

PUBLIC

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06 September 2007

UA 236/07 Arbitrary detention/possible prisoners of conscience/risk of torture or ill-treatment

**ETHIOPIA Fekadu Negeri (m), teacher, Ethiopian Human Rights Council local official
Ibsa Wake (m), lawyer, Ethiopian Human Rights Council local official
Tesfa Burayu (m), teacher, Ethiopian Human Rights Council local official
Abraham Likasa (m)
Jereгна Keba (m), student
Osman Dawer (m), student
Tamrat Tadesse (m), student
Workneh Dinsa (m), teacher**

The eight men named above were arrested on 23 August, on suspicion of links with the armed opposition group Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). They are held in the police station in the western town of Nekemte, and they are at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes they may be prisoners of conscience.

Fekadu Negeri, Ibsa Wake and Tesfa Burayu are executive committee members of the regional office of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) in Nekemte town, Oromia Region. They were arrested together with 12 other people, seven of whom have been released without charge. Police searched their homes but reportedly found nothing. By law they should have been taken to court within 48 hours of arrest, but this was not done until 3 September. After a court hearing that day, they were remanded in custody until 6 September and then remanded again until 13 September for investigation into suspected links with the OLF.

Amnesty International believes the three EHRCO officials, who had been arrested previously but released without charge, may be prisoners of conscience detained on account of their work in defence of human rights. They have been allowed visits from their families. The six others may have been arrested arbitrarily in the course of the anti-OLF security operations which are underway in parts of the Oromia Region with many other arrests.

Amnesty International fears the eight men may be detained for a prolonged period without trial or subjected to an unfair trial.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Thousands of members of the Oromo ethnic group (or "nationality") have been detained, and many of them tortured, in recent years on suspicion of links with the OLF, for example for allegedly distributing pro-OLF leaflets, fundraising or possession of weapons. The OLF, which is based in Eritrea, has been fighting the government since 1992. Among the detainees have been prisoners of conscience who have not advocated armed opposition or support for the OLF, such as leaders of the Mecha Tulema Association, a long-established and officially-registered Oromo community group, who were released from three years' detention in early 2007. (For details see UA 180/04, AFR 25/011/2004, 28 September 2004 and updates.)

Several investigation staff and local committee officials of EHRCO, the leading independent human rights organization in Ethiopia, were arrested in 2005 after election protests and detained without charge for several weeks.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the arrests in Nekemte on 23 August of three regional officials of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Fekadu Negeri, Ibsa Wake and Tesfa Burayu, who may be prisoners of conscience detained solely for their peaceful work in defence of human rights;
- expressing concern also for Abraham Likasa, Jereгна Keba, Osman Dawer, Tamrat Tadesse and Workneh Dinsa, who were arrested at the same time on suspicion of links with the Oromo Liberation Front;
- calling on the authorities to allow them regular access to their families and legal representatives, and any medical treatment they may require;
- asking for assurances that they are being treated humanely in custody;
- calling on the authorities to release them if they are not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito, Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 5517775

+251 11 5520874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu, Federal Police Commission, Ministry of Federal Affairs

PO Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi, Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 1552020

Salutation: Your Excellency

The official Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

Ambassador Dr Kassa Gebreheywot, Chief Commissioner, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

PO Box 1165, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 618 0041

Email: hrc@ethionet.et

Salutation: Dear Chief Commissioner

and to diplomatic representatives of Ethiopia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 18 October 2007.