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Issues: **Treatment of members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), including members of their family**

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The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) considers itself a political organisation, however the Ethiopian authorities categorize it as a terrorist organisation.¹

The OLF was founded in 1973 to promote the right to self-determination of the Oromo people against Abyssinian colonial rule, under which Oromo language was banned and attempts were made to suppress Oromo culture.² The Oromo are an ethnic group living mainly in Ethiopia, but also in Kenya.³ In Ethiopia they inhabit the large region of

¹ Oromo Liberation Front. *OLF Mission*. Available from: <http://www.omoliberationfront.org/OLFMission.htm> (Accessed 12 July 2009). Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009). Les -Nouvelles.org, Dawud Ibsa Ayana, Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front, Interview to *Les nouvelles d'Addis*, Paris, 29th March 2006. Available from: http://www.lesnouvelles.org/P10_magazine/15_grandentretien/15050_itvOLF/15050_itvOLF_eng.html (Accessed 20 July 2009)

² Oromo Liberation Front. *OLF Mission*. Available from: <http://www.omoliberationfront.org/OLFMission.htm> (Accessed 12 July 2009). Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, Oromo Available from: <http://www.unpo.org/content/view/7917/135/> (Accessed 20 July 2009). Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

³ African Holocaust, Peoples of Africa, Oromo, undated, Available from: <http://www.africanholocaust.net/peopleofafrika.htm#o> (Accessed 20 July 2009). Ethnologue, Oromo, Borana-Arsi-Guji, undated, Available from: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=qax (Accessed 20 July 2009)

Oromiya in the eastern central and western parts of the country⁴. Their native language is Oromo, also called Oromiffa.⁵ According to the 2007 census, the Oromo are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, making up 34.5% of the population.⁶ Other sources put the figure at 40%⁷ and 45%.⁸ The Oromo comprise Muslims and Christians in roughly equal numbers and traditional Oromo religion, Waqefana.⁹

IRIN reports that even though it is Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Oromo "have had little political power since the expansion of Ethiopia in the 19th century."¹⁰

The OLF joined a transitional government with the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) between 1991- 1992. The EPRDF was dominated by the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF). The OLF withdrew from the coalition government in 1992.¹¹ According to several sources this was due to the TPLF's lack of commitment to democratic processes and the abuse of Oromos supporting the Oromo national movement¹². On leaving the coalition the OLF resumed its armed struggle.¹³

According to Freedom House

"The government has tended to favor Tigrayan ethnic interests in economic and political matters. Politics within the EPRDF have been dominated by the Tigrayan People's Democratic Front. Discrimination against and repression of other groups, especially the Oromo, have been widespread."¹⁴

The OLF is fighting for the right to self determination rather than an independent state.¹⁵

⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009). Centre for Victims of Torture, Cultural Profile: Oromo, 2004, Available from: <http://www.cvt.org/file.php?ID=5759> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

⁵ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, Oromo Available from: <http://www.unpo.org/content/view/7917/135/> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

⁶ Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Population Census Commission, *Summary and Statistical Report of the 2007 Population and Housing Census*, December 2008, Available from: http://www.csa.gov.et/pdf/Cen2007_firstdraft.pdf (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷ BBC, *Ethiopia links blast to Oromo rebels*, 2 October 2002. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2293185.stm> (accessed 12 July 2009). US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸ IRIN, *Ethiopia: Oromo armed groups oppose conflict with Eritrea*, 21 November 2000. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=1432> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁹ IRIN, *Ethiopia: Oromo armed groups oppose conflict with Eritrea*, 21 November 2000. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=1432> (accessed 12 July 2009). Les -Nouvelles.org, Dawud Ibsa Ayana, Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front, Interview to *Les nouvelles d'Addis*, Paris, 29th March 2006. Available from: http://www.lesnouvelles.org/P10_magazine/15_grandentretien/15050_itvOLF/15050_itvOLF_eng.html (Accessed 20 July 2009)

¹⁰ IRIN, *Ethiopia: Oromo armed groups oppose conflict with Eritrea*, 21 November 2000. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=1432> (accessed 12 July 2009).

¹¹ IRIN, *Ethiopia: Oromo armed groups oppose conflict with Eritrea*, 21 November 2000. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=1432> (accessed 12 July 2009). Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, Oromo Available from: <http://www.unpo.org/content/view/7917/135/> (Accessed 20 July 2009). Human Rights Watch, World Report 2003, *Ethiopia*. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/ethiopia0103/index.htm#TopOfPage> (accessed 12 July 2009).

¹² Jalata, Asafa, (Ed.) 'Two national liberation movements compared: Oromia and Southern Sudan' in *State crises, globalization, and national movements in north-east Africa*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2004, p90. Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009). Human Rights Watch, World Report 1993, *Human Rights Developments – Ethiopia*. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1993/WR93/Afw-01.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

¹³ Jalata, Asafa, (Ed.) 'Two national liberation movements compared: Oromia and Southern Sudan' in *State crises, globalization, and national movements in north-east Africa*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2004, p90

¹⁴ Freedom House, Country Report; Ethiopia, 2009, Available from: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7606> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

¹⁵ IRIN, *Ethiopia: Oromo armed groups oppose conflict with Eritrea*, 21 November 2000. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=1432> (accessed 12 July 2009). Les -Nouvelles.org, Dawud Ibsa Ayana, Chairman of

According to the OLF, their armed resistance is “an act of self-defense exercised by the Oromo people against successive Ethiopian governments, including the current one, who forcibly deny their right to self-determination”¹⁶. Although the OLF officially states that its armed resistance targets the government machinery and not individuals and civilians¹⁷, it has been accused of several attacks on the civilian population.¹⁸

The Ethiopian government outlawed the OLF in 1992¹⁹, and it has increasingly used accusations of terrorism to arrest and charge OLF members and other Oromo people involved in political opposition and armed resistance.²⁰ Human Rights Watch states that “Ethiopia’s government has regularly used accusations of support for the Oromo rebels, who have been carrying out a low-level insurgency for a decade, as a pretext for cracking down on political dissent among the Oromo population.”²¹

According to the United States Department of State (USSD), in 2008 Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi told parliament that “the government had confirmed that all bombings this year in Addis Ababa were the work of the OLF.”²² However the USSD reports that “no credible evidence has been presented to verify these claims.”²³

In 2007 Prime Minister Zenawi stated that some members of the opposition parties were acting as a front for the OLF²⁴. In 2008, Bekele Jirata, the Secretary General of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), was arrested and charged with “recruiting and organizing OLF members, promoting OLF terrorist activities, and financially supporting the OLF.”²⁵

Human Rights Watch states that “since 1992, security forces have imprisoned thousands of Oromo on charges of plotting armed insurrection on behalf of the OLF.”²⁶

the Oromo Liberation Front, Interview to *Les nouvelles d’Addis*, Paris, 29th March 2006. Available from: http://www.lesnouvelles.org/P10_magazine/15_grandentretien/15050_itvOLF/15050_itvOLF_eng.html (Accessed 20 July 2009)

¹⁶ Oromo Liberation Front, *OLF Policies*. Available from: <http://www.oromoliberationfront.org/OLFPolicies.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

¹⁷ Oromo Liberation Front, *OLF Policies*. Available from: <http://www.oromoliberationfront.org/OLFPolicies.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, World Report 1993, *Human Rights Developments – Ethiopia*. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1993/WR93/Afw-01.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009). The Africa Monitor, *Probe into OLF link in Kenya massacre*, 18 July 2005. Available from:

<http://www.theafricamonitor.com/resources/58%20English%20issue%20%20April%2026.%202005.pdf> (accessed 12 July 2009). US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

¹⁹ Oromo Liberation Front, THE IMPACTS OF ETHIOPIAN STATE TERRORISM AND GOBALIZATION ON THE OROMO NATIONAL MOVEMENT, . Available from: <http://www.oromoliberationfront.org/OLFPolicies.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia’s Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²¹ Human Rights Watch News Release, *Ethiopia: Charge or Free Ethnic Oromo Terrorism Suspects*, 27 November 2008. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/26/ethiopia-charge-or-free-ethnic-oromo-terrorism-suspects> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²² US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²³ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²⁴ The Reporter, Ethiopia: Meles Warns Opposition Parties Supporting of OLF, 27 October 2007. Available from <http://allafrica.com/stories/200710270019.html> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

²⁵ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia’s Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

Human rights abuses against members of the OLF, perceived sympathisers and their family members

General background

The USSD states that human rights abuses reported in Ethiopia include,

“limitations on citizens' right to change their government in local and by-elections; unlawful killings, torture, beating, abuse,, poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention, police and judicial corruption; detention without charge and lengthy pretrial detention; infringement on citizens' privacy rights including illegal searches;restrictions on freedom of the press; arrest, detention, and harassment of journalists; restrictions on freedom of assembly and association.”²⁷

The USSD also reports security services use of excessive force in addressing internal conflict and in counterinsurgency operations.²⁸

Suppressing political dissent

Speaking in 2006 about protests by Oromos between September and November 2005, the Chairman of the OLF claimed that the Ethiopian government was using ‘concentration’ camps to contain protestors.²⁹

“Thousands of Oromos were imprisoned to quell the uprising and protests by students, teachers and peasantry. And because the prisons were full, concentration camps were established, in Senkellé Police College, which was used to imprison about 5.000, 6.000 at one time. And imprison them for about a month and two months and then release some of them and again, substitute others. Another concentration camp was established in Dedesa, in western part of the country, in Wollega and similar concentration camps were used closer to Hurso. Almost all schools and all police stations are full now in most of the Oromo regions. In particular in western Harergé, in Ambo area, in Senkellé and Guder area, in Gimbi area and now it is very difficult to know even the numbers of peasants, teachers and students in prison. In fact there are many high security prisoners (university students and college students) that are in Kaliti, their number is big. And, this is the situation as of yesterday. One university student, a fourth year engineering student was beaten and killed in Kaliti prison, yesterday. He was imprisoned for the last 3 years and he was beaten to death by the security forces. Such actions are rampant all over Oromiya.”³⁰

²⁷ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²⁸ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

²⁹ Les –Nouvelles.org, Dawud Ibsa Ayana, Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front, Interview to *Les nouvelles d'Addis*, Paris, 29th March 2006. Available from: http://www.lesnouvelles.org/P10_magazine/15_grandentreten/15050_itvOLF/15050_itvOLF_eng.html (Accessed 20 July 2009)

³⁰ Les –Nouvelles.org, Dawud Ibsa Ayana, Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front, Interview to *Les nouvelles d'Addis*, Paris, 29th March 2006. Available from: http://www.lesnouvelles.org/P10_magazine/15_grandentreten/15050_itvOLF/15050_itvOLF_eng.html (Accessed 20 July 2009)

The USSD reports that between 30,000 and 50,000 demonstrators were arrested after these anti government protests which ‘erupted’ in November 2005.³¹

Human Rights Watch reports that,

“regional authorities in Oromia have cultivated a climate of fear and repression by using state power to punish political dissent in often brutal fashion. Regional and local authorities have consistently harassed and abused perceived critics of the current government.”³²

According to Human Rights Watch, abuses in Oromiya are “so widespread and arbitrarily inflicted that they have left many people afraid to engage in any kind of public discussion related to issues of concern to their communities.”³³ Human Rights Watch states that this has resulted in a “climate of suspicion and abuse within which many security and government officials make widespread use of arbitrary imprisonment as a weapon in an ongoing war against dissent.”³⁴

Treatment of perceived government critics

In 2005 Human Rights Watch reported that government authorities have used the longstanding insurgency by the OLF to imprison, harass and physically abuse critics:

“Since 1992, security forces have imprisoned thousands of Oromo on charges of plotting armed insurrection on behalf of the OLF. Such accusations have regularly been used as a transparent pretext to imprison individuals who publicly question government policies or actions. Security forces have tortured many detainees and subjected them to continuing harassment and abuse for years after their release. That harassment, in turn, has often destroyed victims’ ability to earn a livelihood and isolated them from their communities³⁵”.

