



PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 25/17/98

15 May 1998

Further information on EXTRAF 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; AFR 25/04/98, 16 February 1998) - Fear of torture / Probable prisoners of conscience / Legal concern / Medical concern

ETHIOPIAN Beyene Abdi, 72, former judge (photo)

Beyene Belissa, 50, amputee, telecommunications manager

Hussien Abdi, 50, Mecha Tulema Association office manager, former Ministry of Foreign Affairs employee

Haji Sahlu Kefta, 62, retired civil servant, former Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs member

Gabissa Lemessa, Save the Children Fund accountant

Tilahun Hirpasa, former Oromo Relief Association official, ex-teacher

Zewde Chamada

Adam Hussien

Adugna Fitte

Mohamed Wagu

Gadissa Boltossa

Addisu Beyene, Oromo Relief Association

Hailu Tarfassa Tasso, Church hostel manager

New names: Gizaw Irana, medical doctor

Tsigie Kebede (f), nurse

Zawditu Dzeressa (f), nurse (photo)

and 50 others

The number of people imprisoned and charged with armed conspiracy in relation to their alleged links with the Oromo Liberation Front now totals 65, including eight founding members of the Human Rights League (HRL).

The charges carry penalties of between five years' imprisonment and death. It will not be known whether the death penalty will be sought until later in the trial, which is expected to last for many months or more.

Some of the 65 are alleged to be fighters of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), while those named above are accused of being members of clandestine OLF support groups.

The 65 include 31 people who were arrested in October and November 1997, among them three journalists of the *Urji* newspaper (see UAF 330/97, 23 October 1997, AFR 25/17/98, and updates AFR 25/23/97, 28 November 1997; AFR 25/01/98, 8 January 1998). The additional 34 individuals were arrested in March 1998. Among them are Gizaw Irana and Zawditu Dzeressa who were also arrested in 1996 when police raided the "Gate of Life" private clinic looking for an OLF fighter allegedly being treated there. One of the original 31 defendants, Tsigie Kebede, also a nurse at the clinic, had been arrested along with them.

The defendants now have access to families and legal representatives, though not in private. They have attended several court hearings, but the hearings on a preliminary defence application have been adjourned recently because of a lack of judges.

Amnesty International considers the Human Rights League officials and *Urji* journalists to be prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence, and believes that some of the other defendants, such as the three health professionals, may also be prisoners of conscience.

On 8 April 1998 security officers raided the Human Rights League office, seized documents, computer files and office equipment, and sealed the office.

Replies from the Ethiopian government: Several UAF participants have received replies from Ethiopian embassies enclosing a state press report regarding the charges of "terrorism" and denying that any of the prisoners were held because of their opinions or human rights activities.

Replies from the Human Rights League: HRLe vicechair Bekele Nedi, a lawyer, has thanked several UN participants for their appeals: *"We sincerely believe that you would continue to assist in advocating human right protection and use everything within your means in order to add to the efforts of influencing the government to either free these prisoners of conscience or [bring] charges against them [to] be judicially handled in a fair just and expedient manner"*. Bekele Nedi was interrogated when the HRLe office was shut down but was not detained.

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

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of officials and founding members of the Human Rights League, whom Amnesty International regards as human rights defenders and prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence, and for any other prisoners of conscience held with them to be released;
- expressing concern that 65 people arrested in relation to this case are now facing possible death sentences;
- requesting assurances that the trial will be fair and prompt and in accordance with recognized international standards, which includes the right for defendants to consult in confidentiality with their lawyers.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office, PO Box 1051, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 552030

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Werqde-Wold Wolde

Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 550278

Salutation: Your Minister

COPIES TO:

His Excellency President Negasso Gidada, Office of the President, PO Box 1051, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 552030

Mr Kemal Bedri, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, PO Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 550278

Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P O Box 395, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia,

Faxes: + 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 26 June 1998.