



Executive summary: Oromo, racial discrimination, minority rights, right to assembly, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, torture, self-determination.

Oromo

5

1. Introduction

The Oromo are an indigenous group who traditionally live in Oromia which is part of present day Ethiopia. The Oromo are the largest national group in Ethiopia, with around 35 million out of a population of 75 million. Despite this numeric majority they are treated like a minority, suffering discrimination and marginalization.

The Oromo enjoy a homogeneous culture and share a common language, history and descent. Prior to its colonization by Abyssinia during the late 19th Century, the Oromo also had common political, religious and legal institutions. Although much of their culture and traditions have survived harsh suppression, much has been forgotten and lost. Oppression was particularly brutal under the imperial rule of Haile Selassie (1930-1974). The Oromo language was banned and speakers were privately and publicly ridiculed, with the government attempting to ensure the domination of the Abyssinian language and culture over the Oromo people.

With the overthrow of the junta in 1991, the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) co-authored a democratic charter. However the TPLF dominated the ruling government of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and consolidated its grip on power, continuing to deny Oromo's their political autonomy. Like its predecessors, the government, dominated by the TPLF has been vicious in its brutality against the Oromo people.

After the deeply contested general elections of 2005, high school and college students have been central to peaceful demonstrations against the Ethiopian Government. As a result they have been targeted by the Government for a number of years. This has led to several schools being closed, while students, and teachers have been arrested, treated inhumanely and some killed in indiscriminate shootings. The OLF have accused the Government of detaining thousands of elementary school children, often for simply wearing traditional Oromo clothes.

The discontent within the Oromo population is mainly a result of the TPLF forcing political parties such as the OLF to leave the political process thus denying their community a voice. The resulting dissatisfaction has been responded to by violence. Such incidences have been well reported by various governmental organizations and NGOs, although many more human rights abuses go unreported as they have occurred in rural areas.

40

2. Right to Assembly

Article 30 of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's Constitution provides that 'everyone has the right to assemble and to demonstrate together with others peaceably and unarmed, and to petition.' However numerous protests by Oromo students have been violently repressed.

45

It is well known that the Ethiopian Government, led by the TPLF, harasses those Oromo students who call for greater self-determination for the Oromo community. Several hundred students have been killed and thousands jailed since 2005 when a popular protest known as



50 the ‘Revolt Against Subjugation’ began in the Oromia region. In 2006 Human Rights Watch reported that the Ethiopian Government was ‘violently suppressing any form of protest and punishing suspected opposition supporters.’

55 An example of such suppression occurred on 10 March 2009 when over 80 Oromo students from Bahir Dar University were arrested and others beaten as they peacefully demonstrated against the treatment of the Oromo people, appealing to the international community to help their cause. Another student was killed and others were injured and imprisoned in Gedo High School in the Western Shoa zone of Oromia as they protested against derogatory remarks against the Oromo nation.

60 *UNPO urges the Ethiopian Government to respect their country’s constitution that protects the right to peaceful assembly (Article 30), and its obligations under international treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Ethiopia ratified in 1966.*

65 *UNPO calls for an independent, credible investigation into abuses carried out by officials during the peaceful demonstrations that followed the May 2005 elections.¹*

3. Arbitrary Arrests

70 Despite Articles 14, 17, 19, 20, 25 and 37 of the Ethiopian Constitution allowing for; liberty, protection against arbitrary arrest, a prompt process of law, equality before the law and that a judicial matter will be decided by a competent judicial power, the Ethiopian Government is charged with arbitrarily arresting Oromo students and holding them indefinitely and incommunicado often on fabricated charges of terrorism. Oromo students have effectively
75 been detained and jailed without trial for their political beliefs and ethnicity.

80 During numerous peaceful demonstrations that have taken place since 2005 in the Oromo region hundreds of students have been arrested and held incommunicado. The number of students held incommunicado in Ambo had reached 130 by the end of 2005. Again they are often falsely charged with terrorist activities, or links to terrorist organisations.

85 The U.S. State department has also accused the Ethiopian Government of arbitrary arrests, and the OLF has also cited unlawful imprisonment as one facet of the Ethiopian Governments suppression of the Oromo people.

Amnesty International expressed their concern on 1 February 2006 about 11 university students who were being held incommunicado. It was reported that the majority were from

¹ These include: the demonstration at Bahir University 10 March 2009; On 9 November 2005 the police killed three Oromo students (Jaagamaa Badhaanee (from Ambo, grade 11 student); Kabbadaa Badhaasaa (from Tiukur Inchinnii, grade 11 student) and an unidentified female student) and wounded 17 in Ambo town. On 12 November 2005, a 10th grade student Lachiisaa Fullaasaa was killed at Muka Turii High School. On 16 November 2005, Dabalaa Oliiqaa Guutaa and Malaakuu Tarfaa Fayisaa, of Kofale High School in Arsi, were killed, Eleni Kitessa (female), student of grade 9 was severely wounded. On 28 November 2005, students Habtamu Bayyataa Biqilaa and Fiqaaduu were killed in Jalduu town (W.Shewa), Katamaa Xaafaa and Nuussaa Girmaa were severely wounded, and later died in Ambo Hospital. On 20 December 2005, the TPLF is reported to have killed three students in Qiltu Karaa, Western Oromia.’ Meanwhile a further 5 students were injured, and one was reported to have died. In 24 January 2006 a student named Hayile Desta was killed by the state militia in a town called Finca’aa.



90 secondary school, some under 18 years-old. It also reported that on 31 August 2006 250
civilians from the Tukur Inchinni district of Oromia were arbitrarily arrested by the Ethiopian
Government. These included several high school students. This is despite Ethiopia ratifying
the Convention on the Rights of the Child (20 November 1989) that allows peaceful assembly
(Article 15), prohibits exposing children to cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or
punishment and the arbitrary deprivation of liberty (Article 37).

95 Despite these concerns the Ethiopian Government has continued to respond to popular unrest
with wanton arrests particularly amongst students.

100 *UNPO calls upon the Ethiopian Government to respect their constitution and international
human rights mechanisms such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
(ratified 16 December 1966) and the Convention against Torture or other Cruel, Inhuman or
Degrading Treatment or Punishment (10 December 1984) and to either charge those that
are detained, bring them to court for a prompt and fair trial or release them with immediate
effect.*

105 *UNPO urges the Ethiopian Government to respect the special provisions for children as
outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified 20 November 1989).*

3. Extrajudicial Killings

110 Article 15 of the Ethiopian Constitution protects the right to life, and states that ‘no person
may be deprived of his life except as a punishment for a serious criminal offence determined
by law.’ However despite this domestic protection there have been numerous incidences of
extra-judicial killings amongst the Oromo population, particularly students.

115 According to reports received the Ethiopian Government has met peaceful demonstrations
with shootings, killing as well as injuring many students. In November 2005 in the region of
Ambo three high school students were killed by Government forces, and in 2006 Human
Rights Watch reported that between June and November 2005 at least 40 people had died
during confrontations with the police in the Oromo region. In the same year Amnesty
International also reported that demonstrators had been shot dead by police. UNPO also
120 raised this issue with the Commission on Human Rights at its 62nd Session (through the
International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic and
Other Minorities) on 13 February 2006 where it expressed its concern regarding extrajudicial
killings of Oromo Students in Oromia.

125 On 20 October 2006 a senior judge in charge of investigating the violence that followed the
2005 elections, reported that Ethiopian security forces massacred 193 people, three times the
official number given. Among those killed were 40 teenagers. 763 people were believed to
have been injured. The European Union’s chief observer during the May 2005 elections, Ana
Gomes, told the Associated Press that this ‘exposes the lie’ that the Ethiopian Government is
130 forging a democracy. The U.S. State Department has also accused Ethiopia of extrajudicial
killings.

