

Illegal Acts committed against the clergy and

laity of Lideta Church

57th Special Report

December 3, 2002

Members of the Federal Special Police Force have on November 18/2002, severely beaten up and highly inconvenienced the clergy and monks who were rendering spiritual services as well as the laity and Sunday School students who had congregated in the sacred pre-cincts of Mahdere Sibhat Holy Lideta Mariam and Debre Medhanit Medhanealem Church. Many people have been clobbered and received light and serious physical injuries as a result of the forceful action that was taken by members of the Federal special police force. On that very date, many people were rounded up in the church's premises, crammed in trucks and whisked off to Wereda 22 Police Station. According to EHRCO's findings, the cause of the conflict is based on the feud that had flared up between the officials of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on the one hand and the church's clergy, the laity and Sunday school students on the other. The misunderstanding that had surfaced between them could not be resolved in the course of time. Nor could it be resolved through the traditional church method of resolving conflicts. So the case was brought before the court where the two parties mentioned above have been arguing their cases. Finally, the court gave a decision on the case to the effect that the former head of the church and members of the Diocese council should hand over the church's property to the new church head who has been appointed by the Addis Ababa Head Office of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Members of Wereda 22 police, representatives of the Ethiopian Orthodox church, the former head of the church, the newly appointed head of the church, members of the Diocese Council had gathered on November 18/2002 to execute the court's decision. On that day, the laity had congregated beginning from 6:00 a.m. and were saying prayers.

The handing over process started at about 9:00 a.m. and proceeded smoothly until 4:30 p.m. At about 4:30 p.m., the Special Security police force had, for unknown reasons, cordoned off the street stretching from Mexico Square to Lideta Church and the street stretching from the High Court to the Lideta Church. At about 5:00 p.m. more than 100 helmeted police, with shields, clubs and carrying rifles started to make their way into the church's pre-cincts. The laity voiced their protest peacefully by singing and shouting asking the armed men to vacate the pre-cinct. In addition they said, they would not accept the newly appointed church head and were not willing to hand over the church. They prevented the law enforcement agents from coming closer to the church by holding their hands together. At that moment, members of the special police force seiged the area and, and brutally and continually clubbed monks, elderly people, children, women and Sunday school youths. After identifying and beating up the youths who were preaching the Gospel, the police herded them together at one spot crammed them into a truck and shipped them off to Wereda 22 Police Station. Police have also inflicted similar harm on the residents of the area, who were outside the church compound protesting against police brutalization of the laity.

At about 7:00 p.m., members of the special police force took measures to disperse the crowd in the area. As has been indicated below, one person was shot and killed as a

result of the police offensives. Police have shot and killed thirty-year old Sintayehu Taddesse in violation of Article 15 of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia which stipulates “Every person has the right to life. No person may be deprived of his life except as a punishment for a serious criminal offence determined by law” and Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which the FDRE government has accepted. Sintayehu Taddesse who was 30 years old, was a resident of woreda 4, kebele 38, House No. 040. Sintayehu was hit on his right side by a bullet shot by police near the gate of the Federal High Court while walking along the road that takes to Merkato. Members of the Federal police immediately picked up Sintayehu, put him on their own car and rushed him to Tikur Anbessa Hospital where he died. The police took his body to Menelik Hospital and dumped it in the mortuary.

The family of Sintayehu who could not trace his whereabouts after he left his home and never returned were perturbed and reported to the police. They tried to look for their son in several police stations. On November 20/2002 police took the picture of the deceased from the applicant and followed up the case. On Nov. 22/02 they told the family of the bereaved over the telephone to collect the corpse of their son from Menelik Hospital. The remains of the late sintayehu were laid to rest in the St. Lideta Church yard on Nov. 23/2002 at 12:00 noon.

On that very day the police registered the names and residential addresses of the laity and other believers of the church whom they had put under custody and made them sign on a blank sheet of paper. Police duty officers had made attempts to force the detainees sign a statement saying that “We have incited riots in the church and we admit that we are guilty of the offence.”

Police duty officers had told the detainees that they would be released on condition that they sign a statement admitting that “they are guilty of inciting riots in the church.” The detainees protested against the police suggestion saying that they would not incriminate themselves without having committed any criminal offences. The police prepared a note which said “We have incited unrest; and we are held accountable for the problems that had cropped up. We have also obstructed the execution of the court decision,” read it out to the detainees and attached it to the blank form on which the detainees had signed. The laity who were opposed to this practice were severely beaten up and inconvenienced.

