

## RESEARCHED AND COMPILED BY THE REFUGEE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE OF IRELAND ON THE 22 OCTOBER 2024

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### DISCLAIMER

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. All COI Query Responses are compiled in line with the Common EU Guidelines (2008) and the EUAA Methodology (2023). This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. Please refer to all documents cited.

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### COI QUERY RESPONSE

#### ETHIOPIA - INFORMATION ON MISTREATMENT OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

The *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)* in May 2024 notes that: "...the Ethiopian government continues to arbitrarily arrest Oromo activists and holding them indefinitely and incommunicado, often on fabricated charges of terrorism. Oromo students too have been detained and jailed without trial for their political beliefs and ethnicity."<sup>1</sup> This same document further states that: In March 2024, the UNPO submitted a report to the UN OHCHR's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention raising concerns regarding the arbitrary arrest and detention of seven (7) OLF leadership members by police, special forces, and various state authorities of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The maltreatment of these seven individuals is indicative of a wider trend of behaviour against members of the Oromo community by the Ethiopian Government, and we request that this trend is taken into account and addressed as part of Ethiopia's 2024 UPR. Gada Gabisa Abdisa, Kenasa Ayana Alabe, Michael Boran Iticha, Abdi Regassa Kopessa, Gada Oljira Gobana, Qajela Lammi Begna, Hundessa Dawit Abdeta were each arrested between February and December 2020 without a warrant on false charges and brought into custody by state authorities including the Ethiopian federal police, the Oromia police, and the Oromia special forces. Since their initial arrest, they have undergone several transfers between different prisons and detention centers, without it being possible to always keep track of their movement and confirm their safety. They have each been kept in custody for 30 months or more. To this day, they remain detained incommunicado –that is being denied access to relatives, a lawyer, or an independent doctor– and under precarious, unsanitary conditions. Since their initial date of arrest, several district courts as well as the Oromia Supreme Court and Federal Supreme Court have waived the charges against each of the seven detainees, ordering their immediate release. However, the relevant authorities have blatantly ignored these court orders and have either kept these individuals in custody or re-arrested

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2 May 2024) The Oromo People in Ethiopia (Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review)

them shortly after their initial release.”<sup>2</sup> The document also mentioned that: “... it is important to note Gada Gabisa Abdisa, Kenasa Ayana Alabe, Abdi Regassa Kopessa, and Gada Oljira Gobana all suffer from severe health conditions (further details available on each individual's respective questionnaire); some prior to their arrest, but some directly resulting from the conditions of their detention as they are being held in cramped, unsanitary spaces.”<sup>3</sup> The document further points out that: “In Ethiopia, the police forces are still able to arrest a person at any time, in any place, without any legal basis or warrant authorising their actions. This is further evidenced by the arrests of seven political opponents throughout 2020 and 2021 (see para 14-17). These activists have been arrested and detained for 3 years in conditions that clearly violate human rights standards. In recent years, high-school and college students have been central to peaceful demonstrations against the Ethiopian government. They have consequently been targeted by the government, which has led to the closing of several schools, the arbitrary arrests of students and teachers and the inhumane treatment of detainees.”<sup>4</sup>

