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EHRCO

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ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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

Atrocities Committed by Religious Extremists
97th Special Report

November 30 2006

Introduction

A clash between the followers of Islam and of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which took place in Illubabor, Jimma and West Wollega zones of the Oromiai region, has caused loss of life, physical and psychological injury, property damage, and displacement of hundreds of people. The incident occurred during the Celebration of Demera, a burning of the bonfire on the eve of the Christian holiday of Meskel, the finding of the true Cross. According to evidences documented by EHRCO, the incident started when some grouped Muslim extremists disrupted the celebration by throwing stones at the Christian worshippers.

Cause of the conflict

On September 26, 2006, about 7 pm, while many Christian worshippers were celebrating the annual feast of *Demmera* in Illubabor zone, Dedessa woreda, around Chello town, a group of Islam followers disrupted the celebration declaring that the formers were not allowed to burn the bonfire at that place. This triggered a conflict which resulted in severe human and material damages. The conflict swollen both in leap and bound until Oct 16, 2006 such that it affected Christians in neighboring kebeles (the lowest administrative unit) of Sebo, Yebu, Goro, Gera, Chelo Dingo, Bilu, Demecha, Haro, and Bilkemu Kemech.

Followers of Islam killed During the Incident:

Table 1

No	Name	Details
1	Muktar Abarago	Shot to death
2	Gehad Aba Chibssa	" " "
3	Sultan Aba Rago	" " "
4	W/o Bedriya(AdeSherif)	" " "

Table 2 :- Christians killed:

No	Names	Details
1	Yismaw Alemneh	Resident of Chello Kebele, killed after having been chopped with machetes
2	Getahun Adal	Resident of Denso Kebele, 90 years old, killed on October 1 st , 2006 fire burned to death along with his family.
3	W/o Yewegnech Yizengaw	Resident of Haro Dayu Kebele, speared to death on September 30, 2006 after having been forcibly converted to Islam
4	W/o Desta Tadesse	Resident of Gute Kebele, fire burned to death while in her home.
5	W/o Aselefech Liben	Resident of Haro Dayu Kebele, killed on October 7, 2006 after being attacked by spear and machete as she resisted the order to convert to Islam
6	W/o Zena Tilahun	Resident of Haro Dayu Kebele, mother of three months old baby, killed on September 30, 2006 after being attacked by spear and machete as she resisted the order to convert to Islam

Christians who have been displaced and/or their properties destroyed in different Kebeles of Dedessa Woreda, Illubabur zone.

**Table 3
Goro Kebele**

No	Name	Family Size	value of property damaged(in birr)
1	Tadesse Desta	11	40,376
2	Wubshet Nega	9	18,335
3	Tilahun Anley	9	12,000
4	Taye Yilma	11	11,109
5	Belete Desta	11	18,803
6	Wasse Mengesha	9	36,584
7	Tadesse Alamrew	10	43,826
8	Temesgen Aschalew	9	29,586
9	Abebaw Mekonnen	7	7,456
10	Asrese Gashu	14	3,090
11	Getaneh Yilma	8	9,787
12	Aganew Engida	4	6,644
13	Engida Chekol	13	27,366
14	Azmeraw Engida	2	10,000
15	Abire Mengistu	9	10,000
16	Gashaw Desta	7	10,869
17	Wubshet Yizengaw	10	25,000
18	Bayle Adam	6	1,883
19	Tadesse Bayle	4	8,000
20	Sisay Zemedu	3	5,000

21	Belay Gedfew	3	4,000
22	Wale Alamrew	10	40,000
23	Alehegn Lakachew	4	6,000
24	Andarge Liyew	6	20,000
25	Wale Desse	5	6,000
26	W/o Eseynech Zerihun	5	5,000

Table 4
Harro Kebele

No	Name	Family /Size	value of property damaged(in birr)
1	Ato Zewde Wube	13	99,520
2	Abrham Assaye	14	97,000
3	Tseada Assaye (priest)	7	65,000
4	Birhan Assaye	6	40,000
5	Negesse Zewde	3	35,000
6	W/o Messel Andargie	7	15,000
7	W/o Belayu Mekonnen	2	12,000
8	Ato Wale Addis	3	13,000
9	Wendim Tadesse	3	10,000

Table 5
Bilkomu Kebele

No	Name	Family /Size	value of property damaged(in birr)
1	Zelalem Workneh	10	50,000
2	Anmut Hunegnaw	5	30,000
3	Gashaw Alemneh	6	21,000
4	Wubshet Alemneh	3	5,000
5	Getachew Mengiste	3	5,000
6	Adisu Dilu	2	5,000
7	Aderaw Tiruneh	7	25,000
8	Enyew Tiruneh	2	15,000
9	Migbar Temesgen	5	30,000
10	Tadesse Assaye	1	50,000
11	Gashaw Molla	8	51,000
12	Atalay Tiruneh	10	65,000
13	Yigarde Amogne	9	51,000
14	Yirga Anagaw	5	15,000
15	Mihretu Chekol	8	17,000
16	Ziyen Teages	4	16,000
17	Andualem Ayele	3	10,000
18	Behaylu Andarge	8	13,000
19	Belachew Andarge	2	8,000

Table 6
Begoro Garsso Kebele

No	Name	Family Size	value of property damaged(in birr)
1	Yasegagn Akalu	5	7,000
2	Akalu Muluneh	7	6,000
3	Getachew Mitku	9	6,905
4	Abay Bizuneh	4	5,641
5	Tsegaye Chekol	5	7,684
6	Wubetu Demeke	2	1,000
7	Wendimu Mekonnen	2	1,000
8	W/o Adanech Meshesha	2	1,500
9	W/o Sente Embiale	4	2,049
10	Yenealem Wubet	8	9,735
11	Dilu Yitayih	7	7,540
12	Abebe Tilahun	6	14,320
13	Mihret Alemayehu	3	5,656
14	Amanu Mihretu	3	11,628
15	Simachew Mengiste	6	5,000
16	Yaregal Simachew	6	6,000
17	Bante Tilahun	5	2,000
18	W/o Anchiye Nigate	3	1,500
19	Gebeyaw Kinde	3	1,000
20	Aweke Gedefu	8	2,000
21	Gebeyehu Andualem	3	1,000
22	Kume Temesgen	6	4,000
23	Mehabaw Andualem	3	3,000
24	Yibeltal Asmare	9	16,000
25	Belete Temesgen	3	3,550
26	Desalegn Alemu	6	23,000
27	Tsegaye Abaye	3	44,000
28	Belew Wubetu	6	6,000
29	Lingerew Shetaye	6	5,000
30	Gete Tamiru	7	7,000
31	Darcha negash	9	14,065
32	Mulat Mersea	6	4,000
33	Emahoy Simegn Mersha	3	8,920
34	Wale Desse		8,000
36	Yilkal Tadesse	10	3,000
37	Ashagre Melesse	4	2,500
38	Denekew Nigatu	3	2,500
39	Addisu Wasse	3	3,500
40	Wube Anteyazew	3	250

Damages caused in Goma and Manna Woredas, Jimma Zone

A conflict associated with the celebration of *Meskel* feast has also caused serious human and material damages in various kebeles of Goma and Manna woredas of Jimma Zone; namely, Yachi, Goga, Choge, Bore, Yachu Urche, and Bebesha kebeles. Moreover, about 1,000 displaced persons were sheltered in St. Mary Church at Agaro town.

However, on October 10, 2006, most of the displaced were made to return to their villages after the local administration and the police told them to do so stating that 'fathers of the two religions have discussed the matter and the problem has finally been settled.'

On October 14, 2006, about 100 of the displaced accompanying the Temple of *Abuna GebreMenfes Kidus* which was temporarily sheltered at Agaro St. Mary Church moved to Beshasha kebele by a track owned by Ato Getahun Sheberu, to celebrate the October 15th religious feast of *Abuna GebreMenfes Kidus*. However, on the eve of the feast at about 12:30 pm, while the clergy and the faithful were celebrating, more than 200 grouped and masked Islam extremists surrounded the town, sprayed benzene on and burned down the church and the Isuzu truck (plate no 3-04016-Oro) which has transported the people. As a result, people who were in the church, including women, elders, and children were burned to death. The rest of the believers were ruthlessly stabbed and killed by sword and spear. More than sixty were coerced to convert to Islam.

Table 7 Persons killed:

No	Name	Age	Occupation
1	W/o Alemnesh Debela	53	Agaro St. Giorgis Church
2	Aboye Beyene	65	Synod member at Beshesha Abune Gebremenfes Kidus Church
3	W/o Mihret Reda	44	Mother of 8 children and resident of Agaro town
4	Rev. Getahun Welde	44	Clergy at Beshesha Abune Gebremenfes Kidus Church
5	Rev. Kefyalew Yigletu	38	Clergy at Agaro St. Giorgis Church
6	Terefe Tekle	-	Guard at Beshesha Abune Gebremenfes Kidus Church

Table 8 Persons sustained bodily injuries

No	Name	Age
1	Asnake Getnet	13
2	Negaso Galleta	7
3	Kassahun Zewde	32
4	Nigusse Mengistu	65
5	Tesfaye Gobena	35
6	Elias Teshome	12
7	Tsegaye Bekele	25
8	Mulugeta Teka	23

Damages occurred in Deddessa woreda, Jimma zone

In relation with the *Demera feast* about 400 houses in Dedesa woreda were burned down along with the property and some cases with persons inside them, domestic animals looted, and grain stores too were burned down. About 1,594 persons who led to Dembi town, the seat of the wereda administration, appealed for help to government authorities there. Sadly, the response they could get from the public authorities and police was to go away and try to settle the issue through local elders, downplaying the matter as local conflict. Moreover, the victims express that they were to return to where they come by the army.

Churches completely burned down with properties inside them.

1. Kemech St. Michael Church, and the temple of Abune Aregawi which was in it.
2. Demecha Denge St. Kidane Mihret Church. Moreover, St. Abune Gebre Menfes Kidus Church of Busi kebele and one Protestant Church were transformed to worshipping place of a different religion.

Damages Caused to Christians in West Wollega

In Begi and Kondala woredas of West Wollega Zone, Oromia region, a religious conflict that occurred from October 6-18, 2006, has caused serious human and property damage. Over 400 people were also displaced. Moreover, houses were burned down; various farm plants such as coffee, mango, orange, avocado, and the like were damaged. Various musical instruments, clergies' cloths, and even the holy bibles were destroyed by fire. Even tombs and graveyards of Christians were not spared. A land cruiser vehicle plated 35-757410, a property of Ethiopian Mekane Yesus Begi Synod, serving for rural water project was damaged. Water wells in all churches were destroyed.

Table 9

People killed

No	Name	Address	Details
1	Wongelawi Michael Kenea	Begi wereda, Kober kebele	Slaughtered to death with knife and sword in front of his wife and children by Islam extremists who broke into his home on October 10, 2006, about 11:00pm
2	Ato Essa Regasa	Begi wereda, Bila kebele	Shot to death by government forces in an attempt to controlling the conflict
3	Ato Hussen Eressa	Begi wereda, Bila kebele	Shot to death by government forces in an attempt to controlling the conflict

Table 10
Persons who sustained Injuries

No	Name	Address	Details
1	Yonas Beyene	Kerma Sheroma Shoro kebele	Guard at Kerma Mekane Yesus Church, his house burned down due to the conflict, and was injured on his face and is an out patient at the nearby clinic until this report was prepared.
2	Challa Emru	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	Chopped at three places on his head with machete and speared on his arm; treated in Ayra hospital from October 13-28, 2006 and is an out patient in the surrounding clinic until this report was prepared.
3	Ato Regassa Emru	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	Hit at four places on his head by machete knifed on his abdomen and left arm; treated in Ayra hospital October 13-28, 2006 and is an out patient at the nearby clinic until this report was prepared.
4	Yosef Sirage	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	Wounded with machete at two places of his head; treated in Ayra hospital October 13-28, 2006 and is an out patient at the nearby clinic until this report was prepared.
5	Hirpo Rekitu	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	Wounded with machete at two places on his head; treated in Ayra hospital October 16-23, 2006 and is an out patient at the nearby clinic until this report was prepared.
6	Melkamu Milki	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	Wounded in his leg with sword; treated in Ayra hospital October 16-23, 2006 and is an out patient at the nearby clinic until the preparation day of this report.
7	Kenea Tafesse	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	23, seriously beaten
8	Hamsedi Fitte	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	32, a father of five children; seriously beaten
9	Mulu Kenea	Kondela wereda, Shura Litike	25, seriously beaten

