

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 25/07/98

UA 57/98

Fear for safety / Legal concern

20 February 1998

ETHIOPIAAbebe Abashu, folk-singer

Yadesa Bedassa, student

Alemayehu Dirro, employee of *Hundee*, an Oromo NGO

Ademe Gebre-Senbet, Nebe Transport Company manager

Alemu Kanaa, auditor

Sori Kitila, university student

Dawit Mekonnen, folk-singer in *Gada* band

Isayas Negatu, photographer

Mohamed Sheka, folk-singer in *Bilisuma* band

Amsalu Taye, employee of Oda company

Bekele Tefera, laboratory technician, Pasteur Clinic

Tejitu Tucho (f), business-person

Alemayehu Umatta, journalist on the official *Barissa*

Oromo-language

newspaper

Muktar Usman, folk-singer in *Gada* band

Hundesu Wakwaya, translator and part-time journalist for

Urji newspaper, disabled

and many others

The 15 above-named are among scores of members of the Oromo ethnic group (or "nationality") arrested in Addis Ababa in early February 1998 for suspected involvement with the armed opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Arrests are continuing. Amnesty International fears for their safety in view of continuing reports of torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions of OLF suspects.

The Penal Code and Constitution require that anyone arrested should be taken to court within 48 hours, but none of the above (or others held in this continuing wave of arrests) have so far been taken to court or charged with any offence. They have also not been allowed access to their families and the whereabouts of some are not known. A number have reportedly been taken to regional prisons in Ziway and Nazareth - towns south of Addis Ababa - or to Holeta Police Academy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The OLF has been fighting the government in the Oromia Region since it left the government coalition in 1992. The authorities accused the OLF of urban bombings that occurred in 1997 and, in January 1998, 31 people were charged with armed conspiracy as a result. These included several prominent Oromo community activists from the Human Rights League, Mecha Tulemma Association, *Urji* newspaper and Oromo Relief Association (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 some of these 31 prisoners to be prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of the above-named 15 prisoners and urging that they and any others detained with them are brought before a court without delay and charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released;
- urging that they be granted immediate and regular access to their families, medical treatment if required, and private access to legal counsel.

APPEALS TO:

Please note: fax tones can be difficult to obtain

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 / 550722
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

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

Mr Kemal Bedri, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, P O Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Faxes: + 2511 550728**

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

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 3 April 1998.