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**Case studies to accompany Amnesty International report
'Because I Am Oromo': Sweeping Repression in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia**

October 2014

The Government of Ethiopia anticipates a high level of opposition in Oromia, and signs of dissent are actively sought out and suppressed. People from all walks of life are regularly arrested based solely on the suspicion that they do not support the government, or conversely, that they support the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the armed group in the region.

Below is a small sample of the testimonies documented by Amnesty International in the course of conducting the research for *'Because I Am Oromo': Sweeping Repression in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia*. Many of those interviewed by Amnesty International – students, teachers, writers and medical professionals, among others – had their lives torn apart by repeated human rights violations over many years.

For more detailed information on the human rights violations committed in Oromia, and on the multiplicity of both regional and federal actors responsible, please refer to the full report at

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR25/006/2014/en>

(NB: Names have been changed for security reasons.)

Case study 1: Dereje, student

Students made up a significant proportion of those arrested in relation to peaceful protests in Oromia between 2011 and 2014. They are also subjected to ongoing, high levels of surveillance, as the government anticipates dissent amongst students. Current and former students have reported to Amnesty International that there are high levels of surveillance for signs of dissent in schools and universities. Large numbers of students are reported to have been arbitrarily arrested in recent years based on their suspected political opinion.

In his third year of university, Dereje won a competition to produce a business plan, but was arrested on the accusation that the plan was underpinned by political ideas. It was the fourth time he had been arrested since he was 14.

"It was around midnight. I had been in the library. I was sleeping. They came and arrested me. One put his pistol against my head and told me to stand up and go with them. They took me to an office. They started beating me. I told them they

are being unreasonable. Why are you beating me without asking any questions? They said, you want a question. Fine. Open your email. Open your skype, and Facebook. He beat me, he forced me to open the email. There was nothing incriminating in there. Finally they said, fine, give us your business idea for the competition.”

Dereje was detained without food, beaten with telephone cable and made to walk over rough ground on his knees and elbows. After a week, his captors took him to Maikelawi in Addis Ababa, where he was detained for eight months without charge and was tortured.

“When I arrived at the prison, the officer said, you are not new for Maikelawi. The first time we released you because you were adolescent. Now you are big. Your crime is big. I said no, the court decides whether I’m innocent or guilty. He slapped me and said, until we get what we want from you, you don’t have anything.”

“Then they took me underground. I was alone in that place. When they come it is only for two reasons, investigation or punishment. We know it is morning because they give you tea and bread. That’s the only way you count the days. And if they say ‘out’ you know it is evening and you are going to be beaten.”

Dereje described the torture and ill-treatment he endured during months of interrogation:

“I was chained by one wrist from the wall so that my toes only just scraped the floor and he left me there for two hours, and just sat and read his book. Then he came and yanked me away from it. My wrist was broken. I passed out.”

“They told me to go to the shower. I was in the shower washing myself, and they came and took me again, for investigation. They beat me with a big hard strip of rubber which cut straight into my skin. They tied my hands behind me, they put cloth in my mouth and beat me so hard. They said you are doing the business plan to organise the Oromo people, the OLF is behind this. Who is the member of the OLF in your university? Tell us who is a member of the government or not a member and who runs the political agenda of the OLF in the campus.”

“They tied my arms around the sides of my legs, with a pole through my arms and under my knees. Then they hung me upside down, and then they turned on the big pump of water above me. And they beat me on the soles of my feet. They said when you want to say something show your finger. If you want to tell us who is a member of OLF, if you want to say you are a member of OLF, show your finger, we will stop beating you.”

“He trod on my penis. Beat me on my mouth, my neck.”

“Then he took me to the place where the kitchen is, heating a knife in the fire and then put it on my right leg. I lost consciousness.”

Eventually Dereje was taken to a training ground and subjected to a mock execution:

“They said they were going to kill me. And said do you have any final words for your family. I said no, and I am not going to beg you to release me. I said I only want to say one thing, I am innocent, the question of Oromo people is fair, I have never done anything wrong, I have never created any protest.”

“He came and tied my eyes. And then he didn’t kill me.”

After being held for eight months by the federal police in Maikelawi without being taken to court or his parents knowing where he was, he was released on stringent conditions.

“They said, we want to give you one more chance, because you are brilliant, you are young. They said, we are going to release you, and you are going to go back to your school. But you must be our employee, our informer. I said ok.”

After he was released Dereje went to visit his parents and was arrested for a fifth time. He escaped through the window of the office he was being held in and fled the country.

