

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 01/93 (AFR 25/01/93, 5 January 1993) - and follow-up: AFR 25/3/3, 10 February 1993 - Possible extrajudicial executions/Legal concern

ETHIOPIA: Student demonstrators in Addis Ababa

The official Committee of Inquiry into the incident of 4 January 1993 when the security forces shot at a student demonstration at Addis Ababa University began its investigations in March 1993. It was mandated to establish the facts and report to the Council of Representatives (parliament) which would decide on any measures to be taken. The President of the Supreme Court was named to chair the committee and nominate its members from among religious leaders, judges and others.

The committee has not yet completed its inquiry. It has taken or summoned evidence from students and professors, eye-witnesses, journalists, police officers, hospital staff and others. Some evidence was given before television cameras. The inquiry appears to have focused on the number of people killed by the security forces, where the police stated that only one person, Tesfahun Worku, a first-year mature student, had been killed and 13 wounded. The committee has already stated that it has received no evidence of more than one death by shooting and that no witness has been able to name any other student who was killed. The government has repeatedly criticised Amnesty International and others for suggesting that there had been more than one student killed and many more wounded, on the basis of first reports of the incident. Neither Amnesty International nor any others have yet been able to identify any other student killed in the incident, although there seems to be reliable evidence that dozens of people were wounded in the incident, rather than the smaller number claimed by the police.

Amnesty International remains concerned about procedural and substantive aspects of the inquiry:

- it believes that insufficient attention has been paid to protection of witnesses from reprisals: indeed the arrests of 95 students after the incident (some of whom are reportedly still detained), and the subsequent university closure and dismissals of staff and students, created a strongly intimidatory atmosphere;
- televised testimony is not a reliable method of obtaining evidence and is also intimidatory, particularly in view of a new press law which makes it an offence to publish material defamatory of the government - this law has already been invoked against the chairman of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, a political prisoner, and journalists;
- the committee has not been given the power to make recommendations, for example about the use of lethal force or compensation to victims;
- there is no obligation on the Council of Representatives to take action or to publish the committee's findings or their own decisions;
- even one shooting death raises serious questions about the use of lethal force by the security forces against a demonstration which appears to have started peacefully:

In addition, questions remain about whether or not the police were armed and fired weapons - which the police officer in charge denied, while the EPRDF soldiers involved in the shootings have apparently not been called to testify - and about witness statements that a police ambulance

took away a number of bodies (whereas there was no secrecy about those taken away for treatment in Ethiopian Red Cross ambulances which were after about an hour allowed to take the wounded to hospitals).

Amnesty International has expressed its concerns about the above matters to the chair of the inquiry, Mr Kemal Bedri, the President of the Supreme Court. The organization awaits with keen interest the result of the inquiry. It urges that the committee's report should be published in full, as soon as possible after the completion of its investigations, and that it makes recommendations on the use of firearms against demonstrators, to ensure that these are compatible with international standards.

This is for information only. No further action is requested at this time. Thank you to all UA participants who sent appeals.