

41st Special Report

Inhuman and Cruel Violation of the Rights of Children

30 April 2001

Introduction

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), in its Urgent Special Report No. 2 of May 6, 1996, had detailed the human rights violations committed against children, youth, and the elderly in the street. That report had pointed out that huge populations were being exposed to displacement, insecurity, worsening poverty, and destitution as a result of the long-drawn, internal war, the economic policy of *structural adjustment*, as well as the ethnic politics put in place after the fall of the military regime. The report also showed that, in contravention of the provisions of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and other international human rights instruments, the Ethiopian Government had violated the human rights and fundamental freedoms of many of these destitute citizens, including street children.

The recent Ethio-Eritrean war, inter-ethnic conflicts in different corners of the country and the spread of HIV-AIDS have increased the number of the dislocated. There is no dispute as to the pathetic fact that most of the victims of these tragedies are children. Due to the reasons mentioned above, children who do not have parents or economically strong relatives to support them are forced to discontinue their education. The streets, churches, mosques, bus and taxi stations of cities in Ethiopia are crowded by a frighteningly increasing number of these defenseless citizens.

From the beginning, the government tried to solve this problem by rounding them up and taking them to and abandoning them in the woods outside cities. But, besides being inhuman, cruel and illegal, this action of the government could never resolve the problem. Children who are less than 10 years of age and without parents, parents who have lost their houses and properties due to different reasons, shoeshine boys, newspaper vendors and others who are forced to make the streets their homes have been victims of this government action. As of February 2001 the government is once more engaged in similar cruel and illegal actions against children and destitute adults in Addis Ababa.

Instead of mobilising the public and other humanitarian organisations to help rehabilitate these destitute children and adults, the government has chosen to abandon them to hyenas and other wild animals in forests outside the city. A number of the children that EHRCO has been able to interview reported that some of their friends, especially the very young and weak, which had been taken with them to one of these forests outside the city, have so far not returned. For instance, from among those that had been picked up on 29 April and taken to Dukem and abandoned in the woods was **Yirgalem Melaku**, 14 years of age. Yirgalem has not returned and his whereabouts is still unknown. His friends fear hyenas may have eaten him. This forces the question as to how much more cruel and irresponsible can a government become.

In addition to what the government has been doing to the destitute, it has started a similar campaign against those children and youth that have been trying to survive and support their families by vending newspapers, magazines, and second-hand items in the streets. These children and youth are being picked up from the streets, taken to Kolfe Police Training Camp, made to perform military-like "sports", made to sign written statements that they "will never again sell newspapers or other things anywhere in the city", and released. A number of these children and youth had also come to report their grievances to EHRCO. It has not been possible to include samples of these, since they are frightened of even more serious retaliation.

These actions of the government against children and youth violate

- Article 14 of the Constitution which clearly states that

"Every person has the inviolable and inalienable right to life, the security of person and liberty."

- The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child which the Ethiopian Government has adopted and ratified, especially Articles 2 (1) and 3 (1) which respectively state that

"states parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status."

"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration."

- Articles 5 and 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which state, respectively

"No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

"Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each state, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality."

EHRCO has been interviewing the victims of such inhuman actions since last February 2001. The names and other particulars of those victims interviewed by EHRCO are listed below. These children, youth, and adults reported that as the police were arresting them they were told the following:

1. As the number of beggars is increasing, the more affluent are finding it difficult to move around the city. You cannot beg in the main streets of Addis Ababa.
2. You instigated the disturbances that occurred around Addis Ababa Football Stadium during the matches of African Youth Championship games.
3. You have been a nuisance to foreign visitors, almost forcing them to help you.