135 *UNPO urges the Ethiopian Government to respect its constitution and international norms
especially Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which it
ratified in 1993, and stop extrajudicial killings.*



140 *UNPO commends the Government of Ethiopia for investigating the treatment of the civilian population after the 2005 election. However it urges the Government to acknowledge its findings and bring those responsible for the atrocities to justice as well as put a new mechanism in place, charged with undertaking independent and credible investigations into all reported extrajudicial killings.*

4. Torture

145 Ethiopia has ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (ratified 10 December 1984), and this is reflected in Article 18 of their constitution. However as with arbitrary arrests Oromo students are often subjected to torture and inhumane treatment. There are various reports that many Oromo students detained within Ethiopia have suffered serious bodily harm.

150 UNPO has received reports highlighting cases of demonstrators being indiscriminately tortured, with students particularly targeted. In 2005 Amnesty International reported that over 1,500 students and other demonstrators were at risk of torture in Addis Ababa. Such incidences are a clear contravention of accepted international human rights standards. Amnesty International feared that those detained were beaten, forced to do harsh exercises, and denied adequate food and medical treatment. Students that have been arbitrarily arrested are often held in locations where torture has been frequently reported, such as Ambo Palace Prison and Senkele police training centre, near the town of Ambo.

160 On 10 October 2006 the 43rd Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child reported that it was ‘concerned over the situation of children belonging to minorities, in particular the Oromo and Anuak, as they suffer stigmatization and persecution by the armed forces, including torture, rape and killings, due to the presence of opposition groups within their territories.’ The committee called on the Ethiopian Government to ‘respect the life of the members of minorities groups and in particular that of children.’

165 *UNPO urges the Ethiopian Government to desist in its inhumane treatment of Oromo students and respect its constitution and international obligations and investigate cases of alleged mistreatment and bring those guilty to justice.*

170 *UNPO acknowledges the Ethiopian Government’s attempts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However it urges them to fully implement the articles of the Convention and in particular to put greater efforts into the creation of an effective juvenile justice system.*

5. Summary of Conclusions

175 The Ethiopian Government can be widely praised for incorporating key international human rights obligations into the Ethiopian Constitution. However the treatment of students from the Oromo region has demonstrated a distinct lack of commitment by the ruling party to respect these rights.

180 There have been several reports into the human rights violations that have occurred in Ethiopia by organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the US State Department, Amnesty International, the African Union and The European Union, but none have produced any noticeable change on the practices of the Ethiopian Government. It is clear that the Ethiopian



185 Government has targeted students, suppressing the next generation of Oromo's with arbitrary detention, inhumane treatment and even extrajudicial killings.

190 The overall assessment of the human rights situation in Ethiopia leads UNPO to conclude that in the areas of civil and political rights enough mechanisms are in place to adequately guarantee the rights of minorities, but that the implementation thereof is severely lacking. The Ethiopian Government is currently acting in contravention to its domestic obligations and international commitments.

195 An 'ethnic'-based federal structure was introduced in Ethiopia as a political remedy for the historical oppression of nations and nationalities of Ethiopia, which the Tigran-led regime has ignored along with international norms, including the right to exercise self-determination. UNPO believes that the human rights situation for students and that of the Oromo in general will be greatly improved if their right to self-determination is respected.

200 In addition the UNPO urges Ethiopian authorities to:

Refrain from inhumane treatment of Oromo students and initiate an independent, credible investigation into the reports of extrajudicial killings, torture and inhumane treatment of civilians including students immediately, and bring those guilty to justice;

205

Organize free, democratic and open elections where opposition parties can take part in an attempt to achieve genuine equality for all in Ethiopia, free of intimidation;

210

Ensure the implementation of unilateral and bilateral agreements signed and ratified by Ethiopia which are intended to uphold the respect of human rights, the promotion of democracy and the furtherance of good governance, which will guarantee:

215

- *proper access to political structures and legal assistance for the Oromo population,*
- *the right to peaceful assembly,*
- *an end to extrajudicial killings, and a guarantee that those alleged incidences are swiftly investigated independently, and those responsible fairly judged,*
- *an end to racial discrimination, which appears to be the motivation behind the current mistreatment of the Oromo population but which is prohibited under Article 25 of the Ethiopian Constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;*

220

Ensure fair and considered treatment of Oromo communities – respectful of human and civil rights – which would fulfil their obligations made to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention against Torture or other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment as well as their own constitution.