

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 25/003/2004

UA 30/04

Arbitrary detention / Fear of ill-treatment

23 January 2004

ETHIOPIA

Terfessa Barkessa (m)  
Million Diriba (m)  
Getachew Gadissa (m)  
Tamirat Gadissa (m)  
Imiru Gemechu (m)  
Temesgen Gameda (m)  
Belina Manocha (m)  
Merga Namu (m)

**Fourteen other students arrested for calling for their release:  
Aman Abdulkarim (m), Worku Banti (m), Hassen Bariso (m), Telila  
Bulbula (m), Milkisa Dandena (m), Taye Dandena (m), Tolassa Debella (m),  
Gemachisse Haile (m), Habtamu Jimma (m), Dawit Kodoo (m), Dessalegne Legesse  
(m), Gadissa Merga (m), Lelisse Tadesse (f), Meselech Tadesse (f)**

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The first eight Oromo students named above were arrested on the Addis Ababa University campus on 18 January, and are reportedly currently held at Maikelawi police central investigation centre in Addis Ababa. Over 300 students who called for their release were later arrested, including the second group of 14 students listed above, who are reportedly held with the first eight. These 22 students are still detained but others have mostly been released. Those still held are at risk of ill-treatment in custody.

The first eight were arrested after protests at a cultural performance at the university, staged by the Oromia Region ruling party. The performance broke up when several Oromo students protested to Oromia regional state officials about the recent federal government decision to transfer the regional state capital from Addis Ababa to Adama (also known as Nazareth), a town 100 kilometres south-east of Addis Ababa. Police arrested the eight students that evening, and accused them of causing damage to university property, including broken windows.

On 21 January many Oromo students gathered to present an appeal to the university administration to secure the release of their eight colleagues, to which they received no reply. In the evening police entered the campus and arrested a large number of Oromo students. On 22 January police said that 315 had been released but suspended from the university for a year, and that 22 (names provided by unofficial sources) remain in custody for possible charges of criminal damage or possible expulsion from the university. Amnesty International has received reports of further arrests of students.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

There is widespread opposition among members of the Oromo ethnic group (or "nationality") to the relocation of the Oromo regional state administration away from the national capital of Addis Ababa, which has a large Oromo population.

At a public demonstration on 4 January in Addis Ababa against the Oromia regional capital transfer, dozens of Oromo students were detained for a few days. They were released without charge, but warned not to demonstrate again. (See UA 03/04, AFR 25/001/1004, 6 January, and follow-up, AFR 25/002/2004, 15 January.)

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of the eight Addis Ababa university students arrested on 18 January, and for other students still in custody since 21 January;
- welcoming the 22 January release of 315 of the Oromo students arrested the previous day, but expressing concern that they had been arrested and suspended from the university for peacefully calling for the release of the eight students detained three days earlier;
- calling for an independent review of the process and grounds for suspension or expulsion of students, apparently for defending human rights, and for those suspended or expelled to be given the right to appeal to an independent university authority, with recognition of their right to pursue their education in conditions of freedom of peaceful association and expression;
- appealing for the immediate and unconditional release of the eight students arrested on 18 January, the 14 arrested on 21 January, and any other students still held, who may be prisoners of conscience, or for them to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial;
- requesting assurances that the students still detained are not being ill-treated, and are given access to their families, legal representatives and any medical treatment they may need.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

##### President

His Excellency Girma Woldegiorgis

Office of the President

P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: President Girma Woldegiorgis, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Fax: +251 1 552030**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

##### Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Office of the Prime Minister

P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Fax: +251 1 552020**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

##### Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu

Ministry of Federal Affairs

P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Police Commissioner, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Fax: +251 1 552020**

**Salutation: Dear Commissioner**

##### Minister of Education

Ms Genet Zewde

Ministry of Education

P O Box 1367, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Education Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Fax: +251 1 550877**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**Email: moe@telecom.net.et**

#### **COPIES TO:**

##### University President

Professor Andrias Eshete

President of Addis Ababa University

P O Box 1176, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: University President, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Fax: +251 1 550655**

**email: andrias.eshete@telecom.net.et**

Oromia Region President  
President Junedein Saddo  
Oromia Regional State Council  
P O Box 101769, 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 5 March 2004.