Case study 2: Hussein, pharmacist

The government appears to target individuals who might have influence or authority over others and who are not members of the ruling political party. Amnesty International interviewed several medical professionals who were arrested and detained on the accusation of using their profession to assist the OLF - despite their ethical and professional responsibilities of non-discrimination on any basis in the provision of healthcare, including political affiliation.

Hussein was a nurse by profession. He had moved away from his hometown, afraid of persecution because his cousin was a member of the OLF and his family had been repeatedly harassed and accused of association with the OLF.

“I don’t know [my cousin’s] whereabouts at the moment. It’s now eight years since he disappeared. He was a university student. His family tried to find information about where he was but they couldn’t get any.”

For seven years, Hussein ran his own clinic and had three employees. Two years after he opened his clinic, the harassment started again.

"I treated everybody who came to the clinic regardless of their identity, politics, or religion. The people knew me and business was good. I also went to the homes of people in the rural area to treat people. So now the government asked me to be a member of the ruling party since I had popularity with people. I was asked so many times that I lost count."

"After I refused membership they started accusing me of supporting the OLF, that I am treating OLF, providing them with medicine, and that I am going into the bush to treat the wounded soldiers of the OLF. After that I was under a lot of surveillance, the government were following every action."

Hussein was arrested in December 2012 and detained for two months.

"Initially I was in a room with about 50 other people. They were all Oromo. The ones I talked to were all detained for issues relating to OLF, being accused of supporting OLF. After two or three days I was taken to a solitary cell. I was in solitary confinement for 57 days."

"[The cell was] approximately 2m by 3m. At the beginning they came twice in a day for interrogation and then gradually they stopped. During interrogation they said we have evidence that you are OLF member, tell us how you are financially supporting them, tell us where they are, tell us other people who are supporting them."

"I was tortured while they interrogated me. They threatened me, pointed their gun at me. They would beat me with electric wire on my back. On many occasions."

Hussein was finally released on condition that he reported three times a week to the local government office and promised to become a ruling party member. He was no longer allowed to run his clinic, or to move from place to place without permission from local officials.

"I tried to start again but I realised it wasn't possible. Because they confiscated everything. They closed my clinic, they refused to renew my license."

Hussein fled the country with his wife.

Case study 3: Abdetta, midwife

Abdetta, a midwife, resisted joining Ethiopia's ruling party. He told Amnesty International:

"The authorities used to call me once a week in the evening to the local military camp. They kept interrogating me about why I was not joining the party."

In February 2012, he assisted a woman to give birth at home. Her husband was linked to the OLF.

“I was again targeted. The authorities used this to claim that I was an OLF supporter, even though I told them I was acting according to medical ethics.”

Abdetta was arrested the same day and kept in detention for two months in a military camp.

“I was repeatedly beaten and punished, and food and water was insufficient. Interrogations [took place] twice a day all of the first month. In the second month, [they were] once a week. Different people would interrogate me every time. The first month of interrogation was the worst – [I was] forced to crawl on gravel and beaten regularly.”

After Abdetta’s release, he was assigned to a job to secure repayments of fertilizer credit from farmers.

“When I started my work with the local community, they were already struggling with malnutrition and dying cattle – asking for repayment made them even more angry at the government. The authorities blamed me for it. They claimed that I was inciting the villagers and fermenting trouble. They told me that they would take action against me.”

Fearful of being detained again, Abdetta fled the area and eventually left the country.

Case study 4: Kusa, teacher blinded by a bayonet

Kusa was a maths teacher in a primary school.

“I was ordered to teach the students about the goodness and achievements of the OPDO [the Oromo party in the ruling coalition], but I didn’t think this was the job of a teacher so I refused.”

He was arrested and taken to a military camp where he was detained for seven months.

“I was never taken to court. It was a hidden detention. My family did not know where I was.”

While in detention Kusa was interrogated, accused of supporting the OLF and tortured.

“They asked me about the party I support. I said I didn’t support any party. So they pointed the gun at me and stabbed the knife part, the bayonet, into my eye.”

When Amnesty International met Kusa, his eye was visibly badly damaged and the eye-ball was sunken in the socket.

“They slapped me, they beat me using electric cables. They put nails through a table and wanted me to walk on them. I refused. I said it's better if you just kill me.”

After seven months, Kusa managed to escape from the camp and eventually fled the country. A father of two children, he hasn’t had any contact with his family since he left.

Case study 5: Negusa, student and poet

The government has interpreted expressions of Oromo culture and heritage as manifestations of dissent, and as a potential catalyst for opposition to the government. Oromo singers, writers and poets have been arrested for allegedly criticising the government and/or inciting people through their work. People wearing traditional Oromo clothing have been arrested on the accusation that this demonstrated a political agenda, and hundreds of people have been arrested at Oromo traditional festivals.

