

Human Rights Violations Committed in Oromiya Region

48th Special Report

April 2002

Introduction

It is to be recalled that the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) has been following up and reporting on the human rights violations committed by Government security forces and armed agents against students.

Even though EHRCO had repeatedly called on the Government to stop the violations against the constitutional rights of students and bring those that are responsible for these violations before the law, there has not been any significant step taken in this regard. On the contrary, violations against the rights of students have worsened in recent times.

During 2001, EHRCO reported the following violations against the rights of students at Jimma and Bahir Dar Universities, Awassa Teachers' College, Senior High Schools in Awassa, Addis Ababa University, and Ambo Agricultural College:

Table 1. Reports Issued by EHRCO Regarding Violations Committed at Different Times Against the Rights of Students

Title of Report	Number of Report	Date Report Issued
Addis Ababa University Students' Attempt at Peaceful Demonstration & the Atrocities Committed Against Them.	A Special Report with no number	November 21/1992
Human Rights Violations Against University Students	Special Report No. 12	May 12/98
Education and Development	Special Report No. 25	April 2000
Human Rights Violations Against Welaita Students	Special Report No. 27	December 11/1999
Human Rights Violations Against Ambo Students	Special Report No. 31	April 20/2000
Repeated Violations of the Right to Free Expression	Special Report No. 33	August 15/2000

Similarly, in recent clashes between students and armed security officers, students have been killed and both students and teachers have been arrested and detained in Nekemte, Shambu, Ambo and Gedo towns.

It is obvious that rather than resolving the problem and bringing about lasting peace, such forceful actions against students who were trying to express their grievances through peaceful demonstrations would result in the loss of lives and property. Recently too, instead of giving appropriate and peaceful replies to the grievances of students in East Wellega and West Shewa, serious destructions have occurred as a result of clashes between student & security officers. The learning and teaching process has been disrupted.

Despite the fact that Article 30 (1) of the EPRDF Constitution provides for "Every

one has the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed, and to petition” and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression...”violations against the rights of students have gotten worse.

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On 20 March 2002, officials of the regional government issued a call to students of Darge Senior High School to come on 21 March at 8:00 a. m. to Nekemte multi-purpose meeting hall in order to discuss various issues. The students accepted the call and presented themselves at the meeting hall at the time specified. The officials who had issued the call informed the students that the topic of the discussion would be “speeding up Rural Development” and gave clarifications on the topic.

Then the students expressed their wish to ask questions and when they were given permission, they raised the following questions:

- "a) How would the rural centered new Oromiya development policy benefit the Oromo people?
- b) Why is the forest in our region being destroyed?
- c) At present, because the fertiliser debt that the peasant is required to pay has become more than what he can afford to pay, he is forced to sell his domestic animals. What are you planning to do regarding this?"

The students raised these and other questions. The official who had been chairing the meeting responded to the students’ questions. However, the students who were not satisfied with the official’s response started expressing their dissatisfaction while in the meeting hall. As the officials continued giving answers to the students’ questions, the students walked out of the meeting hall and continued their protests in the streets of the town. In the process, the students caused damage to a road maintenance vehicle owned by the Road Construction Authority, a private bakery, and a medium range public bus.

Police and soldiers surrounded and dispersed the students. The police arrested and detained 102 students believed to have participated in the demonstration, but released them the next day, on 22 March 2002, after giving them warnings and advice. Classes were disrupted in all Nekemte schools for over a week after this incident.

On 28 March 2002, Nekemte police obtained a court order and arrested students that it believed to be leaders of the student riot as well as teachers suspected of inciting the students to riot. This resulted in a cooling of the crisis for a few days.

