

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 25/19/97

EXTRA 153/97

Fear of torture /
Probable prisoners of conscience

6 November 1997

ETHIOPIA **Beyene Abdi**

Beyene Belissa

Hussein Abdi

Haji Sahlu Kebte

Gabissa Lemessa

and others

The five people named above are being held incommunicado, possibly in the Maikelawi central investigation prison in Addis Ababa. Amnesty International fears for their safety in view of reports of torture and "disappearances" of political prisoners.

The five are among over 20 prominent members of the Oromo ethnic group (or "nationality") who were arrested in Addis Ababa on 4 and 5 November 1997. They were publicly accused of being associated with three other detainees (not so far charged) whom police alleged were members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and involved in bombings in Addis Ababa and elsewhere earlier in 1997.

All five are board members of the newly-established Human Rights League. The first four named, retired and aged in their 60s or 70s, are also officials of the Mecha Tulema Association, a long-established Oromo welfare association, and some of them are also board members of the Oromo newspaper *Urji*. Gabissa Lemessa works as an accountant for the UK-based Save the Children Fund.

Amnesty International believes the five are probably prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence.

Arrests are continuing.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since 1992 large numbers of members of the Oromo nationality have been detained without charge or trial, or have "disappeared" or been extrajudicially executed, on suspicion of supporting the OLF, which is fighting government troops in the Oromia region.

Among other recent arrests of Oromos, two *Urji* journalists, Solomon Namara and Tesfaye Deressa, were arrested on 16 October 1997 for questioning the government account of the killing in Addis Ababa on 8 October of three alleged OLF members. On 27 October, Garoma Bekelle, secretary general of the Human Rights League, was also detained. (See UA 330/97, AFR 25/17/97, 23 October and update of 30 October, AFR 25/18/97.)

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrests of Beyene Abdi, Beyene Belissa, Hussein Abdi, Haji Sahlu Kebte, Gabissa Lemessa, and other prominent members of the Oromo community in Addis Ababa, some of whom are human rights activists;
- urging that they are given immediate access to relatives, legal representatives and medical doctors, so as to ensure they are safe from "disappearance" or torture or ill-treatment;

- urging that none be detained solely for their non-violent opinions or human rights activities, and that if they are not charged with a recognizable criminal offence they be released immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
P O Box 1031
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: +2511 552030
Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Werede-Wolde Wolde
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 1370
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: +2511 550722
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Salutation: Dear Minister

Colonel Legesse Tegegne
Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 1370
Addis Ababa
Faxes: +2511 550722
Telegrams: Police Commissioner, Justice Ministry, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Salutation: Dear Colonel

COPIES TO:

- His Excellency President Negasso Gidada, Office of the President, P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 552030**
- Mr Kemal Bedri, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, P O Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 550278**
- Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 514300**
- Human Rights League, P O Box 20600, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

and to diplomatic representatives of Ethiopia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 25 December 1997.