



## ***Press release***

Addis Ababa, 27 Jan 2020

### **Ethiopia should rescue the Kidnapped Female University Students in Oromia region**

It has been nearly two months since 18 University students who were on their way back home from Dembi Dolo University were kidnapped, in Oromia region. Among these, 14 are female students. Different sources including one of the captives escaped confirmed this fact in her interview with BBC Amharic. In early of December, some of the victims contacted their families through phone in the first week of the kidnapping. However, ever since no one heard from them. Some parents stated that even if they went to the University they could not find their children. Various sources including one of the students that escaped the abduction revealed that the students were taken hostages by gunmen in Western Oromia region.

To the worst, the government waited more than a month to acknowledge the abduction. On January 11 the Prime Minister office Press Secretariat head told to EBC that 13 female and 8 male kidnapped were released following continuous negotiations in which elders and members of the Ministry of Defense were involved. The spokesperson added that the government is negotiating for the release of the remaining 6 students under kidnap. Nevertheless, the parents of captives said they have not seen or heard of anything about their children yet. The government also keeps silent on the issue. This puts the statement made by the government about the release of the students in big doubt. Attempts by the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) for the how-about of the *freed students*, as claimed by the Secretariat, did not get any response from the government of Ethiopia.

On the other hand, Ethiopia is a country that ratified almost all international and regional human rights instruments recognizing women's rights. The government also recognizes women's rights under its national laws and has been taking measures in promoting gender equality in the country. "Abiy's administration has been appreciated for filling half of its cabinet with women and bringing more women to power. But, with regard to the abducted girls, in its silence, it is violating tremendous number of their

human rights including their right to be free from violence recognized under the human rights instruments it ratified and also provided under its national laws,” says Yared Hailemariam, Executive Director of Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia. “Ethiopian authority has failed to protect the victims from the abduction and to take necessary measures to bring them back.”

Ethiopian woman Lawyers Association (EWLA) has been following the case since we heard about the situation. Following the statement of the press secretariat, the office sent letters to concerned institutions demanding clear information on the status of the female abductees. In addition to that, we reach out the families of the abductees and gather various evidences concerning the case. However, none responded to the matter and prefer to remain silent thus we can't get genuine information from the officials.

Lensa Biyena, Executive Director of EWLA, said “EWLA strictly condemned such acts and urge the government to pay due attention to women on such scenario. Also, the office demands the government to work on the realization of rule of law in the country”.

Since the beginning of this academic year, there has been growing insecurity at Universities across the country, especially in those located in Amhara and Oromia regional states. The government acknowledged that 35,000 students fled disturbances at 16 Universities. “We heard about the situation by the end of December 2019 and we tried to verify it. However, we were not yet able to make public statements because the issue was not yet confirmed by the government, and still there are political groups that disclaim about the situation. Whatsoever the case may be, the government is duty bound to protect the rights of its citizens and give information to the public about the situation, who the kidnapers are, what legal measures are being taken, and what the concerned government bodies are doing.” said Mesud Gebeyehu, Executive Director of the Consortium of Ethiopian Human Rights Organizations (CEHRO). Mesud added that “....these days, we are observing an increase of human rights violations in the country and we urge the government, non-state actors as well as the international community to work on this.”

We the undersigned CSOs, Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia, Consortium of Ethiopia Human Rights Organization, Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, and Ethiopian Initiative for Human Rights are deeply concerned about the whereabouts of the kidnapped female students and their wellbeing as well as the freedom of movement situation in the country. Therefore, we call up on the Ethiopian government to be due diligent to expose the status of the students kidnapped and bring perpetrators to justice.

Attention:

- FDRE Office of Prime Minister
- FDRE Office of the President
- Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
- Ministry of Peace
- Ministry of Defense
- UN Human Rights Commission
- UN Special Rapporteur on Violation Against Women
- African Commission on Human and People's Right
- European Commission of Human Rights
- Denbidolo University

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