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Still Detained

	Detainee's Full Name	Place of Detention
1	Teacher Ayana Qebeta	Nekemte Police Station
2	>> Tesfa Buryu	>> >> >>
3	>> Getachew Umeta	>> >> >>
4	>> Garuma Waqjira	>> >> >>
5	Student Boshra Mizanu	>> >> >>
6	>> Damt'o Endale	>> >> >>
7	>> Lemlem Tesfaye	>> >> >>
8	>> Zelalem Turiko	>> >> >>
9	>> Misganu Abdi	>> >> >>
10	>> Zebaba Daba	>> >> >>
11	>> Haile Biqila	Ambo Police Station
12	>> Getu T'aba	>> >> >>
13	>> Degu Set'egn	>> >> >>
14	Ato Girma Midiqisa	>> >> >>

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2. Human Rights Violations in East Wellega, Shambu Town

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Causes of the Clash

- On 27 March 1994, morning shift students of Shambu Comprehensive High School were leaving school at about 12:30 when afternoon shift students of the School were assembled at the gate and chanting slogans that were critical of the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation (OPDO) and the Government.
- The Morning- shift students walked toward the gate to join those afternoon - shift students who had assembled outside. As these students were trying to force themselves out of the campus, the school guard loaded his rifle and fired into the air.
- Upon hearing the shot, the town's police and other armed security agents rushed to where the students had assembled and fired their guns, causing the following damages:

Table 2. Students Killed & Circumstances Under Which The Killings Occurred

1	<u>Mulat Akela</u> , an 11 th grade student of Shambu Comprehensive High School was hit on the head by a bullet fired by an armed security agent on 27 March 2002. He died instantly.
2	<u>Assefa Fegadu</u> , a 10 th grade student of Shambu Comprehensive High School was hit and killed by a bullet fired by an armed security agent on 27 March 2002.
3	<u>Belay Bala</u> , an 11 th grade student of Shambu Comprehensive High School was hit and killed by a bullet fired by a policeman on 27 March 2002.

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Table 3. Students Wounded & Circumstances Under Which They Were Wounded

1	<u>Figru Negassa</u> , a 10 th grade student of Shambu Comprehensive High School, was hit on the right thigh by a bullet fired by an armed security agent on 27 March 2002. He was taken to Ambo Hospital where he received first aid medical treatment and later taken to Black Lion Hospital in Addis Ababa for further medical help. Because of the seriousness of his injury, his right leg was amputated.
2	<u>Tadesse Tunj</u> , a student of Shambu Comprehensive High School, was hit on the right leg by a bullet fired by a policeman on 27 March 2002.
3	<u>Negerew Qoche</u> , a student of Shambu Comprehensive High School, was hit and wounded on the right leg by a bullet fired by a policeman on 27 March 2002.
4	<u>Mesele Lemessa</u> , a 9 th grade student of Shambu Comprehensive High School, was hit and wounded on the right leg below the knee by a bullet fired by a policeman on 27 March 2002.
5	<u>Mijina Ayano Roro</u> , an 11 th grade student of Shambu Comprehensive High School, was hit and wounded on the left arm by a bullet fired by a policeman on 27 March 2002. She is undergoing medical treatment at Nekemte Hospital.

3. Clashes in Ambo Town

March 26, 2002 was the date on which the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organisation (OPDO) celebrated its anniversary at Ambo Town Stadium. Many residents of the town and officials of the regional government were present at the Stadium to celebrate the occasion.

- Between 9:00 and 9:30 in the morning, students of Ambo Comprehensive High School assembled in the School's campus and, together with their teachers, proceeded toward where the anniversary was being celebrated. While they were entering the Stadium, some 350 to 500 students left the procession and started shouting various slogans that were critical of OPDO and the Weyane (popular name for the Tigray People's Liberation Front). On hearing these students' shouting, other students and youth of the town joined them, thereby raising their number significantly.
- The town's police and trainee policemen from Senqele training camp arrived at the scene and started firing their guns in order to disperse the students. This resulted in the following damages:

Killed

1. ***Girma Beyene*** was a student of the Ambo Technical School. After the student protest was long over, a policeman was trying to arrest him on 29 March 2002 while

the latter ran to escape arrest. The policeman fired his gun repeatedly and hit the student on the back and killed him. The alleged killer has been arrested and detained.

