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## Amnesty International Report 2016/17 - Ethiopia

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### **Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia**

Head of state: **Mulatu Teshome Wirtu**

Head of government: **Hailemariam Desalegn**

**Prolonged protests over political, economic, social and cultural grievances were met with excessive and lethal force by police. The crackdown on the political opposition saw mass arbitrary arrests, torture and other ill-treatment, unfair trials and violations of the rights to freedom of expression and association. On 9 October, the government announced a state of emergency, which led to further human rights violations.**

### **BACKGROUND**

In response to sustained protests in Oromia and Amhara regional states, the authorities introduced reforms. However, these failed to address the protesters' grievances, including those relating to: economic, social and cultural rights; respect for the rule of law; and the release of prisoners of conscience.

Protests in Oromia that began in November 2015 against the Addis Ababa Master Plan, which would have expanded the capital at the expense of land owned by Oromo farmers, continued even after the government cancelled the plan in January.

In late July, people in Amhara region protested against the arbitrary arrest of members of the Wolqait Identity Amhara Self-Determination Committee and demanded additional regional autonomy in accordance with the Constitution. There was also a series of protests for greater administrative autonomy by the Konso community in Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region.

After at least 55 people were killed during a stampede during the Oromo religious festival of Irrecha on 2 October, allegedly caused by heavy-handed policing, activists declared a "week of rage". Some demonstrations turned violent, with protesters burning and demolishing businesses and government buildings.

After the state of emergency was declared in October, protests subsided but human rights violations increased.<sup>[1]</sup>

### **EXCESSIVE USE OF FORCE**

The security forces used excessive and lethal force against protesters. By the end of the year, the security forces had killed at least 800 people since the protests began in November 2015.<sup>[2]</sup>

On 6 and 7 August, for example, when an open call to protest was made in Addis Ababa, government forces killed at least 100 people. More than 1,000 protesters were arrested and taken to Awash Arba military base, where they were beaten and forced to do strenuous exercise in hot weather.

## **FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION AND ASSEMBLY**

The crackdown on human rights defenders, independent media, journalists, bloggers, peaceful protesters as well as members and leaders of the political opposition intensified during the year, often using provisions of the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP).<sup>[3]</sup> The declaration of the state of emergency signalled further restrictions on freedom of expression, including intermittent blocking of the internet.

Under the state of emergency, more than 11,000 people were arrested and detained without access to a lawyer, their family or a judge. Among those arbitrarily arrested were Befeqadu Hailu, a member of the Zone-9 blogging group; Merera Gudina, Chair of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC); Anania Sorri and Daniel Shibeshi, members of the former Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (Andinet); and Elias Gebru, a journalist. Four members of the national NGO, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council – Addisu Teferi, Feqadu Negeri, Roman Waqweya and Bulti Tessema – were arrested in Neqmta, Oromia.

## **UNFAIR TRIALS**

Political activists faced unfair trials on charges brought under the ATP, which includes overly broad and vague definitions of terrorist acts punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

Political opposition leaders Gurmesa Ayano and Beqele Gerba, Deputy Chief of the OFC, were among 22 defendants who faced an unfair trial on charges brought under the ATP for their role in organizing the November 2015 Oromia protest. On 11 May, when they were due in court, the authorities refused to take them there because they were wearing black suits in mourning for people killed during the protests. For their next court appearance on 3 June, prison officials brought the defendants to court in their underpants. The defendants complained in court that they had been beaten in detention and that prison officials had taken away their clothes. The court did not order an investigation into their allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.<sup>[4]</sup>

Desta Dinka, Youth Coordinator for the OFC, was held in pre-trial detention from 23 December 2015 until May, before he was charged under the ATP. The court ordered his detention pending trial. The law only allows up to four months of pre-trial detention.

Berhanu Tekleyared, Eyerusalem Tesfaw and Fikremariam Asmamaw were denied their right to present a defence during their trial on terrorism-related charges. Despite this, on 20 July they were found guilty.

## **IMPUNITY**

The government rejected calls by the UNHCR, the UN refugee agency, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for independent and impartial investigations of human rights violations committed in the context of protests in various regional states.

## **EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS**

The Liyu police, a special force in Somali Regional State in eastern Ethiopia, extrajudicially executed 21 people in Jamaa Dhuubed on 5 June. Fourteen were shot in the village's mosque; seven were shot elsewhere in the village. When relatives of those killed arrived to mourn and bury the dead, the Liyu police threatened to kill them.

## **HOUSING RIGHTS – FORCED EVICTIONS**

On 30 June, the government forcibly evicted at least 3,000 residents deemed to be "squatters" in Lafto Sub-City, Addis Ababa. The residents were apparently offered no prior consultation or alternative housing and were given only three days' notice of eviction. While the residents were meeting the local administration to complain, the government taskforce started to demolish their houses. The situation turned violent, resulting

in the death of the District Administrator and two police officers. The police arrested all the male residents and completed the demolition in subsequent days.

## ABDUCTION OF CHILDREN

The authorities failed to protect adequately people in Gambella Regional State from repeated attacks by armed members of Murle ethnic group based in neighbouring South Sudan, during which hundreds of children were abducted. In February and March, Murle fighters abducted a total of 26 Anuwa children. In one incident on the night of 15 April, they attacked 13 Nuer villages in Jikaw and Lare districts in Gambella, killing 208 people and abducting 159 children. Ethiopian forces had rescued 91 abducted children by June.

1. Ethiopia: Draconian measures will escalate the deepening crisis ([News story](#), 18 October)
2. Ethiopia: After a year of protests, time to address grave human rights concerns ([News story](#), 9 November)
3. Ethiopia: End use of counter-terrorism law to persecute dissenters and opposition members ([News story](#), 2 June)
4. Ethiopia: Detainees beaten and forced to appear before court inadequately dressed ([News story](#), 3 June)

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