

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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20 November 1992

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.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Minister of Justice Solomon, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

4) Mr Kuma Demeksa

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Internal Affairs

Ministry 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

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

P O Box 393

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

2) Mr Hassen Shifa

Head of Police and Prison Administration

Ministry of Internal Affairs

P O Box 2556

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.