

PUBLIC

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UA 148/04

Fear of ill-treatment or torture/incommunicado detention

19 April 2004

ETHIOPIA

Abebe Chimdi (m) ]  
Dinsa Serbessa (m) ]  
Mosissa Futasa (m) ]  
Tsfaye Teressa (m) ]

] teachers in Gudar High School

Ashebir Oncho (m) ]  
Merga Legesse (m) ]  
Woldeyesus Mengesha (m) ]  
Around 50 others

] teachers in Ambo secondary school

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Around 60 people, including the teachers named above, were arrested on 9 April in western Oromia Region, west of the capital, Addis Ababa. They are reportedly detained incommunicado in a police detention centre in Ambo Palace and Amnesty International fears they may be tortured there.

They were apparently arrested in connection with demonstrations by school students in the towns of Ambo and Gudar, where they work, that began in late February 2004. The teachers may have been accused of instigating these demonstrations, in which many students were arrested, of whom dozens are still detained without charge or trial. The authorities have alleged that these demonstrations were orchestrated by the armed opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Several of the teachers/detainees had previously been detained on suspicion of links with the OLF, which they denied, and they were released without charge or trial.

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since early 2004 there have been demonstrations by school and college students in many towns in Oromia region, including Jimma, Waliso, Bishoftu (Debre Zeit), Ziway, Dembi Dollo, and also in Harar city, leading to most schools in the Oromia region being closed. These demonstrations started as protests at the transfer of the Oromia Region Administration from the national capital of Addis Ababa to the newly designated Oromia regional capital in Adama (also known as Nazareth). Police used live ammunition in some incidents to disperse demonstrators, some of whom had reportedly thrown stones at police, and several students were killed or wounded. This led to further protests.

Many of the demonstrators were severely beaten. Some were released after some days with warnings, but hundreds are reportedly still in detention without charge or trial. Over 300 Oromo student demonstrators arrested at Addis Ababa University on 18 January 2004 were all released within a few days but were expelled from the university (see UA 03/04, AFR 25/001/2004, 6 January).

The authorities have alleged that the disturbances were created by the OLF, which has been fighting the government in the Oromia Region since 1992. Hundreds of members of the Oromo ethnic group (or "nationality") have been detained indefinitely, and many of them tortured, on suspicion of having links with the OLF, but few have been charged or tried.

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

- expressing grave concern for the safety of the teachers named above, and others arrested in Ambo and Gudar on 9 April;
- asking for assurances that they that they will not be ill-treated, and that they will be given immediate access to their families, legal representatives and any medical treatment they may need;

- calling for them to be released immediately unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- . calling for an urgent independent investigation into the continued detention without charge or trial of hundreds of school and college students in Ambo, Gudar, Jimma, Waliso and elsewhere in the Oromia Region, and the police use of live ammunition against demonstrators resulting in several deaths and injuries.

**APPEALS TO:**

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**

Minister of Justice

Mr Harke Haroye

Ministry of Justice

P O Box 1370

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Fax: +251 1 520874/517775**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu

Ministry of Federal Affairs

P O Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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

**Fax: +251 1 552020**

**Salutation: Dear Police Commissioner**

**COPIES TO:**

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 550877/551355**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

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

Oromia Region President

President Junedein Saddo

Oromia Regional State Council

Adama, Ethiopia

**Salutation: Dear President of Oromia**

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 31 May 2004.