

UA 07/01

Fear of t

ETHIOPIA  
Mohammad Jamal (m), 3<sup>rd</sup> year law student  
Tita Gonfa (m), 3<sup>rd</sup> year sociology student  
Dula Raggasa (m), 3<sup>rd</sup> year psychology student  
    Derese Furgasa (m), 3<sup>rd</sup> year psychology student  
Badada Bayene (m), 4<sup>th</sup> year history student  
    Damte Danye (m), 3<sup>rd</sup> year mathematics student  
    Tolasa Dabala (m), 3<sup>rd</sup> year physics student  
Tuli Bayisa (m), chair of the Oromo students association

and a large number of other Oromo students from Addis Ababa University

Up to 150 Oromo students from Addis Ababa University have been in police custody since 22 December 2000. Only 18 were brought to court and charged within 48 hours, as required by law, and Amnesty International fears that the students, particularly those not yet taken to court, may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Police were called to the university on 22 December to break up a fight between Oromo and other students, which started after a Tigrayan student presented a sociology class paper about the Oromo, the largest ethnic minority group in Ethiopia, which offended Oromo students. Police reportedly detained 10 Oromo students and took the names of other Oromo and Tigrayan students, telling them to report to the police later.

That evening a special police unit raided the university dormitories, arresting and reportedly beating about 200 Oromo students (whose names were on a list carried by police). At least four students were seriously injured, including the chair of the Oromo students association, Tuli Bayisa, and two women who were taken to hospital with abdominal injuries. Police later released around 55 of the students, but the others are reportedly still in custody at Maikelawi police investigation centre, and Holeta and Sendafa army camps, without access to lawyers, their families or adequate medical care. There have been reports in the past that prisoners in these camps, including students, have been ill-treated.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Thousands of members of the Oromo ethnic group (or 'nationality') are currently detained in Ethiopia without charge or trial on suspicion of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which is fighting the ruling coalition government led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). In recent months there have been several peaceful demonstrations against the government's decision to move the Oromia regional capital from Addis Ababa (which is known as Finfine in the Oromo language, and has a large Oromo community) to the southeastern city of Nazareth (known as Adama in Oromo). Oromo students at Addis Ababa University had reportedly organized one such protest shortly before the arrests detailed above.

There have been numerous reports of torture of political prisoners in Ethiopia in recent years, particularly in certain police stations and security centres in Addis Ababa. Prison conditions are generally harsh, medical treatment is inadequate and complaints of torture are rarely investigated by the authorities.

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

- expressing concern at reports that up to 200 Oromo students were beaten by police when they were arrested on 22 December 2000, and calling for an independent and impartial investigation into these allegations;
- requesting assurances that those arrested are not being tortured or ill-treated in custody, and calling for them to be allowed visits by their families, lawyers, and doctors;
- urging that all those arrested be either charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given prompt and fair trials, or else released immediately and unconditionally;
- calling for any member of the police and security forces responsible for torture or ill-treatment to be brought to justice.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency  
Meles Zenawi  
Prime Minister  
Prime Minister's Office  
PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Fax:+ 2511 552020**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Fax:+ 2511 550278**  
**Salutation:Dear Minister**

Commissioner of Police  
Office of the Commissioner of Police  
Ministry of Justice  
PO Box 21321, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Salutation:Dear Sir**

**COPIES TO:**

Mr Kuma Demeksa  
President of Oromia  
Oromia Regional State Council  
PO Box 62297, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Salutation:Dear Sir**

Mr Kinfe Gebre-Medhin  
General Manager, Public Security  
Office of the Prime Minister  
PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Salutation:Dear Sir**

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 23 February 2001.