Shot and Wounded

1. **Gumela Qelbessa**, an 11th grade student of Ambo Comprehensive High School, was shot and wounded by the police.

Detained

The following persons have been detained for allegedly coordinating the March 26, 2002 student protest in Ambo:

1. Student Hailu Biqila
2. >> Getu T'aba
3. >> Degu Set'egn
4. Ato Girma Mideqsa

4. Violations Against Students in Gedo Town, West Shewa Zone

On 29 March 2002 beginning from 8:30 in the morning, students of Gedo Senior High School assembled in the compound of their school. Then, raising the same demands and questions that students of Nekemte and Ambo had raised earlier, they proceeded out of the school's compounded. Soon, the special police force that was nearby and the town's police opened fire at them, causing the following damages:

Killed

1. **Student Asfaw Balcha** was a resident of Gedo Town and a 9th grade student of Gedo Senior High School. On 29 March 2002 at about 9:00 in the morning, he was shot in the back by the police. He was being taken to Ambo Hospital when he died.

Those Who Sustained Bodily Injuries

1. **Abera Degebassa** is a 9th grade student at Gedo Secondary School. On 29 March 2002, he was seriously wounded in the right thigh by a bullet fired by the police. He was then taken to Ambo Hospital where the doctors informed him of the need to amputate his leg. He was sent for advanced medical treatment to Black Lion Hospital in Addis Ababa.
2. **Degefu Jita** is a 10th grade student at Gedo Senior High School. On 29 March

2002, he was hit on the back by a bullet fired by the police. The bullet, which had entered his back shoulder, pierced his chest and left his body. Afraid of further attack, he had managed to reach the kitchen of a private house where he fell on the fire hearth and sustained a burn on his left hand. Degefu Jita received first aid treatment at Ambo Hospital, from where he was later taken to Addis Ababa for more advanced medical treatment.

3. **Awoqe Adugna Yegido** is a 9th grade student. On 29 March 2002 at about 9:30 in the morning, he was shot and wounded on the right knee by the police. He received medical treatment at Ambo Hospital and was later taken to Addis Ababa for further medical treatment.
4. **Feyissa Dinqa** is a 22-year old and 1st grade student at Gedo Dejazmach Chache Primary and Junior High School. On 29 March 2002, he was shot and wounded on the left thigh by the police. As a result of the injury he sustained, he is unable to control his bowel movements. He received some medical treatment at Ambo Hospital after which he was sent to Addis Ababa for more advanced medical help.

Damage to Property

According to the Police Program broadcasted on Ethiopian Television on Sunday, 14 April 2002, the clashes that had occurred in Ambo had caused damage to eleven government and private vehicles

EHRCO condemns all human rights violations and destructions to life, physical well-being, and property. EHRCO makes the following call to the Ethiopian Government:

1. Those responsible for the destruction to life and property, including those who gave orders for the use of force, be brought before justice right away.
2. All students who sustained physical injuries are given urgent and free medical help. The government should pay the families of those who lost their lives adequate compensation;
3. All detained students be released immediately and enabled to resume their classes, and that those suspected of having broken the law be brought to justice
4. The government create the condition conducive for the peaceful and stable resumption of classes, and
5. For the future, the government should avoid violence that violates the democratic and constitutional rights of citizens who try to express their demands peacefully.

EHRCO calls upon all organisations and individuals who stand for the rule of law and the respect of human rights to support EHRCO's demands by writing to the following bodies and officials of the Ethiopian Government:

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. Lt. Girma W/Giorgis, 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. Harqo Haroye, P.O.Box 1031; Fax No. (251-1), 552020 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Addis Ababa Council, P.O.Box 356; Fax No. (251-1) 553688; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Dire Dawa Council, P.O.Box 240; Fax No. (251-1) 111072; Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.
- Oromiya Council, P.O.Box 101769; Fax No. 513642; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Council, P.O.Box 18; Fax No. (251-6) 201950; Awasa, Ethiopia.