

37th Special Report

Stop the Repeated Violation of the Rights of Students

January 23, 2001

Introduction

Ever since the establishment and expansion of higher education in the 1950's, students have often raised questions and expressed their views regarding their education as well as the problems facing the country. Today, too, students at higher educational institutions in different regions have continued doing the same. What has been sad, earlier as well as now, is the fact that the officials of the educational institutions and government have responded to the student's questions and demands by violating the students' rights or, at best, with indifference.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) has been monitoring these violations and issued various reports as summarised in Table 1 below. EHRCO has repeatedly appealed to the Government in vain to put a stop to these violations of the constitutional rights of students as well as to bring to justice those government officials and armed security officers responsible for these violations.

Table 1. Summary of EHRCO's Reports of Violations of the Rights of Students

	Title of Report	Report Number	Date of Report
1	The Attempted Demonstration of University Students and the Brutal Violence They Suffered	Unnumbered Special Report	January 21, 1993
2	Human Rights Violations Committed Against University Students	Special Report No. 12	March 27, 1997
3	Education and Development: The Right of Parents and Students	Special Report No. 25	April 1999
4	Human Rights Violations in North Omo	Special Report No. 27	December 13, 1999
5	Human Rights Violations in Ambo	Special Report No. 31	20 April 2000
6	Repeated Violation of the Freedom of Expression	Special Report No. 33	August 15, 2000

In addition to the above special reports, EHRCO's other regular reports on the human rights situation in the country also contain violations of the rights of students.

Since the beginning of the new Ethiopian year (i.e., September 2000), various human rights violations have occurred against students of Jimma and Bahir Dar Universities, students of Awassa Teachers College and Tabor Junior and Senior High School as well as residents of the town, and against students of Addis Ababa University.

At Jimma University, medical science students had recently submitted peacefully their complaints about their education and the inadequacy of facilities. Instead of having open and free discussions with the students, were threatened and intimidated into vacating the University campus. Not only did this disrupt the learning-teaching process, but also it did not resolve the students' and the University's problems.

At Bahir Dar University, many students have been suffering from typhoid as a consequence of which two students died, over one hundred have sustained serious injuries to their health due to lack of appropriate and prompt medical assistance.

At Awassa Teachers College, a large number of armed soldiers were made to intervene forcefully, supposedly to resolve the misunderstanding between students and administrators of the College. This resulted in the loss of life, in many students sustaining heavy and light bodily injuries, in the disruption of the learning-teaching process, in the detention of both students and residents of the town, and in the destruction of property.

Similarly, students of Addis Ababa University suffered light and heavy bodily injuries and detention. Property was also destroyed. This resulted from the excessive force used by armed security personnel in attempting to quell the conflict among students of the University.

At different times in the past, misunderstandings between students and officials of educational institutions have been common. As of recent years, it has become customary for officials of educational institutions and government to try to resolve these misunderstandings by forcing and terrorising the students. The use of force has repeatedly failed to lead to a peaceful settlement of the disputes. On the contrary, they have often led otherwise peaceful students to take unplanned actions that have eventually resulted in destructions. As in the past, the recent failure of concerned officials to give appropriate attention to the requests of the students of Bahir Dar, Awassa, and Addis Ababa led these students to come out in peaceful demonstration only to be met by cruel and illegal actions that resulted in serious injuries and destructions.

This government action violated Article 30(1) of the FDRE Constitution as well as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which state, respectively, the following;

"Everyone has the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with other peaceably and unarmed, and to petition. Appropriate regulations may be made in the interest of public convenience relating to the location of open-air meetings and the route of movement of demonstrators or, for the protection of democratic rights, public morality and peace during such a meeting or demonstration"

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

In order to exercise the right provided for in Article 30(1) of the Constitution as well as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, every citizen has the obligation to respect and abide by other relevant laws. Should a person fail to do so, the government has the duty to hold that person liable under the law. The ultimate responsibility of respecting and ensuring the respect by others of the country's laws rests on the government.

I. The Health Problem of Bahir Dar University Students

Beginning from 11 October 2000, a large number of Bahir Dar University students contracted typhoid. In the week between 11 October and 18 were seriously sick. Even though the contagiousness of the disease was well known to the concerned officials, no proper attention was given to the problem and by 27 October 2000, the number of students suffering from the disease rose to 71 (65 male and 6 female students). Still, no action was taken either to provide the sick students with appropriate medical treatment or to control the spread of the disease.

In the period between 28 October and 1 November, the total number of students suffering from the disease rose to 108 (93 male and 15 female students). Despite this serious health problem, the officials of the University chose to do nothing. In failing to see to it that the sick students received appropriate medical assistance, these official appeared to have contributed to the spread of the disease. In seeing their friends seriously weakened by the disease, those students who were lucky enough not fall sick yet felt insecure about their own safety. Consequently, they had to call for help repeatedly to the concerned authorities. Unfortunately, instead of attempting to resolve the students' problem, officials of the University were busy trying to deny that the health problem the students were complaining about never occurred. It was only when the students invited these and other officials to visit the sick students in their dormitories and see for themselves the seriousness of the problem that these officials reported the problem to the regional health bureau. In the time that the health bureau could carry out the necessary laboratory investigations and provide the students with medical treatment, two students died from the disease.

On the basis of their findings, the medical personnel that belatedly carried out the investigation reported that the cause of the students' health problem was the water, drawn from a well in the University compound, used for food and drinks, The water was found to be contaminated with bacteria. According to information gathered by EHRCO, in June 2000 (i.e., five months earlier) the University clinic had reported to the University officials about the contamination of the said water. Unfortunately, the clinic's warning failed to arouse the concern of the officials. This negligence on the part of the University officials led to the loss of life and considerable suffering.

Scope of the Harm Done

Students Who Died

1. **Student Fuad Mohammed** – First year student of the University._
2. **Student Ababu Kebede** – Second year student of the University._

Other Harm Done

1. At the time that this report was being prepared, 214 students were still sick and in bed at the University.
2. 14 students were hospitalised at the Felege Ghion Hospital in the town.

3. By 12 November 2000, the total number of students that contracted the disease was 1100 and 142 of these suffered from a relapse of the disease.
4. Over 500 students had to leave the University and return to their homes for fear of contracting the disease.

Steps Taken by the Regional Administration

1. The Regional Health Bureau has assigned three doctors and three nurses.
2. Other than adding a higher amount of chlorine than before no action has been taken to ensure the safety of the water.
3. Every student is being made to take an anti-bacterial drug (chloramphenicol) for between 10 and 14 days. However, some of the students are reported to be suffering from the drug's side effects.

In spite of all of these, responsible officials of the University and the Amhara Region appeared to be more concerned with preparations for the 20th anniversary of the founding of the ruling party (ANDM), thereby attempting to belittle and cover up the health problem of the students.

II. Violations of the Rights of Students in Awassa

Causes of the Conflict

- On November 29, 2000, some 750 students of Awassa Teachers College submitted their complaints in writing to the College's administration about the unsatisfactory situation with regard to the food, sanitation, library, the frequent interruption of electric light, and other similar problems they were being faced with at the College.
- The College's administration responded irresponsibly by vilifying the students.
- Angered by the administration's response, the students decided to go a hunger strike. On December 6, a team of officials sent from the region's Bureau of Education came to the College and called the students to a discussion. At the meeting, the officials told the students that since it was impossible to resolve their problems in such a short time they should eat the food that was being provided to them by the College and that if the students failed to do so, they the students would be responsible for the food so wasted. The officials left the College. However, the students continued the hunger strike they had started.
- Disappointed by the students' persistence, the officials sent, at about 6 p.m. on the same day, some one hundred armed security officers to the campus of the College. This was the when regular (day) students were retiring to their dormitories, while extension (evening) students were coming into the campus for their classes. However, the armed, security officers, who had entered the campus from different

directions, ordered the campus gates and blocked everyone from either entering or leaving the campus. They then started beating up any student they could find in front of them. Students who could jump over the campus wall and escape did so, while the people of the town who forced their way into the College's campus rescued those who were weaker.