Table 11
Churches Burned Down

No	Name of the Church	Address	Date	Value of burned property(in birr)
1	Kober Mulu Wongel	Begi Wereda	October11,2006	unknown
2	Tulu Gebeya Mulu Wongel	"	October12,2006	"
3	Shambo Bayda Mulu Wongel	"	October13,2006	"
4	Kama Chandi No.1 Mulu Wongel	"	October12,2006	"
5	Kama Chandi No.2 Mulu Wongel	"	October11,2006	"
6	KongeloGaraKelo No.1MuluWongel	"	October13,2006	"

7	Delgedu Duga Boka No.1Mulu Wongel	"	October13,2006	"
8	Gebeya Defano Mulu Wongel	Kondla Wereda	September - October,2006	"
9	Kabeche Dume Mulu Wongel	"	"	"
10	Cherepa Mulu Wongel	"	"	"
11	Tereko Geje Mulu Wongel	"	"	"
12	Holly Trinity	Begi Wereda, Konglo Gara Kebele	October10,2006	127,3470
13	Holly Trinity	Konedla Wereda	October10,2006	6,960.
14	St. Kidane Mihret	Konedla Wereda Jimebila Tohamebi Kebele	October9,2006	10,983,550
15	St. BealeWolde	Konedla Wereda Hopi Keshmando Kebele	October10,2006	55,000
16	Sunday School Hall	Konedla Wereda Hopi Keshmando Kebele	October11,2006	unknown
17	St. Urayle	Konedela Wereda Bamso Kebele	October13,2006	69,000
18	Kebache Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	September- October,2006	200,000
19	Kerma Shoro Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	450,000
20	Kerma Bebene Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	unknown
21	Shoro Geba Jimata Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	105,000
22	Charpa Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	95,000
23	Jimebila Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	69,000
24	Merem Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	unknown
25	Bamso Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	68,000
26	Shega Dinka Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	unknown
27	Kebache Dume Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	"
28	Shonge Mekane Yesuse	Konedela Wereda	"	"
29	Bile Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	145,000
30	Keme Chendi Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	unknown
31	Mukareba Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	58,000
32	Boni Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	120,000
33	Kobore Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	170,000
34	Gara Kelo Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	90,000
35	Shera Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	75,000
36	Tenze Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	72,000
37	Shera Kama Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	unknown
38	Keme Chend Mekane Yesuse	Begi wereda	"	unknown

Meanwhile, according to the report of His Excellency Prime Meles Zenawi, which he made on November28, 2006 to the parliament, 19 persons were killed (13 Christians and the rest Muslims); 25 Christians and 12 Muslims (37 persons in total) wounded; 5 churches burned; destruction attempted over 6 other Churches; and similar damage was caused to 600 houses; the entire property of one church was looted and six Protestant churches were transformed to a mosque; and a number of people were coerced to convert to Islam. The prime minister further reported the measures taken by the government.

Conclusion

The loss of life, bodily injury and distraction of property caused by religious conflicts that occurred in Jimma, Illubabur and West Wollega Zones were appalling. More over, over 900 persons are displaced from Illubabure Zone Dedesa woreda, and 1,700 persons are displaced from Jimma zone. Indeed, it is a huge shock to Ethiopians of different religious persuasion who have coexisted in peace for centuries.

EHRCO would, therefore, urge concerned Federal and Regional State organs:

- To continue bringing to justice those persons responsible for the conflict.
- Examine fundamental causes of all of the above conflicts and find sustainable solution for it; ensure the rights of people to practice their religion; and guarantee state protection;
- To rehabilitate those persons victimized or otherwise displaced from their homes.

Finally, EHRCO calls upon national and international organizations, representatives of governments, and international groups who stand for human rights protection and the rule of law to put pressure on government authorities to find sustainable solution to religious conflict that is lately unfolding. You can express your concerns by writing to the government bodies and officials listed below.

cc

- Housel of People’s Representatives
P.O.Box 80001, Fax (251-1) 1550900 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Council of Federation
P.O.Box 80001, Fax (251-1) 1550722 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Ato Girma Wolde Giorgis, President, FDRE
P.O.Box 1031, Fax (251-1) 1552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E.Ato Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister, FDRE
P.O.Box 1031, Fax (251-1) 1552020 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E.Ato Assefa Kessito, Minister of Justice, FDRE
P.O.Box 1370 Fax (251-1) 5520874 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Oromiya Regional Council
P.O.Box 101769, Fax (251-1) 5513642, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
P.O.Box 1165 Fax (251-1) 6459290, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- The Institute of the Ombudsman
P.O.Box 2459 Fax (251-1) 6459229, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia