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## Oromia Support Group – Individual UPR submission Ethiopia – November/December 2009

1. **The Oromia Support Group (OSG)** was established in 1994 to raise awareness of human rights abuses in Ethiopia. It has made oral submissions to the UN Commission for Human Rights, submitted written material to the UN Centre for Human Rights and submitted a written statement to the 2001 World Conference Against Racism. Until 2000, OSG published bi-monthly press releases. It has produced yearly publications since then. Press Release 41 (PR 41, July 2005), Report 42 (R 42, August 2006), Report 43 (R 43, August 2007), Report 44 (R 44, August 2008) and a special Press Release (November 2008) are attached for reference.

2. **Summary.** This submission concerns events from April 2005 to March 2009. In 2005, in addition to the abuses associated with post-election demonstrations, security forces killed about 30 Oromo student demonstrators, shot dead 19 Oromo prisoners in their cells and tortured two others to death. Over 20 Oromo demonstrators were killed in the first few months of 2006 and at least 19 civilians were killed in Mi'esso, Hararge, in 2007. About 400 were killed by government-armed militias in Wallega, in May 2008. Other, politically motivated, extra-judicial killings, disappearances, prolonged pre-trial detention and widespread torture were reported. Eye-witness accounts of government interference with the judiciary and of harassment and intimidation by security services were received. There was *refoulement* of Oromo refugees from Djibouti in 2005, Sudan in 2007, Somaliland in 2007 and 2008, and from Kenya in 2007 and 2008. Arrests of over a hundred civilians, including members of recognised opposition parties and civil societies, occurred in late 2008, on the pretext of indiscriminate accusations of terrorism and involvement with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), just as in 1997/8, 2002 and 2004.

3. OSG recorded **594 extra-judicial killings** by government security forces and **43 disappearances** in custody between 2005 and August 2008. From 1994 to August 2008, a total of 4,160 killings and 944 disappearances have been recorded.

4. In **May 2005**, a 43 yr-old who had been detained for over ten years and tortured, died in Karchale central prison, Addis Ababa, because medical treatment was denied (PR 41, p.4).

5. Two pilots and another member of the Ethiopian Air-force requested protection at the French military post in Djibouti in June 2005. They were handed over to Djibouti security services who in turn handed them over to Ethiopian military officers and civilians at the border on **12 July 2005** (PR 41, p.17).

6. In **November 2005**, 19 detainees at Kaliti prison were shot dead in their cells and another 28 wounded. Media reported that they had been shot trying to escape but eye-witness reports (see below, paragraphs 9 and 11) and the poor mobility, due to polio, of one victim, Addis Ababa University student Alemayehu Garba, proved that the killings were deliberate and unprovoked. Another young Oromo Addis Ababa University student and political detainee, Gadissa Hirphassa, was tortured to death and this was later confirmed by eye-witness accounts (see below, paragraph 9). One other torture victim bled to death in Kaliti prison. (R 42, p.21-24)

7. Widespread protests by Oromo students and civilians began in **November 2005** and continued sporadically **until June 2006**. About 30 were killed in November 2005, 14 of whom were named in reports to OSG. At least 17 were killed in February 2006 and 7 in March/April. Thousands were detained during the demonstrations and others – professionals, students and members of the legal Oromo National Congress and Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement parties – were detained throughout the period. (R 42, p. 24-39)

8. In **July 2006**, Oromo political prisoners smuggled out information, later confirmed by other reports, concerning torture and killing of detainees, deaths of detainees from neglect, and delayed trials. They provided lists of 38 who had been

detained for 8 years, 105 for 5-6 years, and another 67 who had been held for shorter periods (R 42, p.3-8).

**9.** In **March 2007**, according to several sources, 19 civilians, including two 14 year-old children, were killed by government forces in Mi'esso, W. Hararge. At least 13 others were reported to have been severely tortured and another 9 detained. They were accused of involvement with the OLF. (R 43, p.28-29)

**10.** Another report from prisoners was obtained in **June 2007**, naming 243 political detainees, 204 of whom were not named previously (R 43, p.5-10). More were named by the OLF (R 43, p.17-19). In April 2007, OSG interviewed the President of Oromia Region Supreme Court, Judge Teshale Aberra, who had defected and claimed asylum in the UK. He reported on government interference with the judicial process at all levels in Ethiopia and the harassment and intimidation of judges by the government security apparatus. He estimated that the Ethiopian government was responsible for 15-20,000 deaths and that there were 20-27,000 being held in official places of detention. At least 30,000 were held in unofficial detention centres; more during times of conflict, such as the post-election demonstrations in 2005. (R 43, p.12-14)

