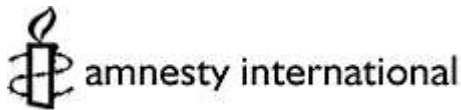


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Ethiopia: Dozens killed as police use excessive force against peaceful protesters

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At least 67 people were killed and hundreds more injured when Ethiopian security forces fired live bullets at peaceful protesters across Oromia region over the weekend, according to credible sources who spoke to Amnesty International.

Thousands of protesters turned out in Oromia and Amhara calling for political reform, justice and the rule of law. The worst bloodshed - which may amount to extrajudicial killings - took place in the northern city of Bahir Dar where at least 30 people were killed in one day.

"The security forces' response was heavy-handed, but unsurprising. Ethiopian forces have systematically used excessive force in their mistaken attempts to silence dissenting voices," said Michelle Kagari, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for East Africa, the Horn and the Great Lakes.

"These crimes must be promptly, impartially and effectively investigated and all those suspected of criminal responsibility must be brought to justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts without recourse to death penalty."

Information obtained by Amnesty International shows that police fired live bullets at protesters in Bahir Dar on 7 August, killing at least 30. Live fire was also used in Gondar on 6 August, claiming at least seven lives.

No deaths were reported from the Addis Ababa protests, but photos and videos seen by Amnesty International show police beating protesters with batons at Meskel Square, the capital's main public space.

In Oromia and Amhara, hundreds were arrested and are being held at unofficial detention centres, including police and military training bases.

"We are extremely concerned that the use of unofficial detention facilities may expose victims to further human rights violations including torture and other forms of ill-treatment," said Michelle Kagari.

"All those arrested during the protests must be immediately and unconditionally released as they are unjustly being held for exercising their right to freedom of opinion."

Background

The protests in Oromia are a continuation of peaceful demonstrations that began in November 2015 against a government masterplan to integrate parts of Oromia into the capital Addis Ababa. Deaths were reported in multiple towns in the region, including Ambo, Adama, Asassa, Aweday, Gimbi, Haromaya, Neqemte, Robe and Shashemene.

The protests in Amhara began on 12 July 2016 when security forces attempted to arrest Colonel Demeka Zewdu, one of the leaders of the Wolqait Identity and Self-Determination Committee, for alleged terrorism offences.

Wolqait is an administrative district in Tigray Region that was part of Amhara Region before the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power 1991. It has been agitating for reintegration into Amhara for the last 25 years.

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