- Those students who had come from different parts of the country and did not have anywhere to go for the night, were forced to seek refuge at St. Gabriel's Church in Awassa town.
- On December 7, 2000, students of Tabor Senior Secondary School assembled in their school compound to protest the steps taken by the police against the students of Teachers' College. Armed policemen arrived in similar mood and, with the view of dispersing the assembled students, started firing in the air. Frightened by the shooting, the students started throwing stones at the police, this lasted until 2 in the afternoon. In the process, a bullet fired by one of the police officers killed one student, many others were beaten and injured, and three policemen sustained injuries from the stones thrown by the students.
- On December 8, the people of the town were called to a meeting by officials of the regional government to discuss the problem. At the meeting, parents expressed their views about the illegal steps taken by the police, stating that the government was responsible for the damages caused. On December 10, 2000, the regional government called parents to a meeting and instructed them not to send their children to school until the situation is stabilised and further instructions are issued.
- On December 15, 2000, officials of the Sidama Zone Education Department met and talked to the students of Tabor Junior and Senior Secondary School. During the discussions, the students demanded compensation for injured students, for legal steps to be taken against those police officers responsible for these injuries, and for permission to hold a rally in the town so that they could express their grievances.
- On December 16, 2000, in accordance to wishes they had expressed to the officials at the meeting held on December 15, 2000, the students started assembling in front of St. Gabriel's Church in town with the view of holding their rally, As they were about to start their rally, they were surrounded by police who fired in the air so as to disperse the and prevent the demonstration the students were planning. Frightened by the gunshots, the students run in different directions. The police forced some sixty of the students in two Isuzu trucks and took them to the special prison within Awassa Police Headquarters. According to information collected by EHRCO, all schools in the town stayed closed until December 20, 2000.

Table 2. Details of the Harm Done During the Conflict

Students killed and brief descriptions of the circumstances of their death_	
1	<u>Student Gashaw Bayew Adanu</u> was a 17-year old, grade 9 student at Tabor Senior Secondary School. On December 7, 2000, he was running away from the scene of the conflict between students and the police when, near a hotel called 'Warka', he was hit by a bullet fired by the police, He died instantly and his body was kept by the police until December 8, 2000. His parents claimed the body from Yirgalem

2	<p>Hospital and buried at Awassa's St. Gabriel Church on the same day.</p> <p><u>Student Wondimagegn Megoro Goltamo</u> was a 15-year-old, grade 9 student at Tabor Senior Secondary School. On December 7, 2000, he was hit on the nape by a stone thrown from an unknown direction. He was taken to Beloki hospital where he had stayed under treatment for some eight days. He died on December 15, 2000.</p>
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Students wounded	
1	<p><u>Student Asaminew Gezahegn Bekele</u> is 20 years of age. He lived in Awassa, Keftegna 2, Qebele 2 and was a student at Tabor Senior Secondary School. On December 7, 2000, he was trying to run away from the police attack on the students when a bullet fired by a policeman on guard at the school hit him on the chest. His life was saved by surgical treatment.</p> <p>□ <u>Student Serawit Guya Guche</u> is a 10-year old, 6th grade student at the Tabor Primary School. She lives in Awassa, Keftegna 2, Qebele 4, House No. 278. On December 7, 2000, she was scared by the conflict between students and the police and was trying to run home when a bullet fired by a policeman hit her on the left hand. She was so seriously injured that she was still in Yirgalem Hospital until the time that this report was finalised.</p> <p>□ <u>Student Alazar Bekele Kumsa</u> is a 17-year old student in grade 9 at the Tabor Senior Secondary School. He lives in Awassa, Keftegna 2, Qebele 7, and House No. 1320. On December 7, 2000, a bullet fired by a policeman hit him on one of the fingers on the left hand.</p>
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Students beaten	
1	<p><u>Student Kassech Makonnen</u> is an 18-year old first year student at the Awassa Teacher Training College. In the evening of December 6, 2000, one of the policemen entered her dormitory and beat her on the shoulders with the staff he was holding. She sustained injuries on the shoulders and feet. At the time she could hardly walk and had to be supported by her friends in order to get medical treatment.</p> <p><u>Student Misrakalem Kebede</u> is 21 years old and a first year language student at the College. In the evening of December 6, 2000, two policemen went to her dormitory, broke the door open and, having entered, beat her in turns. As a result, she sustained severe bodily injuries.</p>
2	<p><u>Student Ewnetu Desta</u> is 21 years old and a first year student at the College. On December 6, 2000, the police beat him and he sustained a fracture on the hand and hip, which left him with a severe</p>

