

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Ethiopia: concern for Chinese “hostages” and killings in rebel attack

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of seven Chinese citizens abducted by the armed opposition Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in eastern Ethiopia on 24 April. They were taken away to an unknown destination after an attack by the ONLF on a military-defended oil exploration installation of a subsidiary company of the China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation. The attack took place in Abole in Degabur district, over 500 kilometres east of Addis Ababa towards the border with Somalia.

Nine other Chinese civilian employees died in the attack. These may have been targeted killings. 65 Ethiopians were also reported to have been killed, although it is not clear how many were soldiers protecting the oil facility or civilian workers.

Amnesty International appeals to the ONLF for the humane treatment and immediate safe release of the people it abducted.

The seven Chinese citizens abducted have been named as Li Genhai, production manager; Xu Jianfeng, human resources manager; Yang Qingwu, medical doctor; Zhang Xiaoyu, civil engineer; You Jindong, equipment manager; Ke Weitao, equipment operator; and Chen Wenxiang, equipment repair worker. Full details of the incident are still unclear.

Targeted killings and abductions of civilians are violations of international humanitarian law, which applies to all armed groups.

Background

The ONLF has been fighting for over a decade for self-determination of the largely ethnic Somali-populated Ogaden area - Ethiopia's Somali Region, which has its own regional assembly and political parties. The ONLF had earlier threatened foreign oil and gas companies if they did not leave the region.

The Ethiopian government described the attack as a “massacre” and accused the Eritrean government of being behind the attack, which Eritrea denied. Eritrea hosts and supports the ONLF. Tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea are still high since their 1998-2000 border war.