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**ETHIOPIA: AUTHORITIES MUST PROVIDE JUSTICE FOR SCORES OF PROTESTERS KILLED,
INJURED AND ARRESTED IN OROMIA**

Amnesty International condemns the use of excessive force by security forces against peaceful protesters in a number of locations across the Oromia region during the last two weeks, which has resulted in the deaths and injuries of dozens of people including students and children. Many hundreds of protesters are reported to have been arbitrarily arrested, and are being detained incommunicado and without charge. Detainees are at risk of torture.

The Ethiopian government must immediately instruct the security forces to cease using deadly force against peaceful protesters, and to release any person who has been arrested solely because of their involvement in peaceful protests. These incidents must be urgently and properly investigated, and suspected perpetrators should be prosecuted in effective trial proceedings.

Since late April, protests have taken place in many universities and towns across the Oromia region over the 'Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan' – a plan from the central government to expand the capital, Addis Ababa, into parts of Oromia – the region which surrounds the city. The government says the master plan for expansion would bring city services to remote areas. However, the protesters, and many other Oromos, the ethnic group that makes up the significant majority of the population of Oromia regional state, fear that the move will be detrimental to the interests of Oromo farmers, and will lead to large scale evictions to make way for land leasing or sale. Many Oromos also consider the move to be in violation of the Constitutionally-guaranteed protection of the 'special interests' of the Oromia state.

Numerous reports from witnesses, local residents and other sources indicate that the security forces have responded with excessive force against peaceful protesters. Forces comprised of the federal police and military special forces known as 'Agazi', have fired live ammunition at unarmed protesters in a number of locations including in Wallega and Madawalabu universities and Ambo and Guder towns, resulting in deaths in each location.

One witness told Amnesty International that on the third day of protest in Guder town, near Ambo, the security forces were waiting for the protesters and opened fire when they arrived. She said five people were killed in front of her. A source in Robe town, the location of Madawalabu University, told Amnesty International that 11 bodies had been seen in a hospital in the town. Another witness said they had seen five bodies in Ambo hospital.

There are major restrictions on independent journalism and human rights monitoring organizations in Ethiopia as well as on exchange of information. Because of these restrictions, in conjunction with the number of incidents that occurred in the last two weeks, it is not possible to establish the exact number of those who have been killed. The government acknowledged that three students had died at Madawalabu University, and five persons had died in Ambo town, but did not state the cause of

death. Numbers of deaths reported by witnesses and residents within Oromia are significantly higher. Investigations into these incidents must include the establishment of comprehensive numbers of people killed and injured in all incidents.

According to eye-witness reports received by Amnesty International, of those who were killed some people, including students and children, died instantly during protests, while some died subsequently in hospitals as a result of their injuries. Children as young as 11 years old were among the dead. Students and teachers constitute the majority of those killed and injured.

Protesters were also reportedly beaten up during and after protests, resulting in scores of injuries in locations including Ambo, Jimma, Nekempte, Wallega, Dembi Dollo, Robe town, Madawalabu, and Haromaya.

Hundreds of people have been arrested across many locations. The main Oromo opposition party, the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) which has been collecting information from its members throughout the region, believes those arrested may total several thousand. Witnesses told Amnesty International that in many cases the arrests took place after the protesters had dispersed. Security forces have conducted house to house searches in many locations in the region, for students and others who may have been involved. New arrests continue to be reported. A small number of people have been released, but most of those arrested remain in incommunicado detention, in many cases in unknown locations. The OFC also reports that two of its members were arrested in Ambo because they had spoken to a Voice of America reporter about events in the town.

Hundreds of those arrested have been taken to unofficial places of detention including Senkele police training camp. One local resident, whose nephew was shot dead during the Ambo protests, told Amnesty International that detainees in Senkele have been prevented from seeing their families or receiving food from them. Military camps in Oromia have regularly been used to detain thousands of actual or perceived government opponents. Detention in military camps is almost always arbitrary – detainees are not charged or taken to a court for the duration of their detention, which in some cases has lasted for many years. In the majority of cases, detainees in military camps have no access to lawyers or to their families for the duration of their detention. Amnesty International has received countless reports of torture being widespread in military camps. The organization fears that the recent detainees are at serious risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

There is a very high security force presence in towns across the region in recent days, including in university campuses. Witnesses in several locations say that classes have been suspended in the universities. Amnesty International has heard from other locations, where classes have continued or resumed, that attendance registers are being taken for every class, with serious repercussions threatened for those not present.

