

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Fear of Ill-treatment / Legal Concern

3 October 1994

ETHIOPIA Lemma Sidamo, 33, acting Vice-Chairman of the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM)
 Getu Tenite, SLM official in Awassa
 Daniso Borsamo, SLM official in Awassa
 - and up to 300 other SLM members in Awassa

Arrests of members of the Sidama Liberation Movement (SLM), a recognized political party, are continuing amidst allegations that some have been ill-treated in custody.

Acting Vice-Chairman of the SLM, Lemma Sidamo, was arrested by soldiers at his home in Addis Ababa on 22 September 1994. The precise grounds for his arrest are not known. He has not been taken to court within the prescribed 48-hour limit, when prisoners must be either charged, remanded in court for investigation into a suspected criminal offence, or released. His family in Addis Ababa have reportedly been unable to find out from the authorities where he is being held. He may have been taken to Awassa, the capital of Sidama region, 200 kilometres south of Addis Ababa.

In August 1994 the government accused the SLM of having an armed group in the south linked to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which the SLM has denied.

Up to 300 SLM members and supporters, including the two other SLM officials named above -- Getu Tenite and Daniso Borsama -- were arrested in Awassa on 16 August 1994 and are currently detained in Awassa and Yirgalem without charge or trial.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The SLM opposition party draws its members from the Sidama ethnic group in the south. It previously belonged to the Council of Representatives (parliament) until it was expelled in 1993 for attending a conference of opposition exiles in Paris. The SLM is a member of the Southern Coalition opposition grouping. The SLM, which previously had a small force fighting the previous government of President Mengistu Haile-Mariam, denies having an armed wing now. It also denies joining in with the OLF's armed opposition to the current transitional government.

Two other SLM leaders, Yilma Chamola, SLM vice-chairman, and Negussie Redda, have been in detention in Awassa without charge or trial since August 1993, when troops closed the SLM office and arrested staff. Amnesty International believes they are prisoners of conscience imprisoned for their non-violent opinions. About 150 other SLM supporters arrested at the same time are also still detained.

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

- expressing concern about the arrest of Lemma Sidamo and the failure of the authorities to state why he was arrested and where he is being held, or to bring him to court within the prescribed 48-hour limit, explaining that failure to bring him to court and clarify his whereabouts give rise to fears of ill-treatment;
- urging that he be immediately brought before a judge and charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released;

- appealing for his family, a lawyer, and a doctor if needed, to be given access to him, and that he is humanely treated in custody;
- calling for Getu Tenite, Daniso Borsama and up to 300 other SLM supporters detained with them in Sidama Region since mid-August 1994, as well as Yilma Chamola and Negussie Redda, detained since August 1993, to be promptly charged or released, and for all detainees to be treated humanely in custody.

APPEALS TO

1) Mr Hassan Shiffa
 Coordinator of Police and Prison Administration
 Ministry of Internal Affairs
 P O Box 5721, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: + 251 1 552020 (or 514300, 511244 or 514042, via Minister of Foreign Affairs)
Telegrams: Hassan Shiffa, Ministry Internal Affairs, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Salutation: Dear sir

2) Mr Mahteme Solomon
 Minister of Justice
 Ministry of Justice
 P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: + 251 1 550722
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Mr Kinfu Gebre-Medhin
 Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs (head of security)
 Ministry of Internal Affairs
 P O Box 5721
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: + 251 1 552020 (or 514300, 511244 or 514042, Minister of Foreign Affairs)

Mr Kemal Bedri
 President of the Supreme Court
 Ministry of Justice
 P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: + 251 1 550722

Mr Abate Kisho
 Chairman of the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Regional Administration
 Regional Administration Office
 Awassa, 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 15 November 1994.