### EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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UA 364/92 Legal concern/Fear of ill-treatment

ETHIOPIA: Arega Kitata, businessman Tilahun Hirpassa, teacher Wolde-Yesus Mengesha, teacher Haile Legesse, farmer and large numbers of others from the Oromo ethnic group

These four are among many of members of the Oromo ethnic group or nationality who have been detained in Ethiopia in recent weeks. Arega Kitata, who has a well-known tailoring business in Addis Ababa, was arrested on 7 November 1992 and reportedly detained secretly in an unidentified "safe house". Tilahun Hirpassa (who had previously been arrested and tortured in 1980 and detained up to May 1991 for his opposition to former President Mengistu Haile-Mariam's government) and Wolde-Yesus Mengesha, both school teachers in Ambo, 85 kilometres west of Addis Ababa, and Haile Legesse, a farmer from near Ambo, are among dozens of people reportedly currently detained in Ambo prison. All four are held incommunicado and without any charge.

They were apparently detained for alleged links with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which withdrew from the government coalition and the parliament (Council of Representatives) in June 1992 after boycotting the regional elections.

These and other detainees are held outside any legal framework and have no opportunity to contest the reasons for their imprisonment before a court. There is no judicial control over detainees or other independent scrutiny of their conditions, with the exception of detainees in the main official prisons to whom their families and representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has access. In the rural areas some detainees are reported to have been tortured or ill-treated and there have also been allegations of extrajudicial executions and disappearance of some prisoners, although apparently not as a routine and government-sanctioned practice, as had been the case under the previous Mengistu government.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The OLF military force remained under arms after the defeat of the former government and is currently in a state of virtual war with the transitional government headed by President Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). However, there has been little actual fighting and talks are continuing between the government and the OLF.

The OLF, an open and recognized political organization since May 1991, is not actually prohibited but large numbers of its members have been detained this year, mostly in Oromo-populated rural areas in the south, east and west of the country, both before and after the regional elections in June 1992.

20 November 1992

In addition, over 10,000 Oromos are detained in three military centres - in Dedessa near Gimbi, Blatta in Sidamo region, and Hurso in Hararghe region. The government maintains that the detainees are OLF armed personnel who have been detained in order to re-educate them politically and then demobilise them. Others claim that the detainees include many civilians who have been detained simply for their support of the OLF's political program or because they oppose the EPRDF and its ally, the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO).

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# RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:

- expressing concern at the reported detention without charge or trial of the four people named above, explaining that they appear to be suspected of involvement with the OLF;

- urging that unless they are promptly charged with criminal offences and given a fair trial within a reasonable period, they should be quickly released;

expressing concern at reports that they are held incommunicado and outside any legal framework, have no opportunity to contest the reasons for their detention, and are held in circumstances where they could be subjected to ill-treatment;
requesting assurance that the above-named detainees are in good health and have

not been subjected to ill-treatment;

- urging that all detainees be given immediate and regular access to their families, and also to humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

### IN SOME APPEALS, PLEASE ALSO:

- expressing concern at the detentions of thousands of other Oromos in similar circumstances in recent months;

- calling on the government to ensure that no one is detained simply on account of their Oromo ethnic origin or support for the political program of the OLF, and that they are immediately released unless there is clear evidence of their use or advocacy of violence.

#### APPEALS TO

His Excellency President Meles Zenawi
 Salutation: Your Excellency
 Office of the President
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
 Telegrams: President Zenawi, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

2) Mr Tamrat Layne Salutation: Dear Prime Minister Prime Minister Office of the Prime Minister Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Telegrams: Prime Minister Layne, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

3) Mr Meheteme Solomon Minister of Justice Ministry of Justice P O Box 1370 Salutation: Dear Minister

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Telegrams: Minister of Justice Solomon, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

4) Mr Kuma Demeksa
Salutation: Dear Minister
Minister of Internal Affairs
P O Box 2556
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Telegrams: Minister of Internal Affairs Demeksa, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

### COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

1) Mr Seyoum Mesfin	2) Mr Hassen Shifa
Minister of Foreign Affairs	Head of Police and Prison Administration
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 393	P O Box 2556
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	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 1 January 1993.