**11.** The Macha-Tulama Association is an Oromo social welfare, self-help and cultural organisation which has been persecuted by every regime since it was established in 1963. Its officials and members have been rounded up and detained repeatedly by the present government – in 1997/8, 2002 and 2004. Two of its officials were interviewed after their release from detention in 2007. They corroborated reports of the torturing to death and fatal shooting of detainees in late 2005 and also corroborated intrusive surveillance by the security system after their release. (R 43, p.19-28)

**12.** In **July 2007**, 30 Ethiopian refugees were put into incommunicado detention in Sudan, following a visit by the Ethiopian Foreign Minister. At least some were UNHCR mandated refugees. More were reported by several sources to be detained in September and October 2007. At least 15 mandated refugees were subject to *refoulement* on **27 September**. At least three more were handed over in **January**

**2008.** Two Oromo mandate refugees were detained in Khartoum on **10 May 2008** but were released three weeks later. (R 43, p.34-36)

**13.** At least one Oromo civilian and three Ethiopian soldiers were subject to *refoulement* from Hargeissa, Somaliland, at the end of **September 2007**. Five Ethiopian Somalis from the Ogaden were arrested in Hargeissa and handed over to Ethiopian security forces on **13 October 2007**. Four more Oromo were reported in **January 2008** to have been handed over. Two were also abducted in **February 2008**; one was badly treated and released and the other was subject to *refoulement*. Two more Oromo long-term residents of Hargeissa were handed over to Ethiopian security forces in **May 2008**. Also in April and May 2008, several Ethiopian Somalis, including civilians, were subject to *refoulement* from Puntland. (R 43, p. 38-39)

**14.** An Oromo human rights defender in Nairobi, who used to report to OSG from inside Ethiopia, informed OSG that on **7 April 2007**, two Oromo mandated refugees, Mesfin Abebe and Tesfahun Chemed, were arrested by Kenyan police in Nairobi. Rumours that they had been subjected to *refoulement* to Ethiopia were later confirmed when they were named among detainees in Maikelawi Central Investigation Department (CID) in Addis Ababa who had appeared at the Federal High Court on **15 December 2008** (paragraph 18, below).

**15.** Another two Oromo mandated refugees, Seifu Abebe Megersa (UNHCR Case No. 845-07C02280) and Gabriel Fekadu Bayisa (UNHCR Ref. ET 10020), and a former pilot for the Ethiopian Air-force, Derege Mosisa, were abducted by Kenyan police from Gidorahi, Nairobi, in **September 2008**. Derege Mosisa was reported to have been taken to Maikelawi CID in Addis Ababa. Rumours of the detention of the other two men at Bishoftu (Debre Zeit) defence establishment were not confirmed.

**16.** From **17-19 May 2008**, well armed and trained Benishangul/Gumuz militia razed villages in Eastern Wollega. Oromo in these villages were forbidden to carry arms and were defenceless. Access to the area after the attacks was restricted by government forces. However, at least 115 bodies were found in four mass graves and 400 were estimated to have been killed from accounts given by surviving members of families. Houses and crops were burnt; women and children were raped; animals were

looted and bodies were burned in large numbers to confuse accurate data gathering.  
(R 44, p.15-17)

**17.** In **November 2008**, 13 villagers were killed in Wollo and 21 arrested in Hararge, four being held at an unknown location. All were accused of involvement with the OLF.

**18.** A wave of arrests of over 100 Oromo, including the General Secretary and 14 other members of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), occurred at the end of **October 2008**. Others detained included Lelise Wadajo, journalist and wife of former detainee and exiled television journalist Dhabasa Wakjira, the Finance Director of the Macha-Tulama Association, lawyers, teachers, university lecturers, other professionals, and university students. The OFDM is a legal opposition party which was among those forced to withdraw from local elections in April 2008 because of harassment, intimidation and detention of candidates and members.  
(November 2008 Press Release)

**19.** Fourteen of those detained in October were charged with the two men, who were subject to *refoulement* from Kenya in 2007 (see paragraph 14, above), with terrorist offences as well as involvement with the OLF. They appeared together in court on 15 December 2008. At a subsequent court appearance, on **9 January 2009**, the defendants complained of being tortured by being made to stand for 15 hours at a time. Over 20 more arrests from the area of the capital and several more from other areas in Oromia Region were reported in **January 2009**. In the same month, an Oromo businessman was shot dead and another wounded by members of the security forces in Hararge.

Dr Trevor Trueman, Chair, Oromia Support Group.

30 March 2009.