

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 25/03/96

UA 81/96 Fear of torture / "Disappearance" / Death in custody  
Legal concern

21 March 1996

**ETHIOPIA** Olana Bati, aged 75, retired lawyer  
Asrat Buli, medical doctor  
Baharsitu Obsa (f), singer  
Shabbe Sheko (f), singer  
Dalu Bekule  
Abdella Ahmed Tesso, local government employee  
Teshome Mutama, nurse  
Challa Kebebe  
and many others

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Scores of political prisoners have been detained in a new and continuing wave of arrests of people suspected of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The arrests began in mid-February 1996 and are taking place in several parts of the country, including Addis Ababa, Oromia region, Shoa district and Dire Dawa town. The detainees belong to the Oromo ethnic group (or "nationality"), from which the OLF draws its support.

The first six named above, have been held without charge, and have not been allowed access to their families or legal representatives. Some are alleged to have been beaten or ill-treated. There are particular fears for the safety of one of them, Teshome Mutama, whose whereabouts since arrest are not known.

Fears of torture are heightened by reports that another, Challa Kebebe, has died in detention as a result of torture.

Olana Bati, a prominent Oromo elder, who was imprisoned in the late 1970s by the former Dergue government, was detained in Nekemte on 18 February 1996. This is his seventh detention without charge or trial since 1992. In October 1994 he was detained in Nekemte in Wollega district, severely beaten and threatened with death, and held by the local security authorities for three months despite court orders for his release.

Asrat Buli, a medical doctor at Fincha sugar factory near Bako in Wollega district, was arrested on 15 February. Baharsitu Obsa and Shabbe Sheko, Oromo folk-singers living in Addis Ababa, were arrested in mid-February while visiting the towns of Dire Dawa and Goba respectively. Dalu Bekule was arrested in Addis Ababa on 16 February. Abdella Ahmed Tesso (known as Abdella "Magazaja", meaning Municipality, as he works for the Municipality or town council), was arrested in Dire Dawa on 19 February. Teshome Mutama, a male nurse at Gindeberet hospital in western Shoa district, and Challa Kebebe, were among dozens of people arrested in Gindeberet on about 12 February on suspicion of involvement in the escape of a suspected OLF detainee, former army captain Dugassa Iticha, several of whose relatives were arrested and reportedly beaten.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The OLF, after fighting the former Dergue government up to 1991, joined the transitional government headed by President Meles Zenawi's Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). In 1992, the OLF went into armed opposition and is continuing to fight the new government established in August 1995. Hundreds of OLF suspects are believed to be currently detained without charge or trial in different prisons, some held in secret detention places. There have also been many reports of torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions of arbitrarily detained OLF suspects.

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

- expressing concern about the detention without charge of Olana Bati, Dr Asrat Buli, the Oromo singers Baharsitu Obsa and Shabbe Sheko, Dalu Bekule and Abdella Ahmed Tesso;
- requesting that they be immediately taken to court and charged with recognizable criminal offences, or released if they are detained solely for the non-violent expression of their opinions;
- urging that they are treated humanely in detention and immediately granted access to their families and legal representatives, and medical treatment if needed;
- calling for urgent investigations into the reported "disappearance" of Teshome Mutama and the reported death from torture of Challa Kebebe.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency Dr Negaso Gidada  
President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
Office of the President  
P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Ethiopia  
**Telegrams: President Negaso, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Faxes: +2511 552030**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

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

Mr Mahteme Solomon  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Faxes: +2511 550722**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

- Mr Kinfu Gebre-Medhin, General Manager, Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs Authority, c/o former Ministry of Internal Affairs  
P O Box 5721, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Mr Kemal Bedri, President of the Supreme Court, Supreme Court, P O Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia **Fax: +2511 514300**

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 10 May 1996.