The *Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO)* in May 2024 mentioned that: “In March 2024, the UNPO submitted a report to the UN OHCHR's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention raising concerns regarding the arbitrary arrest and detention of seven (7) OLF leadership members by police, special forces, and various state authorities of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The maltreatment of these seven individuals is indicative of a wider trend of behaviour against members of the Oromo community by the Ethiopian Government, and we request that this trend is taken into account and addressed as part of Ethiopia's 2024 UPR. Gada Gabisa Abdisa, Kenasa Ayana Alabe, Michael Boran Iticha, Abdi Regassa Kopessa, Gada Oljira Gobana, Qajela Lammi Begna, Hundessa Dawit Abdeta were each arrested between February and December 2020 without a warrant on false charges and brought into custody by state authorities including the Ethiopian federal police, the Oromia police, and the Oromia special forces. Since their initial arrest, they have undergone several transfers between different prisons and detention centers, without it being possible to always keep track of their movement and confirm their safety. They have each been kept in custody for 30 months or more. To this day, they remain detained incommunicado –that is being denied access to relatives, a lawyer, or an independent doctor– and under precarious, unsanitary conditions. Since their initial date of arrest, several district courts as well as the Oromia Supreme Court and Federal Supreme Court have waived the charges against each of the seven detainees, ordering their immediate release. However, the relevant authorities have blatantly ignored these court orders and have either kept these individuals in custody or re-arrested them shortly after their initial release.”<sup>5</sup> This document further mentioned that: “Additionally, it is important to note Gada Gabisa Abdisa, Kenasa Ayana Alabe, Abdi Regassa Kopessa, and Gada Oljira Gobana all suffer from severe health conditions (further details available on each individual's respective questionnaire); some prior to their arrest, but some directly resulting from the conditions of their detention as they are being held in cramped, unsanitary spaces.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) (2 May 2024) *The Oromo People in Ethiopia* (Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review)

<sup>6</sup> ibid

The *US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* in April 2024 under the heading “Political Prisoners and Detainees” points out that: “On July 24, HRW called for immediate release of seven Oromo opposition figures arbitrarily detained for three years due to the government's repeated violation of due process and court orders. HRW stated the government kept Abdi Regassa, Dawit Abdeta, Lammi Begna, Michael Boran, Kenessa Ayana, Gaada Oljira, and Gaada Gebissa in a prolonged and unlawful detention despite several judicial orders directing their release. HRW stated authorities of the Oromia police repeatedly violated the detainees' due process rights, forcibly disappearing them or holding them incommunicado, denying them access to their lawyers and family members for weeks or months – at times up to eight months – and frequently moving them between makeshift and official detention sites, further hampering their families' and lawyers' access. In August media reported the arrest of political figures and elected officials including Christian Tadele, a prominent lawmaker from the National Movement of Amhara opposition party and an outspoken government critic in connection with the conflict in Amhara. The EHRC on September 1 stated it had visited 53 detainees kept in a military camp in Awash Arba, Afar Region, including Tadele, and lawmakers Yohannes Buayalew (a member of Amhara Regional Council) and Kassa Teshager (a member of the Addis Ababa City Council) who were both arrested in their constituencies and transferred to Afar Region. During the visit, detainees told the EHRC they experienced ethnic slurs and harassment during their transfer to Awash Arba. The Federal Police justified transferring detainees to the military camp due to overcrowding in the Federal Police detention center in Addis Ababa. Detainees said their families did not know their whereabouts, and the detention center was built in an extremely hot area and lacked basic services.”<sup>7</sup>

The *World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)* in April 2024 states that: “Most political prisoners have been denied of their bail rights, granted by courts of law, by the executive. This interference jeopardizes the independence of the judiciary and exacerbates torture and inhuman treatment.”<sup>8</sup>

The *Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs* in March 2024 under the heading “Political Prisoners” notes that: “It was difficult to determine how many political prisoners there were during the reporting period. This was because not all sources agreed on who should be regarded as political prisoners. In any case, during the reporting period, seven leaders of the OLF remained imprisoned, despite the fact that the court had ruled that they should be released. According to a confidential source, at least ten Oromo leaders were imprisoned.”<sup>9</sup>

In February 2024 *Freedom House* reported that: “Courts remain complicit in ensuring impunity for security forces, especially in relation to the treatment of political prisoners.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> US Department of State (22 April 2024) 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Ethiopia

<sup>8</sup> World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) (15 April 2024) Broken promises: escalating human rights violations in Ethiopia, p.8

<sup>9</sup> Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (15 March 2024) General Country of Origin Information Report on Ethiopia (January 2024), p.35

<sup>10</sup> Freedom House (29 February 2024) Freedom in the World 2024: Ethiopia

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