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EHRCO

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EHRCO stands for democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights.

Urgent Call!

Reveal The Condition And Whereabouts of Citizens Illegally Taken By Government Security Forces 75th Special Report

25 March 2004

It is to be recalled that following the protests by Oromo students of Addis Ababa University as of 18 January 2004, Oromo students were arrested by police and dismissed from their studies by the university administration. In its 74th Special Report issued on 10 February 2004, EHRCO denounced the illegal measures taken by the security forces and the university officials. It also urged the government to seek just and amicable solutions taking the seriousness of the problem into account.

Nevertheless, as sufficient measures were not taken, the problem remained unresolved, the protests of students has spread to schools and higher learning institutions in different towns of the Oromia Region. And as a result of actions taken by security forces many students were arrested and tortured. Bullets fired by the police killed at least one student. There have also been frequent interruptions of the educational process.

The problem has been aggravated and is taking a dangerous course in causing further violations of the human rights. As this report is being prepared, individuals of Oromo descent, living in Addis Ababa and outside are being illegally taken by government security forces and detained incommunicado in utter violation of Art.17 (1) of the FDRE Constitution which stipulates that "No one shall be deprived of his or her liberty except on grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law." And Art.9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile."

Following is the names of persons illegally taken and detained incommunicado.

1. Ato Zewde Kenea, 45, is a resident of Addis Ababa wereda 23 kebele 16 house number 085/36. He is a civics teacher at the Addis Ababa Technical and Vocational School. On 14 March 2004, at about 8:25 P.M. upto 20 or 30 members of the Federal Police entered his house and took him without any court warrant. Thirteen members of his family were detained in the house until 5:00 P.M. the next day. At noon on 15 March, the police brought Ato Zewde to the house and searched the house until 15:00 P.M. And as they found nothing, they took the detainee back with them.



☎ (00251 1) 51 44 89 , 51 77 04
☎ 2432 Addis Abeba, ETH IO PIA

Tele fax: (00251 1) 51 45 39
E-Mail: ehrco@telecom.net.et

Web site: <http://www.ehrco.net>

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EHRCO has an observers status in the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, is a member of World Organization Against Torture and is also a corresponding member of the International Federation of Human Rights.

2. Ato Dechassa Benti, 43 is a resident of Addis Ababa wereda 24 kebele 04. He is a father of four children and is a purchaser at the Nefas Silk Paint Factory. He is also a member of the Mecha and Tulema Cooperation and Development Association. On 14 March 2004, at about 6:00 P.M heavily armed Federal policemen entered his house without a warrant and took him. The police rounded up his house the whole night. Other eight members of the family were detained in Ato Dechassa's house until 2:30 P.M. the next day. At noon on 15 March, the police brought Ato Dechassa, handcuffed, and searched the house until 5:00 P.M. and took him back.



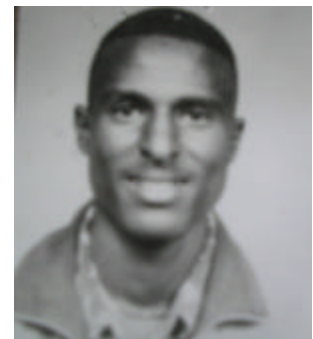
3. Ato Bayissa Belay, 22, lives in Addis Ababa Kolfe Keraniyo sub-city kebele 03 house number 3272 with his parents. He is a freshman at the Kotebe Teachers Training College in the extension programme. On 14 March 2004, at about 11:30 P.M. upto fifteen Federal Policemen and three other plainclothes security personnel forcibly entered the compound of Ato Belay, the father of Bayissa and started knocking at the door of the main house. Ato Belay refused to open the door and tried to call the police through the telephone. He also told the security forces knocking at the door that he would not open the door as it is late and he would come wherever they wanted him to, in the morning. However, the security forces opened the door using a master key, entered the house and took Bayissa with them. Other nine members of the family were detained in the house for 19 hours by the security forces. At noon on 15 March the policemen searched the house for three hours and took 3 audiocassettes, a dagger made of ivory, a seventeenth century sword, a traditional spear and a hatchet.



4. Ato Legesse Yadeta, 50, lives in Addis Ababa Nefas Silk Lafto sub-city kebele 10 house number 1634. He works at the Oromia Cooperatives Promotion Bureau. He is a father of six children. On 15 March 2004 at 7:45 A.M., he was arrested by up to ten men in Federal Police uniforms and three other plainclothes security personnel near the Addis Ababa Exhibition Center while he was heading to his office. The security forces took Ato Legesse in a police pick up vehicle plate number 2313. They searched Ato Legesse's house on the same day and took 28 audio and 2 video cassettes and a gold necklace weighing six grams. They also detained in the house seven other members of the family for two days.



5. Ato Ahmed Mohammed, 24, a second year management student at Addis Ababa University. He is a relative of Ato Legesse Yadetta (No.4 above) and was staying at the latter's house. On 18 March 2004, at about 2:00 P.M. upto ten men in Federal Police uniform took Ahmed after entering the house of Ato Legesse, where he was staying.



The detainees were in custody without their whereabouts known by their families and lawyers until 22 March 2004. On this date, families of the detainees were told that they could bring food and clothes for the detainees at the Central Crime Investigation Section. Accordingly, the families are taking food and clothes from 6:00-8:00 A.M. everyday, the time allowed by the security forces. The families however are not allowed to see the detainees, nor could they talk to them by any means. They give the food and the clothes they take to the guards at the Central Crime Investigation

Section.

EHRCO went to the Federal Police Commission on 18 March 2004 to gather further evidence on the situation surrounding the illegal detention of the persons. However, the EHRCO staff was denied entry to the Commissioner's office as the Commissioner was said to be in a meeting. The Commissioner's secretary told EHRCO that they do not know anything about the detentions. On 22 March 2004 another attempt by EHRCO to reach the Commissioner through telephone was unsuccessful as he was said not to be in his office.

Conclusion

Following the protests by Oromo students of Addis Ababa University in January, the situation has been aggravated and spread to many towns in the Oromia Region. The measures being taken by the security forces are getting harsher by the day. This in turn is endangering the safety and security of citizens. The educational process is facing obstacles in different towns of the region. It is obvious that the actions taken by the government to tackle the problem are resulting in aggravated violations of the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Persecuting citizens, arresting them without sufficient grounds and without court warrant, making them disappear rather than taking them to a court of law are blatant violations of rights. EHRCO urges government authorities to bring an end to these human rights violations.

EHRCO hereby expresses its deep concern over the continued illegal arrest and involuntary disappearance of persons and the danger that pose on the human rights of citizens. It also urges pertinent government officials to seek legal and amicable solutions to the problems and handle the matter in a responsible manner.

EHRCO also makes the following appeal to the government:

1. to immediately release the individuals illegally detained.
2. to notify, without delay the families of the detainees as to their conditions and specific whereabouts and respect the rights of the detainees to be visited by their lawyers.
3. to respect its constitutional duty that requires it to arrest suspects only through the legally prescribed means and to bring to justice those members of the police and security forces who caused violations of the rights of citizens.

Finally, EHRCO calls on citizens, governmental and non governmental organizations, national and international human rights organizations and government envoys to exert pressure on the Ethiopian government so that it respects citizens' rights and work for the realization of the rule of law, by writing to the government bodies and officials listed below.

Council of People's Representatives

P.O.Box 80001, Fax (251-1) 550900 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Council of Federation

P.O.Box 80001, Fax (251-1) 550722 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

H.E. Ato Girma Wolde Giorgis, President, FDRE

P.O.Box 1031, Fax (251-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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

P.O.Box 1031, Fax (251-1) 552020 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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

P.O.Box 1370 Fax (251-1) 520874 Addis Ababa

The Commissioner, Federal Police Commission

P.O.Box 199, Fax (251-1) 534253 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

The Commissioner, Addis Ababa Police Commission

P.O.Box 5647, Fax (251-1) 560112 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia