



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

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Whether persons of Oromo ethnicity are subjected to harm, ill-treatment and/or discrimination by the authorities in Ethiopia. Whether persons of Oromo ethnicity are perceived by the Ethiopian authorities as being members and/or supporters of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Whether members/supporters or perceived members/supporters of the OLF are subjected to harm and/or ill-treatment by the authorities in Ethiopia.

Page 56 of a report from *Human Rights Watch* published in October 2010 states:

“The government has refused to register the independent National Teachers’ Association (NTA) and waged a decade-long struggle to stop teachers from organizing independently of the government. Teachers in Arba Minch, Addis Ababa, Awassa, Dessie, Gonder, and Ambo complained that they are forced to contribute a percentage of their salary to the government-controlled Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (distinct from the now-defunct independent Ethiopian Teachers’ Association and the independent NTA, mentioned above) and in some cases to the ruling party as well. They said that government paymasters in the school and woreda automatically deducted EPRDF dues from their salary once they signed up as party members, that they were repeatedly harassed to join the ruling party, and that the Ministry of Education denied them training opportunities if they did not. Teachers in Ambo in Oromia region said that they were forced to join the ruling Oromo People’s Democratic Organization, a member of the ruling EPRDF coalition, or else be suspected of sympathizing with the rebel Oromo Liberation Front.

Their accounts echo those of the US State Department, which in 2009 wrote that there were “credible reports” that teachers and other government workers were fired for belonging to opposition political parties. The Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement and Oromo National Congress opposition groups also said that “the Oromiya Regional Government continued to dismiss opposition party members—particularly teachers—from their jobs,” according to the State Department report. Simply refusing to join the ruling party is enough to be branded a dissident. One teacher in Gonder told Human Rights Watch that he had been accepted to the civil service college six months earlier to do a post-graduate masters program, but had not been allowed to continue because he was not a member of the ruling party:

The dean of the Teachers Training College in Gonder told me that I cannot get the chance until I join the EPRDF. I made a complaint to the head of office of the education bureau in the regional administration, they said the same thing: you cannot get the chance until you join the party.” (Human Rights Watch (19 October 2010) *Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia*)

A report by *Amnesty International* under the heading 'Repression of dissent' states:

"The government of Ethiopia continued to suppress dissent in the Oromia Region of Ethiopia, and detained hundreds of people suspected of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Many were believed to have been held in incommunicado detention and many were detained without trial. Court proceedings were frequently and repeatedly delayed. Detainees were often held in poor conditions; some were reportedly ill-treated. Group arrests and detentions of Oromo leaders, activists and businesspeople continued sporadically throughout the year. Many of these arrests and detentions were reported to have been politically motivated.

Opposition political parties accused the government of arresting their members ahead of the scheduled 2010 elections; the majority of those named in lists of detainees were Oromo." (Amnesty International (28 May 2010) *Amnesty International Report 2010 – Ethiopia*)

The report from *Freedom House* 'Freedom in the World published in May 2010 states:

"Discrimination against other groups, especially the Oromo, has been widespread. According to the International Crisis Group, Ethiopia's federal system of government, which grants autonomy to the dominant ethnic group in each region, has increased tensions between communities. Repression of the Oromo and ethnic Somalis, and government attempts to co-opt their parties into subsidiaries of the EPRDF, have helped to fuel nationalism in both Oromiya and the Ogaden." (Freedom House (3 May 2010) *Freedom in the World 2010 - Ethiopia*)

A report by the *United States Department of State* under the heading 'Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life' states:

"On February 25, students at Gedo Secondary School (West Shoa Zone, Oromiya region) found a flier containing hateful remarks about Oromos. When the school principal delayed in investigating the case, Oromo students refused to attend classes and demonstrated inside the school compound. The principal called local police, who ordered students to disperse. When they refused, police shot and killed Wendimu Damena, a 19-year-old student. Another student, 20-year-old Belay Motuma, was shot in the chest and remained hospitalized at year's end. Two students, Berecha Folesa and Tamari Melaku Weyesa, were arrested during the demonstration and were released on bail on March 9. On March 17, six school administration employees and one agricultural bureau employee, all of whom were opposition Oromo People's Congress (OPC) candidates in the 2008 local elections, were arrested and charged with inciting violence. The case remained pending at year's end." (United States Department of State (11 March 2010) *Ethiopia: Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2009*)

This report also states under the heading 'Arrest Procedures and Treatment While in Detention'

"In October 2008 officials arrested at least 53 ethnic Oromos (possibly as many as 200) for alleged support of the banned OLF. Of the 53 persons arrested, 38 were released, and the cases of the remaining 15 were pending at year's end." (ibid)

Under the heading 'Political Prisoners and Detainees' the report states:

"On July 4, Nimona Tuffa, a student at Hayume Medical College in Ambo and an opposition OPC member, was picked up by Oromiya Regional Security officials dressed in civilian clothes in Guder town. Nimona reported that security officials, including Head of Security of West Shoa Zone Tesfaye Sime, beat him, first in a nearby forest and later at the Ambo Oromo People's Democratic Organization (part of the EPRDF coalition) office, where they pressured him to sign a statement admitting he was a member of the OLF. He eventually signed. When released, Nimona was hospitalized for severe nerve-ending damage, hearing damage, and back injuries. The case was raised with the government, but no action had been taken at year's end." (ibid)

Under the heading 'Freedom of Religion' the report states:

"Unlike previous years there were no reports of minority religious groups reporting discrimination in the allocation of government land for religious sites. Authorities continued to ban Waka-Feta, a traditional animist Oromo religious group, because it suspected that the group's leaders had close links to the OLF." (ibid)

Page 26 of a report published in September 2009 by *International Crisis Group* states:

"Harassment, intimidation and imprisonment of suspected OLF supporters remain widespread" (International Crisis Group (4 September 2009), *Ethiopia: Ethnic Federalism and Its Discontents*, p.26).

This report also states:

"A recurrent government method to silence critics is to accuse them of being OLF, OPC (formerly ONC) or OFDM members. Reporting OLF sympathisers buys favours from local administrators, including kebele court judgments in property disputes. Unsurprisingly, Oromiya has the country's highest level of reported human rights violations. An atmosphere of suspicion, intimidation and fear prevails" (*Ibid*,p.26).

A report published by *Country of Origin Research and Information (CORI)* in July 2009 states:

"Lecturers, students, journalists, OLF members, opposition leaders, members of opposition groups, members of civil society groups, businessmen, artists, elderly, women and housewives are amongst groups of people who have been reported to have been abused by government agencies, under suspicion of links to the OLF" (Country of Origin Research and Information (CORI) (6 July 2009) *Treatment of members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), including members of their family*, p.12).

A paper published by *Amnesty International* in April 2009 states:

"Throughout the period of review, the government has continued to suppress dissent in the Oromia region of Ethiopia, and has arbitrarily detained thousands of individuals suspected of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Many have been held in incommunicado detention, many have been detained without trial, and court proceedings

have often been delayed. The detainees are held in poor conditions and many have been tortured or otherwise ill-treated

In November and December 2005, thousands of students were detained, many ill-treated and some killed, following demonstrations throughout the Oromia region in support of the release of Oromo detainees and other political demands. They were released in late 2006, early 2007. Hundreds more Oromo people were detained in November 2005 during post-election demonstrations. In November 2007, Mulata Aberra, a trader in Harar city, was arrested for the third time on suspicion of supporting the OLF. During his detention he was tortured and denied medical treatment for his resulting injuries. He was released on bail in July 2008.

From late October 2008 onwards, mass arrests were carried out of suspected OLF supporters. Among the individuals arrested were Bekele Jirata, General Secretary of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) party; Asefa Tefera Didaba, university lecturer at Addis Ababa University; brothers Dejene Borena and Kebede Borena; and Eshetu Kitili and Desta Kitili. The OFDM party strongly denied that Bekele Jirata or the party had any links to the OLF. A number of them have since been released without charge. Bekele Jirata was released on bail in February 2009 after a number of court appearances. Several more detainees have appeared in court and had their detention extended reportedly to allow police and security forces time to investigate the accusations against them. None of the detainees arrested during the round-up have so far faced trial. (Amnesty International (13 April 2009) *Ethiopia: Amnesty International Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review*, p.5).

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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