

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 25/05/98

18 February 1998

Further information on UA 330/97 (AFR 25/17/97, 23 October 1997) and follow-up (AFR 25/23/97, 28 November 1997, and AFR 25/01/98, 8 January 1998) - Fear for safety / Prisoners of conscience

ETHIOPIASolomon Namara, journalist on *Urji* newspaper

Tesfaye Deressa, journalist on *Urji* newspaper

Garuma Bekele (note corrected name), former *Urji* journalist and manager, general secretary of the Human Rights League
Wakshum Bacha (note corrected name), deputy manager, *Urji* newspaper

Alemu Tolessa, deputy editor of *Urji*

Solomon Namara, Tesfaye Deressa and Garuma Bekelle are among 31 Oromos charged in late January 1998 with armed conspiracy and providing support to armed activities of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The charges accused the newspaper *Urji* of being a "mouthpiece" of the OLF, but gave no specific grounds for further accusations. Originally the men appeared to have been arrested under the Press Law because of an article in *Urji* newspaper criticising the police killing of three suspected OLF members in Addis Ababa.

Others among the 31 are Human Rights League officials whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience (see EXTRA 153/97, AFR 25/19/97, 6 November 1997, and follow-ups AFR 25/20/97, 11 November 1997, AFR 25/22/97, 27 November 1997, and AFR 25/04/98, 16 February 1998). Amnesty International believes Garuma Bekelle, Solomon Namara and Tesfaye Deressa are also prisoners of conscience, who had not used or advocated violence.

All 31 have now been transferred to the Central Prison in Addis Ababa. They are allowed family visits and access to their lawyers, although not in private. It is not known when the trial will start. It is expected to take a long time and the penalty, if convicted, is between five years' imprisonment and death.

Wakshum Bacha and Alemu Tolessa are still reportedly held without charge under the Press Law, although no details are known of the specific grounds for arrest. Since late 1997 there have been widespread arrests of Oromos suspected of supporting the OLF.

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

- calling again for the immediate and unconditional release of Garuma Bekelle, Solomon Namara and Tesfaye Deressa as prisoners of conscience imprisoned for their journalistic activities, and in Garuma Bekelle's case for his human rights work too, who have not used or advocated violence;
- expressing concern that they have been charged with armed conspiracy and are now facing possible death sentences;
- urging that they be allowed regular access to their families and to medical doctors as needed;

- requesting assurances that the trial of the 31 will be fair and prompt and in accordance with recognized international standards, including the right to consult in confidentiality with their lawyers;

- calling for Wakshum Bacha and Alemu Tolessa to be released if they are held on account of their journalistic activities.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 552030

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 550278

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

- His Excellency President Negasso Gidada, Office of the President, P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 552030**

- Mr Kemal Bedri, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, P O Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 550278**

- Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 514300**

- Human Rights League, P O Box 20600, 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 April 1998.