On the same day, at about 11:00 p.m. the police released a limited number of the detainees by giving them warnings in violation of Article 17(2) of the FDRE Constitution which stipulates “No person may be subject to arbitrary arrest, and no person may be detained without charge or conviction against him” and the provisions of Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Head of the Church, several members of the Diocese Council, Development committee members, priests, deacons and members of the church choir were brought before the court on November 20/2002. In accordance with the orders of the court, police brought the detainees to court on Nov. 21/2002. The court gave a decision to the effect that the detainees be released on producing bail money ranging from birr 300 (three hundred) to the 1000 (one thousand). The police released the detainees in accordance with the court decision. Below is the list of the names of the people who were detained and released. The list is based on the information gathered by EHRCO.

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Schedule 1. Peoples detained at Wereda 22 police Station

No.	Detainees full name	address	age	date of detention	date of release	Details
1	Melake Sibhat Yemane Birhan Seyoum	W.17 K.20 Ho.No.411	57	18/11/02	21/11/02	He was head of the church. He appeared in court 20/11/02 and his case was adjourned for 21/11/02. He appeared on the adjournment date and was released on 1000 birr bail
2	Teacher Mezgebu Kelkai			“	“	He appeared in court on 20/11/02. He was released on bail money on 21/11/02
3	Ato Aberra Wodajo			“	“	Member of development committee. Appeared in court on 20/11/02 and released on bail money on 21/11/02
4	Ato Bekele Woldeamayrat	W.4, K.49, H.NO. 210	82	“	“	“ “
5	Ato Telahoun Tulu	W.22, K.03, Hno. 355	71	“	“	Chairman of Development Committee; appeared in court on 21/11/02
6	Deacon Terrefe Aberra	W.22, K.03, Hno. 1384	25	“	“	appeared in court on 20/11/02 and released on bail money on 21/11/02
7	Deacon Ashenafi Getaneh	W.17, K. 24, H.No. 1384	24	“	“	“ “
8	Gedeon Nuri	W.22, K.02, H.No. 146	20	“	“	“ “
9	Amsalu Gebre Kidan	W.22, K.07, H.No. 053	26	“	“	“ “
10	Alemayehu Belete	W.4, K.29, H.No. 770	24	18/11/02	18/11/02	Head of Sunday School. Appeared in court on 21/11/02 and released on bail money on 21/11/02
11	Solomon Gemmeda	W.4, K 37, H. No. 858	26	“	18/11/02	He was beaten up
12	Betelehem Mesfin	W.4, K. 40, H.No. 424	17	“	“	He is a student, was beaten up
13	Getachew Gemmechu	W. 4, K. 37, H.No. 851	21	“	“	He was beaten up
14	Moges Aberra	W.4, K. 40, H.No. 006	16	“	“	
15	Dessalegn Abraha	W.3, K. 44, H.No. 1189	20	19/11/02	19/11/02	
16	Yenenesh Fanta	W.4, K.37, H.No. 545	14	“	“	
17	Aster Daddi	W. 4, K. 37, H.No. 868	16	18/11/02	“	She was detained on 18/11/02, released on the evening of the same day, she was then arrested on the morning of the next day at the gate of the church and has stayed in detention
18	Yared MELaku	W. 22, K.03, H.No. 445	20	“	18/11/02	
19	Solomon Teferi	W. 22, K. 06, H.No. 330	22	“	18/11/02	
20	Imit Mekonnen	W. 24, K.13, H.No. 674	22	“	“	
21	Adanech Jemma	W.24, K. 13, H.No. 387	60	“	“	
22	Tirgalem Abegaz	W.4, K. 35, H.No. 376	20	19/11/02	19/11/02	
23	Fikirte Taddesse	W. 22, K.01, H.No. 1512	15	“	“	
24	Meron Ayalew	W.22, K. 06, H.No. 250	16	“	“	
25	Tewodros Bekele	W.4, K.36, H.No. 690	24	18/11/02	“	He was detained on 18/11/02, released on the evening of the same day; arrested at the church on the gate next day, remained in detention at wereda 20 Police Station and released on 19/11/02 at 6:00 p.m.
26	Taddesse Gebru	W.24, K.12, H.No. 586	17	18/11/02	19/11/02	
27	Deacon Solomon Shiferraw	W.4, K.24, H.No. 407	24	“	“	
28	Elias Gugsu	W.3, K.41, H.No. 309	21	“	“	
29	Dawit Kebede	W.4, K.36, H.No. 345	19	“	“	
30	Manyazewal Begashaw	W.4, K.27, H.No. 280	19	“	20/11/02	
31	Mekdes Tesfaye	W.4, K.27, H.No. 384	17	“	19/11/02	
32	Yetnayet Ayalew	W.4, K.37, Hno. 2034	18	“	“	
33	Betelihem Bekele	W.4, K.37, Hno. 522	18	“	“	
34	Betelihem Ikube	W.4, K.47, H.No. 505	18	“	“	
35	Ihitagen Ayalew	W.4, K28, Hno. 697	18	“	“	
36	Alem Tsehai Asnake	W.22, K.01, H No. 1032	20	19/11/02	“	
37	Fikirte Abebe	W.22, k.02, H.no. 167	19	“	“	
38	Aklili Amsalu	W. 3 K. 51 H.NO. 500	19	18/11/02	19/11/02	
39	Idme-Alem Wondemu	W. 22 K. 03 H.NO. 545	19	“	“	
40	Azeb Bekele	W. 22 K. 03 H.NO.545	19	“	“	
41	Selamawit Messele	W.4 K. 37 H.NO.490	17	“	“	