The USSD reports that suspected sympathizers or members of the opposition or insurgent groups were particularly liable to arbitrary arrest and detention and that opposition supporters are subject to mistreatment by security forces “usually with impunity.”³⁶

“Opposition political party leaders reported frequent and systematic abuse and intimidation of their supporters by police and regional militias, particularly in the months leading up to the local and by-elections held during the year”³⁷.

³¹ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

³² Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

³³ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

³⁶ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

³⁷ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009)

Several reports indicate that the Ethiopian government has continued to harass suspected OLF supporters who have sought refuge outside of Ethiopia.³⁸

In 2005 the Voice of America reported claims that Ethiopian authorities have crossed the border into Kenya and kidnapped Oromo refugees.³⁹

According to Human Rights Watch, reporting in 2008, the ruling party uses an elaborate means “of surveillance, intimidation, and coercion of ordinary people who are perceived as being unsympathetic to the government....Local officials in Oromia have also made extensive use of the kebele system [type of council], along with smaller cells called gott and garee, to keep residents under constant surveillance for signs of government criticism.”⁴⁰

USSD and Human Rights Watch report that family and neighbours of members and supporters (real and perceived) of OLF, have been targeted, harassed and detained by Ethiopian authorities.⁴¹

The USSD reported in 2007 that “security forces continued to detain family members of persons sought for questioning by the government.”⁴²

Human Rights Watch states that “not all of those arrested by security officials on allegations of OLF involvement are outspoken critics of the government. In fact, many of those interviewed by Human Rights Watch were at a loss to explain why they or their family members had been targeted for arrest.”⁴³

The mother of a man arrested on suspicion of OLF membership told Human Rights Watch

“They say he is a *shifita* [bandit] and that he raises unrest among the people. I don't know why they say this about him. I was asking [the woreda] many times

³⁸ Amnesty International, Document - Ethiopia: Forcible return/ fear of torture or ill-treatment/incommunicado detention/ prisoner of conscience, PUBLIC AI Index: AFR 25/024/2007, 31 October 2007. Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/024/2007/en/50dae44b-d35b-11dd-a329-2f46302a8cc6/afr250242007en.html> (Accessed 20 July 2009) New African, Persecution of Oromos continues, June 1998. Available from: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5391/is_199806/ai_n21422989/ (Accessed 20 July 2009) Voice of America, Kenya Investigating Claims of Kidnapping By Ethiopia Agents, 28 December 2005. Available from: <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-12/2005-12-28-voa47.cfm?CFID=256544085&CFTOKEN=47448967&jsessionid=00305644db61e352c3f447255c4c2e32c2a2> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

³⁹ Voice of America, Kenya Investigating Claims of Kidnapping By Ethiopia Agents, 28 December 2005. Available from: <http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2005-12/2005-12-28-voa47.cfm?CFID=256544085&CFTOKEN=47448967&jsessionid=00305644db61e352c3f447255c4c2e32c2a2> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia: Repression sets stage for non-competitive elections, 11 April 2008. Available from: <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/ASIN-7DLLRU?OpenDocument> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

⁴¹ US Department of State, 2006 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 6 March 2007. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009). Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁴² US Department of State, 2007 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2007 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 11 March 2008. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100481.htm> (accessed 24 July 2009)

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

but they started showing signs they suspected me also and so I stopped asking them.”⁴⁴

According to Human Rights Watch many Oromo have been detained, tortured and harassed for expressing political opinions. Human Rights Watch state that these practices have intimidated friends and neighbours into silence.⁴⁵

Human Rights Watch state that several people that have been detained have continued to be persecuted on release. “In many cases, police officials follow, harass and intimidate former detainees and their families for years after their release.” According to Human Rights Watch police have harassed former detainees neighbours, friends and family. Some former detainees have had to close businesses as a result of police harassing their customers. Human Rights Watch report that as a result of police intimidation people may become frightened of associating with a former detainee if they have been accused of being an OLF member.⁴⁶

Several former detainees told Human Rights Watch that their relationships had suffered as a result of police intimidation,

“in some cases people had been ostracized almost entirely. One woman who was detained in Agaro said that after her release, police harassment drove most of her family to reject her.

“After I left I tried to go back to my family in the countryside but they could not accept me because they were afraid. My brother who did not reject me because of this took me in but then he was arrested for two months. They said that he is a thug, but he is a person with a wife and children and he has a job. He is back home now but he avoids talking about anything now and [the police] are always telling him that he has the OLF in his house.”⁴⁷

Arbitrary arrest and detention

While investigating 41 cases of arbitrary detention in 2005, Human Rights Watch reported that “courts or police investigators ultimately found the allegations against these detainees to be unsupported by any sort of evidence. None were ever tried for any offense related to the allegations that led to their arrest, but all were nonetheless imprisoned for weeks or months before being released.”⁴⁸

Several cases of individual or mass arbitrary arrests of Oromo people and OLF members (real or perceived) have been documented⁴⁹. Between March and May 2002

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch News Release, *Ethiopia: Halt Crackdown on Oromo Students*, 21 May 2002. Available from <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2002/05/21/ethiopia-halt-crackdown-oromo-students> (accessed 12 July 2009). Human Rights Watch

the police arrested and opened fire upon, hundreds of students in Addis Ababa and Oromiya, and although some were released soon thereafter, many were imprisoned for an undetermined time⁵⁰.

In 2007, the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) expressed their concern regarding the arbitrary detention of several individuals, including three members of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), their affiliated organization in Ethiopia, accused of involvement with the OLF.⁵¹

The USSD reports that in October 2008 Ethiopian authorities arrested 53 ethnic Oromos many of whom had no apparent political affiliation, for alleged support to the banned OLF. Those arrested included university lecturers, businessmen, and housewives.⁵²

Human Rights Watch reports that at the end of 2008 over 100 ethnic Oromo were arrested across the Oromiya region, accused of helping to plot terrorist attacks on behalf of the outlawed OLF.⁵³ Human Rights Watch Africa Director stated ““Ethiopia has well-founded fears of terrorist attacks, but has often manipulated those fears to suppress dissent....These mass arrests bear all the hallmarks of the ‘imprison first, investigate later’ tactics used to arbitrarily detain peaceful critics.”⁵⁴

People arrested and officially charged with involvement in terrorism and rebel activities face harsh punishments, including life imprisonment and the death penalty.⁵⁵

According to the USSD, in 2008 the Ministry of Justice Pardon Board pardoned 44 OLF members who were convicted of serious crimes after serving 16 years in prison.⁵⁶ However in 2008 many people remained in prison as ‘political detainees’, including OLF members.⁵⁷

Human Rights Watch reports that several detainees were told to prove that they were not OLF members by becoming members of the Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (OPDO).⁵⁸ OPDO controls the regional government in Ormoya state, the party was originally created by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic

News Release, *Ethiopia: Charge or Free Ethnic Oromo Terrorism Suspects*, 27 November 2008. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/26/ethiopia-charge-or-free-ethnic-oromo-terrorism-suspects> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch News Release, *Ethiopia: Halt Crackdown on Oromo Students*, 21 May 2002. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2002/05/21/ethiopia-halt-crackdown-oromo-students> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵¹ International Federation for Human Rights, *Arbitrary detention of several individuals and risk of torture*, 13 September 2007. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/482c5bd21f.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵² US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵³ Human Rights Watch News Release, *Ethiopia: Charge or Free Ethnic Oromo Terrorism Suspects*, 27 November 2008. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/26/ethiopia-charge-or-free-ethnic-oromo-terrorism-suspects> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch News Release, *Ethiopia: Charge or Free Ethnic Oromo Terrorism Suspects*, 27 November 2008. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/26/ethiopia-charge-or-free-ethnic-oromo-terrorism-suspects> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵⁵ BBC, *Ethiopia charges 31 over suspected rebel attacks*, 3 December 1997. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/36846.stm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵⁶ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵⁷ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

Front (EPRDF),⁵⁹ it is therefore accused of being “a replica of the ruling power” by Oromo opposition parties.⁶⁰

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council states that further to detention, abuses include disappearances and extrajudicial killings, citing the killing of OLF members by police after capture.⁶¹ The latest Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances presented by the UN Human Rights Council documented 112 outstanding cases of forced disappearances in Ethiopia, none of which has received a response from the government⁶².

Practice of torture

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention of the Commission on Human Rights has examined and expressed opinions on several cases of arbitrary detention in Ethiopia, also calling attention to the fact that imprisonment in remote facilities increases the risk of torture and ill-treatment of prisoners.⁶³ According to the USSD, Ethiopia has “3 federal prisons, 117 regional prisons and many unofficial prisons.”⁶⁴ The USSD and Amnesty International report that prison and pretrial detention centre conditions are harsh and life-threatening.⁶⁵ According to the USSD there is severe overcrowding, lack of adequate food, sanitation and medical care. Although statistics are unavailable, there are reports of numerous deaths in prison due to illness, poor health care and mistreatment.⁶⁶

The USSD states that torture is commonly used to extract confessions,

“Although the constitution and law prohibit the use of torture and mistreatment, there were numerous credible reports that security officials tortured, beat, or mistreated detainees. Opposition political parties reported frequent and systematic abuse of their supporters by police and regional militias. In Makelawi, the central police investigation headquarters in Addis Ababa, police investigators reportedly commonly used illegal interrogation methods to extract confessions. In detention centers, police often physically

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch News Release, *Ethiopia: Charge or Free Ethnic Oromo Terrorism Suspects*, 27 November 2008. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/26/ethiopia-charge-or-free-ethnic-oromo-terrorism-suspects> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶⁰ IRIN, *Ethiopia: Oromo armed groups oppose conflict with Eritrea*, 21 November 2000. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=1432> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶¹ BBC, *Ethiopia told to investigate human rights abuses*, 3 December 1997. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/36572.stm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶² UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances*, 25 February 2009, A/HRC/10/9. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49c778772.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶³ UN Commission on Human Rights, *Civil and political rights, including questions of torture and detention: Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention*, 9 November 1998, E/CN.4/1999/63/Add.1. Available from:

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/470b77b5c.html> (accessed 12 July 2009); UN Commission on Human Rights, *Civil and political rights, including questions of torture and detention: Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention*, 24 January 2003, E/CN.4/2003/8/Add.1. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/470b77ae0.html> (accessed 12 July 2009) and UN Commission on Human Rights, *Civil and political rights, including questions of torture and detention: Opinions adopted by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention*, 19 November 2004, E/CN.4/2005/6/Add.1. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/470b77b10.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶⁴ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶⁵ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009). Amnesty International, ETHIOPIA: Mulatu Aberra and Najima Jamal Ismail released - FUA 328/07, 23 October 2008, Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org.nz/good-news/ethiopia-mulatu-aberra-and-najima-jamal-smail-released> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

⁶⁶ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

abused detainees. Authorities generally permitted visitors but sometimes arbitrarily denied them access to detainees.”⁶⁷

Similarly, after interviewing several former detainees, Human Rights Watch has stated that

“In many cases, police and military officials also subjected these detainees to interrogation and torture aimed at forcing them to produce information about OLF activities that they did not possess. Police officials in Oromia often subject individuals who are arrested on suspicion of OLF-related activities to torture and other forms of mistreatment. In some cases torture is applied in the course of interrogations, while in other cases it is used as a form of punishment.”⁶⁸

Human Rights Watch has collected testimonies from people tortured by government forces, including women and the elderly, as well as several current and former government officials “who confirmed that the practice of torture was widespread.”⁶⁹ A former police officer from Ambo told Human Rights Watch that “most people who go to prison here [in Ambo] are beaten, even people we call elders or respected people.”⁷⁰

Human Rights Watch interviewed a man who had been detained in a military camp near Mendi in West Wollega in 2001 and claimed that

“He was interrogated about his alleged involvement with the OLF and beaten severely by soldiers who nearly killed him when they fractured his skull with a blow from one of their rifles. In April 2004, the same man was again arrested and taken to a military garrison near Nekemte where he was imprisoned and tortured for nearly six months without ever being brought before a judge. His ‘release’ came when his captors abandoned his unconscious body in a riverbed near the garrison after a particularly severe beating.”⁷¹

In 2008 Amnesty International raised concern that 15 people arrested, some of whom were accused of financially supporting the OLF were at risk of torture,

“most were reportedly held incommunicado in detention facilities in Addis Ababa, including Maikelawi, where torture and ill-treatment of political prisoners has been reported in the past.”⁷²

⁶⁷ US Department of State, *2007 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2007 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 11 March 2008. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100481.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷² Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Arbitrary Detention/Torture or Other Ill-treatment*, 14 November 2008, AFR 25/012/2008. Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/012/2008/en/320fc73f-b277-11dd-8634-af6d09acdca4/afr250122008en.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

Human Rights Watch reported that at a court appearance, some of those detainees “said that they had been taken from their cells at night and tortured. Torture has been a routine practice at Addis Ababa's Maikelawi, or Central Investigation Unit, where the detainees are being held.”⁷³

Ethiopia has been a signatory of the 1984 United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) since 1994.⁷⁴ The government has officially denied all allegations of abuses by its armed forces and refused to facilitate independent investigations.⁷⁵ Some reports of beatings, rape and other forms of torture, especially in zones of conflict have been investigated by a government-contracted body but not by an independent international body.”⁷⁶

Elections and Freedom of Expression

As a result of the practice of intimidation and the suppression of dissent Human Rights Watch described the 2005 elections as a “hollow exercise” for most of Oromia's population.⁷⁷

“In Oromia, the largest and most populous state in Ethiopia, systematic political repression and pervasive human rights violations have denied citizens the freedom to associate and to freely form and express their political ideas. As a result, on election day, most voters there are unlikely to be presented with real choices.”⁷⁸

In its 2009 World Report Human Rights Watch reports that when and where opposition candidates contest government candidates, they face abuse, improper procedural obstacles to registration, detention, threats and accusations of affiliation with the OLF.⁷⁹ Freedom House states that “Ethiopia is not an electoral democracy.”⁸⁰

According to the USSD members of opposition parties faced frequent and systematic harassment and violence from government security services in the run up to local elections in 2008,

“Opposition party members consistently reported that in small towns, authorities detained persons in police stations for long periods without charge or access to a judge, and that sometimes these persons' whereabouts were unknown for several months. Opposition parties registered many complaints during the year that

⁷³ HRW News Release, *Ethiopia: Charge or Free Ethnic Oromo Terrorism Suspects*, 27 November 2008. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/11/26/ethiopia-charge-or-free-ethnic-oromo-terrorism-suspects> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷⁴ United Nations, General Assembly, Status of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Report of the Secretary-General, 17 August 1998. Available from: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/53/plenary/a53-253.htm> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2009 – Ethiopia*, 14 January 2009. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49705fa32.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷⁶ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2009: the State of the World's Human Rights*, 2009. Available from: <http://report2009.amnesty.org/en/regions/africa/ethiopia> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2009 – Ethiopia*, 14 January 2009. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/49705fa32.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸⁰ Freedom House, Country Report; Ethiopia, 2009, Available from: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2009&country=7606> (Accessed 20 July 2009)

government militias beat and detained their supporters without charge in the run-up to the local and by-elections held earlier in the year.”⁸¹

Freedom of expression is restricted, journalists, publishers and editors are frequently harassed and arrested.⁸² According to the USSD, in 2004 and 2005, two journalists with the Oromo language service of the state-owned Ethiopian Television were arrested, one for the third time, in 2006 both remained in detention on several charges including passing government information to the OLF leadership. USSD report that “Prison authorities ignored various court orders to free them.”⁸³

According to Amnesty International, in 2008 sixty staff members of the Oromo television programme were removed from their jobs, many of them were placed under surveillance by security forces and their movements in Addis Ababa were restricted⁸⁴

The government restricts internet access and blocks access to opposition websites including the OLF official website.⁸⁵

The USSD states that Ethiopian 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.”⁸⁶

Groups at particular risk of human rights abuses

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.⁸⁷

According to Human Rights Watch authorities have treated the Oromo student population, lecturers and school teachers with suspicion and mistrust, subjecting them to

⁸¹ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸² US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸³ US Department of State, *2006 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 6 March 2007. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸⁴ Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Arbitrary Detention/Torture or Other Ill-treatment*. PUBLIC AI Index: AFR 25/012/2008, 14 November 2008 Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/012/2008/en/320fc73f-b277-11dd-8634-af6d09acdca4/fr250122008en.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸⁵ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸⁶ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸⁷ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009). Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009). Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: Arbitrary Detention/Torture or Other Ill-treatment*. Birtukan Mideska (F), 7 January 2009. Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR25/003/2009/en/f3521423-dcca-11dd-bacc-b7af5299964b/fr250032009en.html> (accessed 12 July 2009). Les -Nouvelles.org, Dawud Ibsa Ayana, Chairman of the Oromo Liberation Front, Interview to *Les nouvelles d'Addis*, Paris, 29th March 2006. Available from: http://www.lesnouvelles.org/P10_magazine/15_grandentretien/15050_itvOLF/15050_itvOLF_eng.html (Accessed 20 July 2009). International Federation for Human Rights, *Arbitrary detention of several individuals and risk of torture*, 13 September 2007. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/482c5bd21f.html> (accessed 12 July 2009).

intrusive surveillance inside and outside of the classroom.⁸⁸ The USSD reports that Between 2000 and 2004, the police have responded to protests from Oromo students with excessive use of force and arbitrary arrests. Hundreds of students have been held in jail for weeks or months on suspicion of supporting the OLF.⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch state that, “students who have had the misfortune to be labeled subversives by government officials have been imprisoned, tortured or expelled from school.”⁹⁰

The USSD reports “Professors and students were discouraged from taking positions not in accordance with government positions or practices”, Students were reportedly pressured to pledge allegiance to the EPRDF in order to access university or post-graduation government jobs.⁹¹ According to the USSD Teachers are pressured to closely monitor students and report to the government information about their political conduct. The Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) reported that authorities have detained teachers under the accusation of being OLF sympathizers and held them in prison for prolonged times without charges or a conviction.⁹²

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁸⁹ US Department of State, *2006 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 6 March 2007. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Suppressing Dissent: Human Rights Abuses and Political Repression in Ethiopia's Oromia Region*, 9 May 2005. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/11759/section/1> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁹¹ US Department of State, *2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 25 February 2009. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/af/119001.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

⁹² US Department of State, *2006 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, 6 March 2007. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm> (accessed 12 July 2009).

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