Negusa was arrested in 2011. It was the fifth time he’d been arrested since 2004. As a student and published poet involved in the leadership of Oromo cultural and religious affairs, he was repeatedly questioned and accused of being involved in politics.

On one occasion he was arrested along with hundreds of others at *Irreechaa*, a traditional Oromo festival. He subsequently mentioned the arrest in a radio interview, and was called in again for questioning by federal security agents.

On another occasion he was told:

“Unless you become a member of OPDO [the Oromo party in the ruling coalition] you will not graduate from university – this is your last warning.”

Nevertheless, Negusa continued to refuse to join any political party.

Negusa was arrested in August 2011, having travelled all over Oromia to film and document the ceremony in the Oromo traditional system of *Gadaa* when leadership is handed over to the next generation.

After being transferred between various places of detention for around one week, he was moved to Maikelawi with other students from his university. Most of them were members of the cultural association or adherents of *waqaafanna* [traditional Oromo religion].

"They said on TV we were 29 Oromo terrorists. But we were not, we were 150 Oromo nationalists, teachers, students, cultural people etc – all arrested on the same day. They said that we were inciting people to overthrow the government unlawfully. But we didn't know each other, most of us had never met."

"If you talk about your rights, culture and identity as an Oromo, you must be a supporter of the OLF."

Negusa was held for around three months in Maikelawi. When he was released, strict conditions were imposed: not to participate in any Oromo activities, not to move outside of his town and to report daily to the police station.

"After I was released, within a week they arrested me again. I was attending a celebration of waqaafanna religion. We were more than 1,000 people praying when the police surrounded us. They said, we released you for a week and you do this. I said I will not stop this, this is my religion."

A few months later, Negusa fled the country.

Case study 6: Nooria, burned with hot coals in a military camp

"I left Ethiopia because of the problems my family faced. The military arrested my father, my brother, and my uncle. When they arrested my father, they sent other troops to bring his children too. They arrested me, my mother, and my two sisters. At the time, I was around 14 or 15 years old. My sisters were around 16 and 18 years old."

Nooria's family was taken to a military camp, where they were interrogated through the night.

"They asked about all different things. My father was connected to the OLF, so they wanted to know who came to our home, who was my father involved with, etc. They were violent; they yelled. They slapped me in the face many times. They pointed a gun at me. They hit me with a rope. They forced me to make things up. They were trying to get information that I didn't have. When I told them I didn't know something, they forced me to say things that I didn't know."

“They separated us from our parents. In the morning my mother and father were gone; I never saw them again. I don’t know whether they’re dead or alive, even now.”

“They kept us in that camp for years and forced me and my two sisters to work for them. There was no more interrogation after the first night, but no release; we didn’t know what the situation was. They didn’t explain anything to us.”

Nooria’s stomach is covered with horrific scars:

“Two soldiers did this to me. It happened at night. We were asleep. I don’t know whether they were drunk or not. They came into the room and tied up our hands and made us lie down on our backs. They put hot coals on my stomach. They didn’t just burn me; they also burned my two sisters. Our clothes melted on us. We screamed but the soldiers didn’t care; they’re accustomed to screaming. Then they rolled us over, face down, and started beating us. They used a stick on us.”

“After it was over they left us in the room and locked the door. There was no one we could go to for help. I didn’t receive any medical care.”

Nooria’s burns had still not healed by the time that the military camp was closed several months later, and she was released. Her middle sister was freed at the same time, but her eldest sister wasn’t released on the same day. Nooria has not seen her since.

Case study 7: Medina, teenager who lost all her family

Medina told Amnesty International how she had successively lost almost every member of her family. Her father, who had been a member of the OLF during the transitional government, continued to be targeted on suspicion that he still supported the OLF and was eventually arrested. He died in prison. One of her brothers was killed during an escape attempt from detention following the 2005 post-election protests. Three other brothers were subsequently arrested for alleged OLF support in 2012.

“Finally, my mother is the only remaining one. She went to look for my brothers, because we don’t know what happened to them.”

Her mother did not return. Medina was left alone with her two younger siblings and continued to be harassed.

“After my mother was gone, the soldiers came to the house, asking about my mum – where did she go? Why did she go? They came so many times to pressure me

though I said I didn't know. They threatened to kill us if I didn't tell them the information they wanted."

Eventually Medina, who was 16 years old at the time, took her two younger siblings and fled the country.

"Now the government makes us fatherless, motherless, brotherless and supportless. I don't think I'll see my brothers and my family again in my life."