Amnesty International has also received several reports that in a number of locations throughout the region local residents are being beaten and in some cases, arrested by the police, ostensibly to intimidate them against taking part in further protests. Police are also threatening parents to control their children. One witness told Amnesty International that one man who went to collect his son's body, who had been shot dead during a protest, was severely beaten by security forces telling him he should have taught his son some discipline.

The OFC says the response of the security forces has fuelled further protests as the colleagues,

parents and community members of those killed and injured have joined in further protests against the brutality of the security forces. In some locations anger at the actions of the security forces has resulted in burning of cars and damage to property.

The Ethiopian authorities regularly suppress peaceful protests, which has often included the use of excessive force against protesters. The Oromos have long felt discriminated against by successive governments. The current government is hostile to all dissent. However, this hostility often manifests most fiercely in the Oromia region, where signs of dissent are looked for and suppressed even more brutally than in other parts of the country. Scores of Oromos are regularly arrested based on their actual or suspected opposition to the government.

The recent events are highly reminiscent of events in 2004 when months of protests broke out across the Oromia region and in Addis Ababa by college and school students demonstrating against a federal government decision to transfer the regional state capital from Addis Ababa to Adama (also known as Nazret), a town 100 kilometres south-east of Addis Ababa. The transfer was perceived to be against Oromo interests. Police used live ammunition in some incidents to disperse demonstrators, killing several students and wounding many others, which led to further protests. Hundreds of students were arrested and detained for periods ranging from several days to several months, without charge or trial. Many were severely beaten when police dispersed protests or in detention. Subsequently hundreds were expelled or suspended from university and many suffered long-term repercussions such as repeated arrest based on the residual suspicion of holding dissenting opinions.

The events of the last two weeks in Oromia demonstrate that there has been no improvement in Ethiopia's policing practices in the last decade, and that very serious concerns remain about the willingness of the Ethiopian security forces to use excessive force against peaceful protesters. These events also show that major restrictions remain on the ability of peaceful protesters to express grievances or make political points in Ethiopia. The environment for peaceful protest, freedom of expression and political participation has worsened over the last decade.

The recent events in Oromia fall at a time when the local population and interested parties internationally, are starting to look towards the general elections in May 2015. The aftermath of the disputed 2005 elections also saw excessive use of force against peaceful protesters during widespread demonstrations against the alleged rigging of the election by the ruling EPRDF party. Security forces opened fire on protesters in Addis Ababa resulting in the deaths of more than 180 people. The recent events bode very ill for the run up to the 2015 elections, still a year away. Unless substantial reforms are urgently initiated, Amnesty International is concerned that the run up to the elections will be characterised by further serious violations of human rights.

Amnesty International urges the Ethiopian authorities to immediately and publicly instruct the security forces to cease using excessive force against peaceful protesters in Oromia. While some of the recent protests in Oromia are reported to have seen incidents of violence, including destruction of property, the use of force, including lethal force, by security forces must comply with human rights standards at all times in order to protect the right to life. Amnesty International urges that any police response to further protests must comply with international requirements of necessity and proportionality in the use of force, in line with the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. These principles state that law enforcement may use only such force as is necessary and proportionate to maintain public order, and may only intentionally use

lethal force if strictly necessary to protect human life.

Thorough investigations which are credible and impartial must urgently take place into allegations of excessive use of force against peaceful protesters, and the torture of protesters and other members of local communities in Oromia, and where admissible evidence of crimes is found, suspected perpetrators should be prosecuted in effective trial proceedings that meet international standards.

All persons arrested solely because of their participation in peaceful protests must be immediately and unconditionally released. Amnesty International urges that no-one suffers any violation or denial of their human rights as a result of their involvement in peaceful protests including any suspension or termination of their education.

Finally, Amnesty International urges the Ethiopian government to respect all Ethiopians' right to peacefully protest, as guaranteed under the Ethiopian Constitution and in accordance with Ethiopia's international legal obligations, including under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The government should immediately remove all restrictions on free and open political participation, including restrictions on the independent media, civil society and political opposition parties.