

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 20 per section.

UA 369/93 Legal concern/Fear of torture or ill-treatment

15 October 1993

ETHIOPIA Staff of the Oromo Relief Association (ORA)
eastern regional office in Dire Dawa:-
Ahmed Mohamed, regional coordinator
Abbas Said, project coordinator
Sharif Mohamed, administrator
Usman Umar, secretary
Ali Haider, accountant
Abdulaziz Abdullah, health supervisor
Mohamed Ahmed, social worker
Tajudin Abdullah, logistics officer
Mohamed Izzedin, health worker
Ammw Hamid, store-keeper
Mohamed Abdu and Mussa Ibrahim, drivers
Raya Abdi, Hamid Abdullahi and Galaye Tufe, security
guards

These 15 people, the entire staff of the regional office of the Oromo Relief Association (ORA) in Dire Dawa in eastern Ethiopia, were arrested by the security forces between 26 September and 2 October 1993. They are apparently suspected of links with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which has been in armed opposition to the government since June 1992, and is active in the Dire Dawa area. It is not known where they are being held, but they are possibly in Hurso "re-education camp" near Dire Dawa. This is a former military training camp used since late 1991 as a detention centre for alleged OLF members. They have not been taken to court or charged with any offence.

Amnesty International is concerned that they may be tortured or ill-treated in custody, and detained without charge or trial for an indefinite period, contrary to Ethiopian law and the Transitional Charter (the interim constitution). Amnesty International believes that they may be prisoners of conscience detained on account of their opinions and their work for the Oromo Relief Association.

The ORA, previously the humanitarian arm of the OLF, has been formally independent of the OLF since 1992, and has been coordinating relief projects in Oromo areas in eastern and western Ethiopia. When the OLF went into armed opposition in June 1992, many ORA projects were closed by the government and 35 staff detained as suspected OLF members. Amnesty International believes that many were in fact prisoners of conscience, not fighters. International relief agencies continued to work with the ORA in joint projects, including Oxfam, Christian Aid, and Save the Children Fund, as well as the Lutheran churches. ORA also received cooperation from relevant Ethiopian government departments, although the Ethiopian security services evidently suspects ORA of being secretly linked to the OLF.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

After the defeat of the former government of President Mengistu Haile-Mariam by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in May 1991, the OLF, which had also fought against the Mengistu government, joined the transitional EPRDF-led government. However tension between OLF and EPRDF increased during 1992 and included outbreaks of fighting and reports of human rights abuses by both sides. In June 1992 the OLF boycotted the regional elections and withdrew from the government after widespread arrests and killings of its members by government soldiers, and electoral malpractices by government supporters. The OLF went into armed opposition to the government. Some 25,000 OLF fighters and civilian supporters, including women and children, were detained without charge or trial in military-controlled "re-education camps" in harsh conditions. All except about 1,000 of them were released in February and March 1993. Sporadic armed conflict between the OLF and government forces has continued. Several hundred or more members of the Oromo ethnic group have been detained during 1993 as suspected OLF supporters: some have "disappeared" in secret detention places and others have been tortured. Amnesty International has received testimonies of torture of Oromo prisoners who stated that they had been beaten and tied by plastic strips round the upper arms bound behind the back.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: please send telegrams/telexes/faxes and airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrests of the Oromo Relief Association office staff in Dire Dawa and their arbitrary detention without charge or trial;
- requesting assurances that they are and will be treated humanely in detention and given immediate access to their families and lawyers;
- expressing fears that they may have been detained on account of their opinions and because the authorities considered their humanitarian relief work among Oromos to indicate their support for Oromo armed opposition, rather than because of actual evidence of involvement with the Oromo Liberation Front;
- appealing for their immediate and unconditional release if they are not promptly brought to court and charged with a recognizably criminal offence.

APPEALS TO:

1) President:

His Excellency President Meles Zenawi
Office of the President
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: President Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telexes: 21050 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Faxes: + 251 1 514300 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Your Excellency

2) Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs (head of security):

Mr Kinfe Wolde-Mariam (head of security)
Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs
Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 2556, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs Kinfe, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telexes/Faxes: as for the President

Salutation: Dear Vice-Minister

3) Minister of Justice:

Mr Meheteme Solomon
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice

P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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

Telegrams/Faxes: as for President

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

1) Mr Hassen Shifa

Coordinator of Police and Prisons Administration

Ministry of Internal Affairs

P O Box 2556, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

2) Mr Mohamed Siraj

Central Attorney General

P O Box 4467

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 November 1993.