

42nd Special Report

An Appalling and Dangerous Violation of the Rights of Students

21 April 2001

Beginning from 10 April 2001, students of the Addis Ababa University have been attempting to present peacefully their grievances to the concerned officials of the University and the Government. They were demanding the removal of the administrative injustices and the cessation of violations against their human and democratic rights to which they have been subjected for a long time. The students' demands concerned the creation of conditions essential for pursuing learning, teaching and research free from any kind of physical, mental or spiritual suppression. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) believes that these demands were presented peacefully and in keeping with the democratic and human rights provisions of the FDRE Constitution as well as those contained in the international and regional human rights instruments adopted and ratified by the Federal Government of Ethiopia. Consequently, EHRCO had hoped that the concerned government authorities would respond to the students' demands as peacefully and promptly. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

On 11 April 2001, the students were peacefully awaiting responses to their demands when security police entered the University campus and systematically beat, as one would snakes, the heads of the students who had no arms other than pencils and exercise books. According to information collected by EHRCO, no less than forty students sustained both heavy and light bodily injuries as a result of these brutal attacks by the security police. Some government and University officials admitted, on television, their ignorance of the security force's entry into the University campus, the atrocious actions taken by it against the students, and expressed their disapproval of both. Nevertheless, because the Minister of Education was unwilling to pursue her own public condemnation of the security police's illegal actions, the situation deteriorated further.

Even after the security force's brutal actions of 11 April, EHRCO continued to hope for the government's peaceful and positive response to the demands of the students. Unfortunately, the news report of 17 April as well as the subsequent, public statement issued on television by the Minister of Education indicated that EHRCO's hope would not be attainable. EHRCO believes that this contributed to the injuries sustained by students and other citizens as well as to the destruction caused to private and public property later that day. In the public statement issued on 17 April, the Minister of Education indicated that force, rather than peaceful and just means, would continue to be used as a response to the students' peaceful demands for the respect of their rights. The Minister stated that the students would have to resume classes by midday of 18 April or vacate the University campus. In anticipation of students failing to comply,

she informed the public that she has, as of that moment, ordered security forces to ensure the safety of those students that would want to return to their classes and also to prevent possible disruption of the learning and teaching process. However, the deadline issued by the Minister of Education

for the students to vacate the University did not permit them to meet their obligations to the University. This must have imposed considerable pressure on the students.

In spite of this and in accordance with the deadline given them, the students started leaving the University campuses in a peaceful and orderly manner in the morning of 18 April. As they were doing so, they were attacked brutally by security police waiting outside. Many students and other citizens were injured physically, some were beaten or shot to death, private and public property was either looted or destroyed. In the evening of the same day, the Ministry of Education declared the Addis Ababa University closed indefinitely; the City's administration announced that all elementary and secondary schools in the city would be closed until 22 April; the Federal Government declared that the Police was given a special and broad power to do what it considered appropriate to ensure the public's peace and security; and the Police on its part, issued a statement affirming and threatening to use the new power and authority given to it. But, even before these statements were made public, many university, elementary and high school students as well as other citizens were already seriously injured. EHRCO has continued collecting and verifying information about the injuries, deaths, and destructions caused by the violent actions of security police against students and other citizens. Its findings will be issued in subsequent reports for release to the public, the government, and all others concerned.

In its efforts to monitor the crisis from the beginning, EHRCO has ascertained that the students had remained within their campuses all the time, chanting and shouting their demands in a peaceful and orderly manner. It has, therefore, found no reason whatsoever to believe that the Addis Ababa University students were responsible for the illegal rioting and destructions that occurred outside of the University campuses on 17 and 18 April 2001. EHRCO believes that had the students' otherwise simple demands been responded to promptly, the problem would not have gone out of the University campuses. Because this did not happen, the problem spread, leading to public unrest and confusion, the loss of life, and the destruction of private and public property. EHRCO condemns all illegal actions that occurred in connection with the demands raised by the students of Addis Ababa University. Nevertheless, the allegation that "**political parties and other groups who claim to be advocates of human rights**" were behind the illegal rioting and ensuing destructions in the city can neither resolve the students' problems nor redress the wanton destructions already caused. It is clear that this insinuation can only further broaden and complicate the problem. Consequently, EHRCO would like to make the following urgent call to the government, the public, and local and foreign humanitarian organisations:

1. The Government

- a) To make all the effort to respond to the demands of the students of the

Addis Ababa University as appropriately and positively as possible with the view of creating the conditions necessary for the students' return to classes, and

b) To ensure that those members of the security police responsible for the injuries sustained by students and other citizens are brought before the law.

2. The Public, Local and Foreign Humanitarian Organisations

a) To use all appropriate and peaceful means at their disposal to influence the government to give the students' demands appropriate and positive consideration so that the students could return to their classes,

b) To provide all appropriate and humanitarian assistance possible to those University students who sustained injuries as a result of the attack by security police, and

c) To provide the students, until such time as the government responds to their demands positively and they are able to resume their normal university life, the necessary assistance with regard to shelter, food, and clothing.