4. You are in the service of anti-peace and anti-people organizations.

The police detained the people whose names are listed bellow at Kolfe Police Training Camp (KPTC) where they were made to perform various military-like "sports" and, later, taken and abandoned at such places as Dukem (ca. 10 kms. on Debrezeit road), Sebeta (ca. 25 kms. on the road to Jimma), and Kara Qore (ca. 15 kms. on the road to Ambo). These children managed to return to Addis Ababa in spite of the threats and strict instructions they had received from the police not to come back to the city. As pointed out earlier, some are feared not to have been as lucky.

Brief Case Histories of Some Children, Youth and Adults Whose Rights Were Violated

	Victim's Name	Age	Sex	Address	Details
1	Elias Yeshitila	13	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 01	Taken from around the football stadium on 2 April at 5 p.m. and was taken to Kolfe Police Training Camp (KPTC). There, he was made to perform military-like "sports", deprived of food and released on 3 April at 6:30 a.m.
2	Musa Shifa	13	M	Legehar	A 6th-grade student was picked up 28 March from around the stadium. At 6 noon, he was taken on a truck to KPTC, made to perform military-like "sports", deprived of food and released in the evening of 29 March.
3	Zerihun Tadesse	15	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 01	Was picked up from around Ambassador Theatre at 6 p.m. on 4 April, taken to KPTC, made to perform military-like "sports"
4	Nebiyu Mohammed	14	M	Stadium	Picked up at 7 p.m. on 4 April from around the National Theatre, taken by truck to KPTC, made to perform military-like "sports" and released with warning at 7 p.m. next day.
5	Michael Yimer	12	M	National Theatre	Picked up at about 9 p. m. of 5 April while sleeping, taken by truck to KPTC, made to perform military-like "sports", deprived of food and released at 9 p.m. next day.
6	Girum Mesfin	15	M	National Theatre	Picked up at 7 p.m. on 4 April while sleeping around Ras Hotel, taken to KPTC, made to perform military-like "sports" and released two days later.
7	Zemedihun Wondimu	12	M	Legehar	Picked up at 6 p.m. on 5 April, taken to KPTC, made to perform military-like "sports", deprived of food and release in the evening of the next day.
8	Askale Leykun	11	F	Shiro Meda	Picked up at 6 p. m. on 6 April, taken to KPTC, deprived of food and released at 6 p. m. the next day.
9	Elias Yirga	10	M	Shiro Meda	Picked up from around Urael Chuch at 7 p. m. on 5 April, detained at a nearby police station and released next day.
10	Workineh Gezahegn	14	M	Filwuha	Picked up at about 5 a. m. on 6 April, taken to KPTC, made to perform military-like "sports" and released next day.
11	Nureidin Seid	21	M	Wereda 18, Qebele 15	A shoe-shiner was picked up at 12 noon on 27 March, taken to the Police Garage and later at 6 p. m. to KPTC and was released next day after being made to some military-like "sport".
12	Assegid Girma	15	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 01	A shoe shiner, was picked up on 4 April, taken to KPTC, given military-like punishment, deprived of food and released next day at about 6 p. m.
13	Almaz Abera	30	F	Wereda 21, Qebele 01	This destitute woman was sleeping in her temporary, plastic shelter with her children, when the police woke them up. The policemen were about to take them away when her children started crying and other people protested. She was ordered to leave the area. The police also beat her husband who worked in the vicinity.
14	Hailu Dejene	13	M	Wereda 13, Qebele 01	A beggar, picked up at 5 p. m. on 4 April from the Stadium, taken to KPTC, made to do military-like "sports", beaten on the finger for disobedience, deprived of food, and released next day at 6 p. m.
15	Arebo Sultan	13	M	Wereda 15, Qebele 30	Picked up on 11 April while shoe shining. The police beat him on the eye and chased him away from where he was working.
16	Abel Tilahun	11	M	Stadium	Picked up at 5 a. m. on 4 April, taken to Legedadi, beaten on his knees and abandoned in the woods.
17	Abush Merhawi	12	M	Stadium	Picked up on 27 March at 7 p. m. from near Ghion Hotel, kept at the Police Garage, made to perform military-like "sports", whipped with electric wire, and taken and abandoned in the woods in Sebeta.
18	Daniel	12	M	Wereda 21,	A 4 th -grade student picked up from Stadium on 5 March at 8 p.

	Admassu			Qebele 22	m., taken to KPTC, beaten and abandoned in a nearby forest.
19	Behailu Tadesse	10	M	Stadium	Picked up on 7 March at about 6 p. m., beaten, taken to Qaliti, abandoned in the woods with a warning not to return to the city.
20	Hadisu Rorisa	10	M	Legehar	Picked up on 9 March at 10 p. m. from around Legehar, beaten, taken to Dukem and abandoned in the woods.
21	Degemu Sefer	16	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 13	Picked up from his sleep on 29 March at about 11 p. m., he was taken on the road to Dukem and abandoned in the woods. He came back to Addis Ababa only to be picked up again at 11 a. m. on 4 April and taken to Kolfe Police Training Camp where he was made to perform military-like exercises and released next day.
22	Yonas Melaku	11	M	Legehar	Picked up on 25 March from around Mesqel Square, kept at the Police Garage, and later at 8 in the evening was taken on the road to Debrezeit and abandoned. He returned to Addis, but was again picked up on 3 April, taken to Kolfe Police Training Camp, made to perform military-like exercises and released next day.

	Victim's Name	Age	Sex	Address	Details
23	Makonnen Belayneh	13	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 22	Lived as a shoe shiner. Picked up on 4 April from around the stadium, kept in Wereda 21 Police Station, and at about 8 in the evening, he was taken on a truck toward Dukem and abandoned in the woods. He walked the whole night back to Addis Ababa.
24	Zelalem Mateos	17	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 22	Lived as a porter. On 4 April at about 2 in the afternoon he was picked from around Mesqel Square, taken to Kolfe Police Training Camp, made to perform military-like sports, taken on the road to Dukem and abandoned in the woods.
25	Daniel Bishaw	8	M	Stadium	Picked up on 4 April at 5 a. m. from around the stadium, taken to Dukem at 9 p. m. and abandoned in the woods.
26	Sintayehu Abay	13	M	Legehar	Picked up from his sleep at 2 in the morning of 4 April and taken on a truck from Legehar and abandoned in the woods in the vicinity of KPTC.
27	Yohannes Gelaw	15	M	National Theatre	On 4 April at about 10 p. m., he was picked up while sleeping and taken and abandoned at an unknown place. He returned to Addis along with others abandoned with him. Next day, at about 11 p. m. he was picked up again, taken to KPTC, deprived of food, made to perform military-like sports and released in the evening of 6 April.
28	Sintayehu Tefera	14	M	Ghion Hotel	On 29 April at about 9 p. m., he was picked up, taken to Dukem and abandoned in the woods. He walked the whole night with others like him back to Addis.
29	Kelifa Hadi	12	M	Stadium	Picked up at 8 p. m. on 25 April, abandoned with other children in the woods near Aqaqi and warned not to return to Addis.
30	Meqdes Terefe	14	F	Bole	On 5 March at about 6 p. m., she was picked up from around the stadium, taken to KPTC, deprived of food and released on 7 March at noon.
31	Afewerk Asaro	12	M	Stadium	Picked up on 6 March at 2 p. m., kept at Wereda 14 Police Station. Later in the evening, he was taken to Dukem and abandoned with others like him.