42	TomaS Woldu	W.4 K.26 H.NO.318	19	“	“	
43	Kassahun Asnake	W. 4 K. 39 H.NO.360	20	“	“	
44	Firehiywot Fekadu	W.23 K. 14 H.NO.2026	25	“	“	
45	Habtam Erago	W.22 K. 06 H.NO.125	22	“	“	
46	Yodit Yonas	W. 22 K. 4 H.NO.602	18	“	“	
47	AshEnafi Mammo	W.4 K.28 H.NO.553	19	“	“	
48	Shewaferraw Kifle	W.4 K.38 H.NO.495	25	“	“	
49	Kidist Legesse	W.22, K. 3, H.NO.116	20	“	“	
50	Yared Aman	W. 22, K. 02, H.NO.013	22	“	“	
51	Sintayehu Kifle	W.4 K.38, H.NO.459	19	“	“	
52	Betelihem Mulugeta	W.4, K.36, H.NO.1766	18	“	“	
53	Tikrem Kefelegne	W.22, K.01, H.NO. 265	23	“	“	
54	Marta Nebiyu	W.4, K.49, H.NO.226	18	“		
55	SiHIne Hailu	W.4, K.39, H.NO.089	22	“		
56	Senait Fekadu	W. 3, K.47, H.NO.027	19	“		
57	Yibeltal Abera	W.24, K.12, H.NO.436	21	“		
58	Adane Gemeda	W.4, K. 37, H.NO.858	20	“		
59	Seble Tilahoun	W.4, K.37, H.NO.892	18	19/11/02		detained for a whole day and released
60	Henok Mekonnen	W.22, K.02, H.NO.705	23	18/11/02		
61	Mulugeta Teka	W.5, K.20, H.NO.425	20	“		
62	Wondwesen Negash	W.22, K.02, H.NO.699	24	19/11/02		detained for a whole day and released
63	Tikikil Teklu	W.4, K.36, H.NO.302	19	“		“ “
64	Serk-alem Ali	W.22, K.03, H.NO.791	17	19/11/02		“ “
65	Meseret Eshetu	W.4, K.36, H.NO.624	19	“		“ “
66	Efrem Abdu	W.22, K.02, H.NO.676	18	18/11/02		“ “
67	Tesfaye Yadete	W.4, K.39, H.NO.373	25	“		“ “
68	Endylalu Tesfaye	W.22, K.03, H.NO.791	26	“		“ “
69	Mulugeta Dejene	W.4, K.37, H.NO.741	18	“		“ “
70	Kassahun Belay	W.4, K.39, H.NO.366	22	“		“ “
71	Daniel Tessema	W.22, K. H.NO.576	17	19/11/02		“ “
72	Tamiru Fikre	W.22, K. 36, H.N797	20	18/11/02		“ “
73	Solomon Melaku	W.22, K. 01, H.No. 1622	26	“		“ “

Conclusion

As has been described in detail above, government armed men have continued to violate people’s human rights. Article 27(5) of the constitution stipulates “Freedom to express one’s religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, peace, health, education, public morality or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others and to secure the independence of the state from religion.”

Acts of the violations of rights that were committed against the laity and servants of Lideta Church who were peacefully exercising their belief. These violations of constitutionally guaranteed rights deserve to be condemned. The government has the obligation and responsibility to ensure the respect of the very laws which it has promulgated and the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which it has accepted and ratified. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) calls on all relevant government bodies and authorities to examine the human rights violations

described in this special Report and take all appropriate measures against human rights violators. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council also calls on citizens, governments organizations and NGOs to write to the Ethiopian governments officials listed below requesting them to ensure the respect of citizens democratic rights.

- House of Peoples Representatives

P.O.Box 80001 - fax (252-1) 550900, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- House of the Federation

P.O.Box 80001 - fax (252-1) 550722, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- H.E. Lt. Girma Wolde Giorgis, FDRE President

P.O.Box 1031, fax (252-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, FDRE Prime Minister

P.O.Box 1031 - fax (252-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- H.E. Ato Harka Haroye, FDRE Minister of Justice

P.O.Box 1370 - fax (252-1) 520874, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- Office of the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

P.O.Box 1283, Fax (251-1) 55 22 11, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia