

Human Rights Violations in Ambo

20 April 2000

Introduction

The following report presents EHRCO's findings from its investigation into the human rights violations that occurred during and after the clashes between security forces and students of Ambo Comprehensive secondary School on March 9, 2000,

On March 9, 2000, students of Ambo Comprehensive secondary School had a meeting in the school compound and delegated four students from their midst to present their petition, requesting the government to facilitate their participation in efforts to extinguish the wildfire that was destroying the country's natural forests. However, when the four students went to present the students' demand to the local authorities, they were arrested. Since the student delegates tried to present to the authorities their fellow students' demand peacefully, their arrest was unjustified and illegal. This measure was also provocative since it instigated the other students to decide to take to the streets demanding the release of their representatives and a satisfactory response to their earlier demand for participation in efforts to extinguish the wildfire.

The students who were angered by the measures taken by the local authorities gathered at their school and went to the police station where their student delegates were detained. At the police station, the students were shouting slogans such as "Release our student representatives ", "Let the government give us a proper response to our demand." The police accepted one of their demands and released the four students whom they had detained for ten days without producing them before a court of law.

Following this event the students continued with their demonstration in the streets of Ambo by chanting additional slogans that were critical of other government policies. Meanwhile, special police units from the Senkele Police Training Centre arrived in the town in two trucks, and surrounded the demonstrating students. The students then dispersed and some entered the compound of the school and closed the gate behind them.

While the police were struggling to open the gate some students are said to have tried to stop them from entering by throwing stones at them. The policemen jumped over the school fence firing shots in the air. They then started beating the students indiscriminately, causing physical injury to many students who had not

even participated in the demonstrations. Among the latter group were students who were taking model examinations and preparing for the Ethiopian School Leaving Examinations.

Article 30(1) of the FDRE constitution provides:

"Everyone has the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed, and to petition"

On the other hand, Article 4(1) of Proclamation 3/1991 stipulates that

"Any individual, group or organisation that organises a peaceful demonstration or public political meeting has the obligation to give a written notice 48 hours before the intended peaceful demonstration or public political meeting is to take place."

While the students in Ambo failed to comply with this requirement of Proclamation 3/1991, the law enforcement officers have violated the constitutional rights of the students by jumping over the school fence and attacking the students indiscriminately. They should have refrained from taking such excessive actions since their objective of dispersing the student demonstrators had already been attained. Indeed, there was no justification for beating students and others who did not take part in the demonstration

Injuries Inflicted by Police Beatings

Killed

Student **Getu Dirriba** was 19 years old and was an 11th Grade student at the Ambo Comprehensive Secondary School. On March 9/2000 the special police force unit clashed with the students of Ambo. When he heard the gunshots, he left his home to look for his elder brother who had gone to the school to take the model examinations. The police caught him and beat repeatedly around his nape as a result of which he fell. The police continued to beat him as he was lying on the ground. The victim died instantly. The police stopped a car passing by and took the victim's body to Ambo Hospital. Next day, the body was escorted by police and taken to Menilik II Hospital in Addis Ababa for an autopsy. The deceased was finally buried on March 11 at the Ambo Jesus Church.

Physically Injured

Due to the indiscriminate police beatings that occurred on March 9, 2000 the following persons sustained bodily injuries of various degrees seriousness.

No Name of person Occupation

1 Seyfu Mengistu Student

2 Senayt Fekade(F) >>

3 Aschallech Shferaw(F) Housewife (a 12th grade student in the night classes)

4 Asfaw Kuma Student

5 Alemu Debbessa >>

6 Ydnekachew W/Yesus >>

7 Abyot Dirriba >>

8 Abiy W/Medihin Surveyor (while walking home)

9 Kebede Tsegaye Employee of Urban Development and Housing Department of the Zone (while walking home)

Illegally Detained

On March 9, 2000, about 300 students and 30 other residents of Ambo town were rounded up and illegally detained. However, on the same day at 10:00 p.m., the police released all of but seven of them. Those released were given strict warnings, while the remaining seven students are still in detention at Ambo Police Station for suspicion of instigating the demonstration. The names of these students are the following:

1. Million Bellema
2. Gelana Nedi
3. Duguma Gdisa
4. Achalo Zembaba
5. Birhanu Fuffa
6. Guta Aseffa
7. Tesfaye Sebboksa

On March 11/2000, the following three students were also taken from their homes and detained.

1. Chala Abdeta
2. Fisiha Nega
5. Alemu Debessa (released 15 days later)

On the same day, all teachers of Ambo Comprehensive Secondary School were called to a meeting at the Hall of the Zonal Council by the police officers and officials of the local administration. The meeting lasted from 6:00 p.m. until 8:30

in the evening. The meeting discussed the student demonstration. Then by the order of the officials who called the meeting those teachers who spoke the Oromo language were ordered to stay behind while the non- Oromo speakers were told to go home.

From among the teachers who spoke *Oromigna*, the following were illegally detained on 21 March 2000 and released on bail ten days later.

1. Mergia Legesse 2. Kenno Woyessa 3. Sinkneh Duressa 4. Dugasa Fite

On March 14, 2000 Ambo Town police arrested the following four teachers on similar grounds. These were also released on bail along with the above four teachers.

1. Merera Fana 2. Ararsa Hirpasa 3. W/Yesus Mengesha (a former teacher)

4. Foffa Sori.

Conclusion

As described above, the security forces committed serious violations of the human and political rights of students, teachers, and other residents of Ambo town. EHRCO strongly urges the Ethiopian government to take legal and appropriate measures against those who have caused the death of one student, inflicted serious injuries on students and others, and illegally detained students and teachers.

EHRCO also calls on all individuals, governmental and non-governmental organisations, religious leaders, regional and international organisations committed to peace, democracy, rule of law, and the respect of human rights to write to the following bodies and officials of the Ethiopian government asking them to stop these and similar human rights violations.

Copy to:

Council of Peoples Representatives

P. O. Box: 80001; Fax: (251-1) 550900

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

1Federal Council, FDRE

P. O. Box: 80001; Fax: (251-1) 550900

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

2H.E. Dr. Negasso Gidada, FDRE President

P. O. Box: 1031; Fax (251-1) 552020

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

3H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the FDRE

P. O. Box: 1031; Fax (251-1) 552020

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

4H.E. Ato Woredewold Wolde, FDRE Minister of Justice

P. O. Box: 1370; Fax: (251-1) 550722

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

5Oromia Regional Council

P. O. Box 272; Fax: (251-05) 518722

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.