

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 25/012/2008

14 November 2008

UA 315/08 Arbitrary detention/torture or other ill-treatment

ETHIOPIA **Bekele Jirata (m), General Secretary of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) party**
Asefa Tefera Dibaba (m), university lecturer at Addis Ababa University
Bekele Negeri (m), a businessman
Dejene Borena (m),
Fiqadu Jalqaba (m), college student
Eshetu Kitil (m), owner of the Hawi Hotel
Desta Kitili (m), his brother
Kebede Borena (m), assistant manager of the Hilton Hotel in Addis Ababa
Leslie Wodajo (f), a journalist
An unknown number of other members of the Oromo ethnic group

At least 15 members of the Oromo ethnic group, including those named above have been arrested in the capital Addis Ababa and also reportedly in eastern and western parts of the Oromia region of Ethiopia, since around 30 October 2008. Most are reportedly held incommunicado in detention facilities in Addis Ababa, including *Maikelawi*, where torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners has been reported in the past.

Some of those detained were reportedly briefly brought before a primary court, accused of financially supporting the OLF. Some were also paraded on state television on 5 November. Amnesty International believes that those detained are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

The Government of Ethiopia, including the National Anti-Terrorism Taskforce, has reportedly claimed that those detained had links to the armed opposition group, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and a previously unknown armed group, *Kawerj*.

Bekele Jirata is General Secretary of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) party, a small registered political party in Ethiopia that holds seats in parliament. Others arrested include Asefa Tefera, a lecturer at Addis Ababa University, and a number of students. Leslie Wodajo is a journalist who worked for the Oromo television programme on Ethiopian state television. On 12 September, the airtime of this programme was cut, a move the OFDM and another opposition party, the Oromo National Congress, claimed was politically motivated. Sixty staff members of the Oromo television programme were also removed from their jobs, many of them placed under security surveillance while their movements in Addis Ababa were restricted.

The OFDM has strongly denied that Bekele Jirata, or the party, has had any links to the OLF. In April, the party accused the Ethiopian authorities of intimidation during local elections, the first held since the post-election violence of 2005 which killed some 187 civilians.

This wave of arrests follows on a series of suicide bombings in Hargeisa, Somaliland, one of which targeted the Ethiopian consulate, killing several Ethiopian officials and a number of Somalilanders queuing for visas.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Thousands of members of the Oromo ethnic group have been detained, and many of them tortured, in recent years on suspicion of links with the OLF. The OLF has been fighting the Ethiopian government in the eastern

and western parts of the Oromia Region and other areas since 1992. Among detainees held on these grounds have been people who Amnesty International considered to be prisoners of conscience who had not used or advocated violence.

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

- calling for formal charges to be brought against Bekele Jirata and other Oromo citizens, including those named above, who were recently arrested, or their immediate and unconditional release;
- expressing concern that those detained are being held incommunicado and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment;
- urging the authorities to bring all those detained before a court with a guarantee of fair trial, and allow them access to their families, legal counsel and medical treatment;
- expressing concern that those detained may be prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister
Meles Zenawi
Office of the Prime Minister
PO Box 1031
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 1552020
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice
Berhan Hailu
Ministry of Justice
PO Box 1370
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 5517775/ +251 11 5520874
E-mail: justice@telecom.net.et
ministry-justice@telecom.net.et
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Governor of Region of Oromia
Mr. Abadula Gemedo,
P.O. Box 10176
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 26 December 2008