

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED OROMO PROTESTERS MUST BE RELEASED

The Ethiopian authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained a number of peaceful protesters including journalists and opposition party leaders in recent brutal crackdown on protesters in the Oromia Region. Those detained remain at risk of torture and other ill-treatment and should immediately and unconditionally be released.

Bekele Gerba (Deputy Chair, Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC)), **Dejene Tafa** (party secretary, OFC), **Getachew Shiferaw** (Editor-in-Chief of Ethiopian online newspaper Negere), **Yonathan Teressa** (an online activist), and **Fikadu Mirkana** (Oromia Radio and TV) are among several Oromo peaceful protesters arrested and detained following the Oromia protests in Ethiopia. The arrests came as a result of a brutal government crackdown on the Oromia protests that started in November 2015 against the government's master plan to integrate parts of Oromia into the capital Addis Ababa. On 15 December, the Ethiopian government labelled the protesters as "terrorists" and escalated its response to the protests resulting in deaths, injuries, and mass arrests.

Dejene Tafa was arrested on 24 December 2015. On the same day, the police conducted an unlawful search on his house. His wife says that the police, who did not have a warrant, planted an Oromo Liberation Front flag and papers in his house during the search which were then seized from the house. Dejene Tafa is currently being held at the Federal Police Central Investigation Centre (Maekelawi) in Addis Ababa without access to lawyers and restricted family visits. His wife has been allowed three visits since his arrest but only in the presence of police officers. During her last visit on 12 February, Dejene Tafa told her that he had been to the Police Hospital due to pain in his eyes, but police officers present prevented them from discussing the health matter further. His wife has said that he did not suffer from any medical condition before his arrest.

Diribie Erga, age 60, was arrested on 18 December 2015 by a group of plain clothed individuals and officers from the Federal Police for participating in the protests and was released on 10 February. Diribie reports being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during her detention at Maekelawi detention centre.

Amnesty International considers the peaceful protesters arrested to be prisoners of conscience detained solely for peacefully exercising their right to peaceful assembly. They continue to be at risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

Please write immediately in Amharic, English or your own language:

- Urging the Ethiopian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Dejene Tafa and other Oromia peaceful protesters, and to ensure that they are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment pending their release;
- Calling on them to immediately cease the use of excessive force against protesters in accordance to the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials;
- Urging them to conduct a thorough, independent and impartial investigation into human rights violations committed in the context of the Oromia protests, including allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, and provide effective remedies for the victims.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 MARCH 2016 TO:

Prime Minister

Hailemariam Dessalegn

FDRE Prime Minister

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 122 6292

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister

Amb. Kassa Teklebirhan

FDRE Ministry of Federal Affairs

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251.11 551 1200/551 3926

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister

Getachew Ambaye

FDRE Ministry of Justice

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 551 7775

Email: justabr@ethionet.et

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 001/16. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/3148/2016/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 12 November 2015, peaceful protests erupted in Ginchi, a town located 81 kilometres southwest of Addis Ababa in Oromia Region, when the government transferred the ownership of a school playground and a stadium to private investors, in addition to clearing the Chilimo natural forest to also make way for private investors. The protesters, mainly Oromo University and high school students who were later joined by city residents and farmers, are concerned that the Addis Ababa Integrated Development Master Plan, in addition to being contrary to the Constitution of Ethiopia, violates the cultural and individual rights of the Oromo people, especially those living within the vicinity of the capital city, Addis Ababa. They are also concerned that the Master Plan is being implemented without proper consultation and in disregard to other safeguards provided in the Ethiopian Constitution, resulting in the forced evictions of Oromo farmers in vicinities surrounding Addis Ababa.

The Oromia regional regular and special police, the Federal Police and, later on, the military, have used excessive force including use of live bullets against peaceful protesters who included journalists and opposition party members resulting in thousands of people injured, mass arrests, enforced disappearance and hundreds dead. The protests turned violent on 1 December when Gazahany Oliiqaa, a Haromaya University student, was killed in Haromaya by the Federal Police. Children as young as 12 years old are also among those who have been killed.

On 15 December, the Ethiopian government labelled the protesters as "terrorists." Amnesty International considers that this labelling of mostly peaceful protesters has further escalated the response of the government and resulted in more casualties.

"They suspect that our party and some of our members are part of the protest movement, that we have been inciting the demonstrations," OFC Chairman Merara Gudina stated, denying that the OFC had incited violence. "We do not know when Bekele and Dejene will be released or be charged for anything."

The Oromo Liberation Front party, for which Dejene Tafa is accused of having a flag for in his house, has been listed as a terrorist group as per the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 652/2009. The Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP), 652/2009 permits up to four months of pre-trial detention of anyone linked to terrorism.

Amnesty International has in the past documented the widespread use of torture and other ill-treatment of Oromo protesters during this lengthy pre-trial detention period. Amnesty International has also documented similar patterns of attacks against peaceful demonstrators in the past. Amnesty International published a report: *"Because I am Oromo": Sweeping Repression in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia* (<https://www.amnesty.org/En/documents/Afr25/006/2014/En/>) on 28 October 2014, and a press statement on the use of the ATP in respect of these protests on 16 December 2015 (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/12/ethiopia-anti-terror-rhetoric-will-escalate-brutal-crackdown-against-oromo-protesters/>).

The Oromo Peoples Democratic Party, the party that rules Oromia Regional State announced the cancellation of the contested master plan on 12 January.

Name: Dejene Tafa (m), Bekele Gerba (m), Getachew Shiferaw (m), Yonathan Teressa (m), Fikadu Mirkana (m) and other protesters, journalists and opposition party leaders arrested in the context of the Oromia protests.
Gender m/f: both

Further Information on UA: 001/16 Index: AFR 25/3437/2016 Issue Date: 17 February 2016