32	Mingizem Asefa	10	M	Meshualekia	On 6 March at about 5 p. m., he was taken to KPTC. He was deprived of food and next day taken to Qeraniyo and abandoned in the woods.
33	Dereje Bishaw	10	M	Legehar	Picked up on 6 March at about 8 p. m. taken with many others to Kara Qore and abandoned in the woods.
34	Asrat Libu	14	M	Filwuha	Picked up on 4 March at about 9 p. m. and abandoned in an unknown forest.
35	Yassin Mucha	10	M	Stadium	Picked up from Mesqel Square on 2 March, taken to Dukem and abandoned in the woods.
36	Abraham Aklilu	13	M	Stadium	Picked up from around the Stadium on 6 March at about 7 p. m., taken to Meta Abo and abandoned in the woods.
37	Eyayu Gezahegn	13	M	Stadium	Picked up from Mesqel Square on 4 March, taken to Dukem, made to perform military-like "sports" and abandoned in the woods.
38	Aweke Tesfaye	12	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 22	Picked up from the Stadium on 7 March at about 2 p. m., taken to the Police Garage and, later, taken to Sebeta with others like him and abandoned in the woods at 9 in the evening.
39	Seifu Ayimut	12	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 22	Picked up from the Stadium on 7 March at about 2 p. m., taken to Police Garage and, later, to Sebeta with others like him and abandoned in the woods at 9 in the evening.
40	Miki Asrat	6	M	Legehar	Picked up on 8 March at 8 p. m., taken past Nazareth (Adama) and abandoned.
41	Wujira Aman	19	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 11	Picked up at 9 p. m. on 9 March from the Stadium, made to perform military-like "sports" and abandoned near KPTC.
42	Alemayehu W/Mesqel	19	M	Wereda 21, Qebele 01	Picked up while selling plastic items at 9 p. p. on 9 March, taken to Kara Qore, made to perform military-like "sports" and abandoned.
43	Jemal Nuru	13	M	Stadium	Picked up on 6 March at 8 p. m. from the Stadium, taken to Kolfe with many other street dwellers and abandoned in the woods in Kolfe.
44	Adane Seta	13	M	Legehar	Picked up with many others on 4 March at 12 noon by police in civilian cloths, promising them food, and handed them over to uniformed police who, in turn, kept them at Police Garage and, later at 8 p. m., took them to Dukem and abandoned them in the woods.
45	Isubalew Leikun	11	M	Stadium	Picked up on 5 March at 6 p. m. from around the Stadium, taken to Sebeta and abandoned.

Conclusion

Ever since its establishment ten years ago, EHRCO has been crying for the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Unfortunately, the concerned government authorities have continued to pretend that they have neither heard nor seen that cry. Indeed, now and then, they have tried to insinuate that EHRCO's cry emanated from some political agenda and desire for power. By labeling others as responsible for these problems, they have been attempting to cover up their own failure to carry out their responsibilities and duties in this regard. Now and in the future, EHRCO shall continue to call upon these authorities to realize that their efforts are in vain and, instead, embark on the search for democratic and just solutions to human rights problems.

In the past as well as now, EHRCO's demand of the government is to respect and protect those human rights and fundamental freedoms provided for in the country's legislations as well as in international and regional ones. These legal provisions, EHRCO believes, were adopted and ratified by the government because they are essential to the building of a democratic system. EHRCO has no other objective.

rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens and especially those of children and the poor are respected and protected.

EHRCO would like to call upon all individuals and organisations committed to the respect and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms to write to the officials and government bodies listed below asking for

- The immediate ending of the inhuman and cruel actions of the government against children, and
- A search for humane and lasting measures to ensure the rehabilitation of those that have been dislocated by various man-made and natural causes.

Copy to:

- The Council of Peoples Representatives
P. O. Box 80001; Fax No. (251-1) 550900; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- The Federal Council
P. O. Box 80001; Fax No. (251-1) 550722, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H. E. Dr. Negasso Gidada, FDRE President
P. O. Box 1031; Fax No. (251-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H. E. Mr. Meles Zenawi, FDRE Prime Minister
P. O. Box 1031; Fax No. (251-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H. E. Mr. Woredewold Wolde, FDRE Minister of Justice
P. O. Box 1370; Fax No. (251-1) 520874, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Addis Ababa Regional Council
P. O. Box ; Fax No. (251-1) , Addis Ababa, Ethiopia