

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 04/01/98

UA 18/98

Refoulement / Fear of torture

20 January 1998

DJIBOUTI / ETHIOPIA

Ali Omar (also known as Ibrahim Ali Osman), refugee
community leader, former university student
Sheikh Mussa Hassan Abdi (also known as Souala),
Islamic religious leader, former political prisoner
in Ethiopia
Mourad Ahmed (also known as Mustafa Salih), farmer
Mohamed Yusuf
Hassan Mohamed, farmer, disabled
Abdulwasi Ali

The six Ethiopians named above were arrested by police in Djibouti town on 14 January 1998 and handed over to the Ethiopian authorities on 19 January. Their whereabouts in detention in Ethiopia are not known. The six, who include a recognized refugee and three asylum-seekers, may now be facing torture and detention for an indefinite period without charge or trial in Ethiopia, and may be prisoners of conscience.

Ali Omar was a recognised refugee and three others - *Sheikh* Mussa Hassan Abdi, Mourad Ahmed and Mohamed Yusuf - had applied for refugee status and were known to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Djibouti. The status of the other two is not known. All six are members of the Oromo ethnic group. The forced return of refugees and asylum-seekers contravenes the international and regional refugee treaties which Djibouti has signed.

Amnesty International fears that some more Oromo refugees in Djibouti may have already been arrested or even returned to Ethiopia, as police or security officers in Djibouti town were reportedly searching for other Oromos.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These arrests are allegedly part of a security agreement between Djibouti and Ethiopia to return each other's particular "wanted" opponents and refugees, despite both countries' ratification of international and regional refugee treaties. In 1996 Djibouti handed over four ethnic Somali opponents to Ethiopia (who were tortured and are still detained) and an Afar opponent (now released), and in 1997 Ethiopia handed over 14 Afar opponents to Djibouti (still detained under judicial investigation). The six Oromos named above were apparently suspected of involvement with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which has been in armed opposition since it left the Ethiopian coalition government in 1992.

In Ethiopia there is a pattern of widespread detentions, torture, "disappearances" and extrajudicial executions of suspected OLF supporters.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters:
A. Appeals to the ETHIOPIAN authorities, in English or your own language:
- expressing concern that the above-named are at risk of torture or ill-treatment while detained in Ethiopia;
- calling on the Ethiopian authorities to state where they are held, provide assurances that they are being treated humanely, and allow them immediate access to their families and lawyers;

- calling for them to be brought before a judge without delay, and either charged with recognizable criminal offences and given a fair and prompt trial in accordance with international standards, or else released.

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: + 2511 552030
Telegrams: Prime Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Kinfu Gebre-Medhin
General Manager, Public Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs Authority
Office of the Prime Minister
P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: +2511 552030
Telegrams: Mr Gebre-Medhin, Prime Minister's Office, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Mr Seyoum Mesfin
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: +2511 514300

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde
Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice
P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Faxes: +2511 550278

and to diplomatic representatives of ETHIOPIA accredited to your country.

B. Appeals to the DJIBOUTI authorities, in French or your own language:

- expressing concern that the above-named were arrested in Djibouti town on 14 January 1998 and summarily handed over to the Ethiopian authorities;
- calling on the Government of Djibouti to obtain from the Ethiopian authorities assurances of their safety and the protection of their basic human rights while in custody;
- asking for a future commitment from the Government of Djibouti to abide by its obligations on *non-refoulement*, as laid out in the international and regional refugee treaties which Djibouti has ratified.

Son Excellence Monsieur Hassan Gouled Aptidon,
Président de la République
La Présidence, BP 6, Djibouti, République de Djibouti
Faxes: + 253 355049 / 350174
Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République

Monsieur Elmi Obsie Ways
Ministre de l'intérieur
Ministère de l'intérieur
BP 2086, Djibouti, République de Djibouti
Faxes: + 253 354862
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO:

Monsieur Ismail Omar Guelleh
Chef du Service de documentation et de sécurité (SDS)
La Présidence, BP 6, Djibouti, République de Djibouti
Faxes: + 253 355049 / 350174

Monsieur Mohamed Moussa Chehem
Ministre des affaires étrangères
Ministère des affaires étrangères
BP 1863, Djibouti, République de Djibouti

and to diplomatic representatives of **DJIBOUTI** accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 4 March 1998.