	internal pain.
3	<p><u>Student Teshale G/Meskel</u>, age 18, is a first year student of the College. On December 6, 2000, three policemen beat him and he sustained injuries on the right arm.</p> <p><u>Student Dawit Gezahegn</u>, age 19, is a first year, biology student of the College. A policeman hit him with the butt of his gun as a result of which the student sustained injuries on the chest and nape.</p> <p><u>Student Geremew Kebede Habteyes</u>, age 20, is a first year physics student of the College. The police beat him on the right shoulder and left leg.</p>
4	<p><u>Student Mulugeta</u>, age 21, is a second year chemistry student of the College. The police beat him with the butts of their guns and sticks on the nape and chest.</p>
5	<p><u>Student Mihret Abram</u>, age 19, is a first year student of the College. She was trying to escape police beatings when she fell, sustaining serious injuries.</p>
6	<p><u>Student Meseret Mengistu</u>, age 20, is a first year language student at the College. The police beat her on the left arm.</p>
7	<p><u>Student Woderyelesh Alem</u>, age 18, is a first year language student at the College. As she is physically handicapped, she could not escape the police beatings. A policeman beat her and she sustained serious bodily injuries.</p>
8	<p><u>Student Abiyot Markos Anedaro</u> is an evening student of the College. Two policemen beat him severely. He has also sustained serious injuries when he fell trying to escape the beatings.</p>
9	<p><u>Ato Tsedeke Bekele</u> lives in Awassa, Keftegna 1, and Qebele 04. He works as a video film recorder. On December 7, 2000, he was on his way to work when the police beat him.</p> <p><u>Woizero Firehiwot Tadesse Eshete</u> lives in Awassa, Keftegna 1, and Qebele 04. She owns a lady's hairdresser's shop. On December 7, 2000, upon hearing gunshots, she had gone out to see what was happening. A policeman starts provoking her. In trying to avoid the provocation, she decides to return to her shop, but the policeman followed her and, entering her shop, hits her on the face with his fist and grabs her by the hair.</p>
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Details of students detained						
	Name	Residence		Age	Educational level	Detention date
		Wereda	Qebele			
1	Student Semere Belachew	1	04	16	9th grade	20/03/93
2	>> Tamrat Gereno	1	04	18	12th	20/03/93
3	>> Wondimagegn Eshetu	2	01	16	11th	20/03/93
4	>> Yared Tsegaye	2	05	15	9th	20/03/93
5	>> Abiyot Shibrú	1	06	14	11th	20/03/93
6	>> Abebayehu Makonnen	2	03	18	9th	06/04/93
7	>> Masresha Chernet	1	06	15	10th	06/04/93
8	>> Biniyam Desta	2	03	16	11th	06/04/93
9	>> Etifwork Abebayehu	2	02	18	11th	06/04/93
10	>> Yoseph Haile	2	07	18	10th	06/04/93
11	>> Wondimagegn Tadesse	2	07	18	11th	06/04/93
12	>> Abiyot Assefa	1	06	15	9th	07/04/93
13	>> Anteneh Adam	2	04	14	9th	08/04/93
14	>> Haile Markos	2	07	18	10th	08/04/93

Property destroyed	
1	Many window glasses of Tabor Senior Secondary School have been broken.
2	The stones thrown by the students have broken glasses of government vehicles.

III. Violations of the Rights of Addis Ababa University Students

Cause of Conflict

- A misunderstanding that later led to a conflict among third-year students of the Department of Sociology and Social Administration at Addis Ababa University occurred on December 21, 2000. The students had been attending class when one of their classmates presented a paper in which "he used the term 'Gala' which is believed to deprecate the identity and honour of the Oromo". Even though it was not possible to fully understand why the student used the term, his classmates had warned him against using the term again in his presentation. But, the student continued using the term, leading his classmates to conclude that he was doing so intentionally.
- The repeated use of the term by the student presenting the paper angered particularly Oromo students in the class. At the end of the class, these Oromo students asked him to account for his use of the term. A student who was not satisfied with the explanation given beat and injured the presenter of the paper.
- Upon hearing the incident, the campus police took the injured student to the health centre for medical treatment. On December 22, 2000, at about 4 p.m., an armed police force went into the class where the incident had occurred and, rounding up ten (10) of the Oromo students in the class, took them forcefully to some unknown place. This government action was perceived by the other students as unusual, arguing that the ten students should have been questioned by the campus police and not by an external, armed police force, which forcefully took them to an unknown place. These angry students gathered in front of the campus police office and demanded that the abducted students be brought back to the University and that the campus police investigate their cases. They could not get any response until evening.
- At about 9 in the evening of the same day, a large police contingent came and surrounded the University campus. Then the police started indiscriminately beating up the students who had been peacefully protesting and putting forward their demands. Even though the students had withdrawn to their dormitories and locked their doors, the police followed them, broke the doors, dragged some of them out, handpicked Oromo students, and took about one hundred of these students in police trucks to an unknown place.
- EHRCO has been able to verify that the following students were among those detained by the police:

Table 3. Addis Ababa University Students Detained

	Name of student	Field of study
1	Dessaegn Negari	Sociology Department, 3rd year
2	Tulu Bojeo	Sidist Kilo campus
3	Teka Gonfa	Sidist Kilo campus
4	Habtamu Idiso	Sidist Kilo campus
5	Dereje Makonnen	History, 3rd year
6	Abdissa Bekele	Political Science, 4th year
7	Mulugeta Terfa	Sidist Kilo campus
8	Abebe Lemessa	Sidist Kilo campus
9	Kedida Sonto	Sidist Kilo campus
10	Gebeyehu Likassa	Electrical Engineering, 5th year

11	Mohammed Abdulahi	Institute of Language Studies
12	Ashenafi Tesfaye	Sidist Kilo campus
13	Fufa Bulito	Sidist Kilo campus
14	Tesfaye Sewa	Sidist Kilo campus
15	Teklu Megersa	Sidist Kilo campus
16	Tesfaye Abera	Sidist Kilo campus
17	Getu Bekele	Sidist Kilo campus
18	Fekade Terefe	Geography, 4th year
19	Alemayehu Debelo	Geography, 4th year
20	Tulu Baisa	Law School, 5th year
21	Ashenafi H/Mariam	Law School, 4th year
22	Tita Makonnen	Social Science, 3rd year
23	Jibril Abaz	Social Science, 3rd year
24	Ibssa Melaku	Social Science, 3rd year
25	Dechasa Sisay	Social Science, 3rd year
26	Dinkalem Godisso	Social Science, 3rd year
27	Nazasa Abdisa	Institute of Language Studies, 3rd year
28	Gadisa Tumssa	Institute of Language Studies, 3rd year
29	Gemechis Tumssa	Geology
30	Kadida	Business Education, 3 rd year
31	Tarekegn Regassa	Social Science, 3rd year
32	Temesgen Wakjira	Social Science, 3rd year
33	Kumssa Tadesse	Social Science, 3rd year
34	Mustafa Mussa	Sidist Kilo Campus
35	Imru	Sidist Kilo Campus
36	Diriba Terefe	Sidist Kilo Campus
37	Jemal Umer	Geography, 3rd year
38	Tadesse Diriba	Civil engineering, 5th year
39	Melkamu Name	Pharmacy, 5th year

- All of the students listed above were detained for some time, but a number of them were released earlier than others. Those listed under 1 to 18 were kept in detention until December 29, 2000. On December 26, the police brought their case to the first instance court, 1st criminal court, requesting for additional time to complete its investigation as a result of which the court had adjourned the hearing until three days later. On December 20, 2000, the police brought the detained students to the court, which asked the police if it had completed its investigations. The police replied it had, applying once more for an additional 14 days for its investigations. The court denied the request, arguing that the time given earlier should have been sufficient and ruled that the students be released on Birr 500 bail each, since (a) the time is examination time for the students, (b) their release would not create any problems for the investigations, and (c) there are no indications that the students would disappear. The court also ordered the police to complete its investigations in cooperation with the campus police and the students to cooperate with the investigators.

IV. Conflict Among Some Students of Ambo Agricultural College

- A misunderstanding between some student- speakers of Oromigna and Student Awoke Abdi, an Amharic speaker from the vicinity of Bahir Dar, occurred in the morning of October 11, 2000 at Ambo Agricultural College.
- According to EHRCO's investigation, the cause of the misunderstanding was the growing but muted misunderstanding between student members of different ethnic/linguistic groups. On the part of Oromo speakers, the cause of the conflict is the alleged deprecation of the Oromo language by Student Awoke Abdi. Student Awoke Abdi, on his part, alleged that Oromo students have been warning him repeatedly to return to his region saying, "You cannot study in our region, get out". Other students confirmed that this misunderstanding was the cause of the conflict.
- At about 9 in the evening of the day the conflict occurred, ten (10) students waited for caught Student Awoke Abdi to come out of the library. Then they beat him up until he fell unconscious. Students who were with him called on the campus police to save Awoke at which those beating him run away.
- Student Awoke was soon after taken to Ambo Hospital where he came out of coma after receiving medical treatment. He sustained injuries on his backbone, kidney, and skull.
- The dean of the College notified the police and the ten students alleged to be responsible were arrested. The police took the detained students to West Shewa Police headquarters for investigation after which released all but two of them. The two students were released on January 14 upon the request and guarantee of the College. They have since been attending classes.

EHRCO is of the opinion that the actions taken by the police in attempting to control the conflict were legally appropriate and justified. Nevertheless, EHRCO also believes that these actions alone cannot be about lasting solutions. EHRCO urges both officials of the College and other government officials not to dismiss the incident as one that occurred between individual students, but rather as a pervasive problem that requires more serious attention and lasting resolution.

Conclusion

Beginning from 1991, EHRCO has been raising its voice whenever it came across situations that appeared to hinder the democratisation process, to break the rule of law, and to violate the human rights provisions of the country as well as those international human rights laws that the Ethiopian Government has adopted and ratified. Because of the magnitude and scope of the violations that have been occurring in the country, EHRCO's appeals and complaints may have appeared boring and even unreliable. But there have also been ample instances in which EHRCO has expressed its complements and support whenever there have been actions that enhance the democratic process, the rule of law and due process, and the protection and respect of human rights. EHRCO's various reports testify to this.

Even though the FDRE Constitution provides for and promises to protect the right of

citizens to express their thoughts freely and to assemble and organise themselves freely, officials at different levels of responsibility have been violating these provisions of the Constitution. EHRCO fears that this state of affairs threatens to impede not only the democratisation process but also the attainment of peace and stability in the country. EHRCO would like to appeal to the Ethiopian Government to do the following with regard to the problems human rights violations of university students in Bahir Dar, Awassa, Addis Ababa and Jimma:

- Take appropriate legal actions based on the findings of independent bodies established by the people of each community,
- Compensate to the extent possible those students and/or their families who were either injured or killed,
- Pay appropriate attention to those unanswered requests of the students with the view of resolving them democratically.
- Opt for actions that enhance peaceful dialogue rather than force and respect for the law rather than irresponsibility in similar situations in the future.

EHRCO would also like to appeal to the international community, representatives of governments, and others to write to the following organs and officials of the Ethiopian Government supporting the above requests.

Copy to:

- Council of Peoples Representatives
P. O. Box: 80001; Fax: (251-1) 550900; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Federal Council, FDRE
P. O. Box: 80001; Fax: (251-1) 550722; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- H.E. Dr. Negasso Gidada, FDRE President
P. O. Box: 1031; Fax (251-1) 552020; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the FDRE
P. O. Box: 1031; Fax (251-1) 552020; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- H.E. Ato Woredewold Wolde, FDRE Minister of Justice
P. O. Box: 1370; Fax : (251-1) 520874; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Oromia Regional Council

P. O. Box 272; Fax: (251-05) 518722; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

- Amhara Regional Council

P.O.Box 312; Fax: (251-8) 201068; Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

- Regional Council, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples

P. O. Box 18, Fax: (251-6) 201050, Awassa, Ethiopia

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