



October 28, 2017

## Ethiopia: Political prisoners and their accounts of Torture

### Part One

Association for Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE) is deeply concerned about the ongoing and consistent allegations concerning the use of torture, ill-treatments, and harsh prison condition in Ethiopia against opposition party members, journalists, human rights activist, other political dissidents and terrorism suspects by security forces. AHRE has received numerous reports of torture during in a pre-trial police interrogation and during the trial period.

In violation of its constitutional and international obligations, the Ethiopian authorities have consistently subjected political dissidents to unlawful detention, torture and other ill-treatments. In many occasions, prisoners have testified countless allegations of torture particularly at the notorious detention centre, Federal Police's Central Investigation Bureau, better known as *Maekelawi*, in Addis Ababa.

Local and international human rights institutions have produced several reports of maltreatment of Ethiopian prisoners amounting to torture and other inhuman treatments.<sup>1</sup> Association of Human Rights in Ethiopia (AHRE) has gathered testimonies of torture and other inhuman and illegal treatments of prisoners in detention centres, prisons, military camps, and other undisclosed areas. We are sharing five of the testimonies below.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/10/18/ethiopia-political-detainees-tortured>

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1. **Zeray Azmeraw Geletaw; age 32, a farmer and resident of Amhara Regional State of Northern Gonder Zone, Dabat Woreda, Ganora Kebele.**

**Charges: (fourth defendant under file name Kindu Dube et al.)** Contravening of article 32 32(1) A of the 2004 Penal Code and anti-terrorism proclamation 652/2009:

**Charge description:** for being a member of the outlawed *Ginbot 7*; recruiting members; joining a Guerrilla militia in Dabat town of Northern Gonder; leading the militia; engaging in armed conflict with Ethiopia's military; detonating explosive in Gonder.

**Zeray's testimonies:** "I am a farmer in Dabat town of Gonder, Amhara Regional State of Ethiopia. I was arrested on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017 and was taken to Gonder Intelligence office. The officials there severely beat me for three consecutive days before moving me to Addis Ababa that left a permanent scar on my back. Here in Addis Ababa, I have spent two months in *Maekelawi* prison; they put me in "Siberia" (named so because of its freezing temperature; the worst block of the three blocks of *Maekelawi*) where I was interrogated and was forced to confess. After my confession, I was then transferred to 'Sheraton (prisoners in this block have more freedom).

However, they sent me back to cell number 8 (a very small dark detention room) soon after. That same night, they called me for interrogation. There were several officers in the room; they said that I was hiding something from them and demanded that I tell them everything. I told them there was nothing that I had not told them, but they did not believe me.

The officers encircled me, and I stood in the centre. I recognized one of the interrogators who was standing behind me; he was one of the officers who interrogated me few days before. This time, he was wearing a thobe; I noticed when I entered that he was holding something in his hand, and was trying to hide it by putting his hand behind his back.

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I don't remember what happened next. I woke up the next morning and thought the whole thing was a dream. Prisoners in the adjoining cell told me that someone carried me back to my cell that night. My whole body was shaking; the prisoners checked my whole body and saw a tiny circle bruise on my back, there were no other marks. My body kept shaking uncontrollably, so security guards and few prisoners carried me to the prison clinic which then wrote a referral to another hospital. I was taken to Police Hospital, and remained there from March 28<sup>th</sup> to April 25<sup>th</sup>. I couldn't move myself for several days in the hospital, and suffered from neurological complications. I still take medications twice a day. The more I think about that fateful day, the more I'm convinced that the officer with something in his hand, had electrocuted me on my back which has left me with a nerve disease, a permanent scar and a regular headache. “

N.B Mr. Zeray is still in prison and his case, along with nine other defendants, is still active.

**2. Tesfaye Liben: age 42, a teacher and resident of Oromia Regional State, South West Shewa, Woliso town, Kebele.**



**Charges:** *(12<sup>th</sup> defendant under the file name Gurmessa Ayana.)* contravening Article 4 (later changed to Article 7(1)) of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation.

**Charge description:** Becoming a member of the outlawed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), listed as a terrorist organisation; working to spread the protests from *Ginchi* Zone in Western Shewa to Southern Shewa; leading the protest in Southern Shewa.

**Tesfaye's testimonies:** “I was originally detained in Woliso Police Station, where a group of individuals wearing a federal uniform and a civil attire brutally beat me with their sticks and rubber button. They just kept on beating me; it was so severe that I finally passed out. I woke up

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the next morning, and did not remember what happened to me. They were surprised that I survived when they saw me the next day. Then they sent me to *Maekelawi* prison in Addis Ababa. I was beaten, tortured, made to do a heavy physical exercise for 43 successive days. As I was doing the exercise, they kicked my back and my feet with their boots. They used their fists, their boots, electric wire, and their rubber batons to beat me. It was so excruciating and beyond anyone can bear. There was a time I tried to kill myself.

After a while, I went for a hearing at Arada First Instance Court; and I took off my clothes and showed the wounds on my body to the judge. He just advised me to admit everything before they kill me, and that I could later deny and tell the court it was a forced confession when my file is officially open. That's exactly what I did that night; I confessed to everything they alleged I did. They then immediately moved me from 'Dark Room' to 'Sheraton' “.

N.B Mr. Tesfaye was arrested on November 2015 following Oromo Protests. Prosecutors later filed charges against him and 21 other defendants on April 2016; the case is still ongoing.

### **3. Birhane Tsegaye: age 25 and member of Tigray Peoples' Democratic Movement (TPDM)**

**Charges:** (2<sup>nd</sup> defendant under the file name of Kassahun Shege et al.) For contravening article 7(2) of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (652/2009)

**Charge Descriptions:** Becoming a member of the terror group Tigray Peoples' Democratic Movement (TPDM), which jointly works with the proclaimed terrorist organization *Ginbot 7*; receiving trainings, and engaging in physical work to raise funds for the terrorist organisation; recruiting members from Sudan and Ethiopia; entering in Ethiopia through Humera, where upon he was captured, with a mission to destroy governmental and not governmental institutions.

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**Birhane's Testimonies:** "I confessed that I defected TPDM and returned to Ethiopia to plea clemency, but they did not believe me. They demanded that I confess to alleged crimes I did not commit, and violently beat me when I refused. They used electric wire, rubber batons and other things; it was so painful and excruciating. They tied a water bottle on my penis and tortured me. I was very sick for many days. They refused to provide medical treatment alleging that as an ethnic Tigrean, I should have never been a member of a terrorist organization, and denying medical treatment was my punishment. "

**N.B** Birhane was captured on February 2015, but formal prosecutions opened after 15 months on 29.07.2016 against him one other person on the same file. Their case is still pending.

**4. Ferede Kindshato Yirga: Age 21, a farmer and resident of Western Tigray, Tegede Woreda.**

**Charges:** (74<sup>th</sup> defendant under the file name of *Miftah Sheik Surur et al.*) Contravening of articles 32/1/ A, 35, 38/1/ and /2/ of the 2004 Penal Code and anti-terrorism proclamation 652/2009:

**Charge Descriptions:** Receiving political and guerrilla warfare trainings from the high officials of the outlawed *Ginbot 7* terrorist group and entering in Ethiopia; making the state of emergency ineffective; recruiting and organizing members; planning, preparing, conspiring, and motivating to undertake a terrorist act in *Quara* military camp.

**Ferede's Testimony:** "They apprehended me on November 18, 2016 while I was returning from a farm. They drove me to *Dansha* and beat me, and later took me somewhere far. They threw me into a deep pit and kept me tied with a rope with no food or water. Then they took me to a military camp in Humera, tied my hands and left me outside in a hot burning day. They came after several hours and started beating me with a rubber baton; it was unbearable. They hit my reproductive organs with their boots which left me with agonizing pain for several days. I was so

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weak and hurt to move anywhere, so they kept me in Bahir Dar for a while before bringing me to Addis Ababa.

I was finally transferred to Addis Ababa; I have been detained in different prisons. Despite my deteriorating conditions, *Qilinto* Prison official denied me medical treatment for three months. Finally, I was allowed to get treatment after I was moved to *Kaliti* Prison; I was then treated at *Kaliti* Health Centre. My condition was very critical, so I was admitted at Police Hospital. I had a surgery because the beating had severely damaged my belly and my reproductive organs. I am now an out-patient at Police Hospital.”

**5. Ayele Beyene Negese: age 29**, a resident and Executive Committee member of Addis Ababa, Nifas-Silk Lafto Sub-City, Woreda 10.



**Charges:** (2<sup>nd</sup> defendant under the file name Melkamu Kinfu et al.) Contravening article 32/1/A/B of and 38 of the Penal Code and article 7/1 of anti-terrorism proclamation 652/2008

**Charge description:** becoming a member of the outlawed terrorist organization Oromo Liberation Front; receiving email instruction how to sustain the violence in Oromia region and how to buy armaments, and disseminate the information to other terror members for discussion; and reporting recent development such as notifying OLF members to take caution; reporting the meeting held at Oromo Cultural Center and the activities in Kolfe Qeranio Sub-city.

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**His wife's testimonies** "Ayele had an appointment on July 7, 2017; I was also there. He raised his hands for complaints, but the court refused. The next day, Saturday, I went to *Qilinto* to see him. His neck and chin were covered with a towel when he came; he told me he had a tooth ache. He was very sick when I visited him on Monday July 10, 2017. I went back the next day, but his brother Bonsa (a third defendant on the same file) came and told me that Ayele was too sick to come and talk to me. The *Qilinto* health center had already sent him a referral on Monday, but the prison officials refused to take him to a hospital.

On Thursday July 13, I talked to the prison officials, but they told me they have no sick patients in their premise. I insisted and told them I would not leave their office unless I heard how he was. Later, they confirmed he was admitted in the clinic. He had a scheduled court appearance the next day, but he did not come. I went straight to *Qilinto*; after a lot of bargaining, the officials pointed to a car from a distance and told me he was being taken to *Kaliti* Clinic.

I went to *Kaliti* on Saturday, July 15. I saw that his chest and neck had swollen; he could not talk. I asked him what had happened. He wrote on a piece of paper that he was beaten. He could not tell me where, how, or by whom; he promised he would tell me everything once he feels better. There was a bucket in the room that had blood in it. When I asked he wrote that it was coming from his aching tooth, but I was confused because it was too much blood.

The next day, Sunday, he was still spitting blood when I went to see him. But despite affirmation the health professionals, I just couldn't believe all that blood was came from a toothache. His phlegm was also filled with blood, I thought to myself that it had to be something more serious. On Monday July 17, I got a permission to nurse him day and night. On Wednesday, I saw blood in his urine which I did not notice before. On Thursday July 20, he had a surgery because the swelling and the pain got worse. That day, he was transferred to St. Paul Hospital because the doctors at *Kaliti* could no longer help him.

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The doctors at St. Paul were shocked when they saw the blood and ultrasound result and asked if he was beaten. The ultrasound showed that one of his kidneys was not functioning, and the second one was also malfunctioning because of his complicated ailment. They told me that, this could be due to accident or physical beating.

On Saturday July 22, he was transferred to Kidney treatment ward. They said he needed to have dialysis treatment, but they did not have the machine. They told me I should take him to a private hospital that has the machine as soon as possible, but the police officers refused. I begged them a lot, but they would not give in. We couldn't do anything; the doctors at St. Paul didn't have the means to treat him, so they could not. He died the next day; he died simply because he was denied better treatment. He had always been healthy and fit, his death is entirely due to his abuse at the prison and lack of medical treatment."

**N.B** Despite the court's orders, the prison administration did not provide written document detailing the cause of Ayele's death. A prison official told the criminal bench on October 7, 2017 that she had no information about a deceased prisoner.

### **Recommendations:**

AHRE urges the Ethiopian authorities to fully comply with its constitutional and international legal obligations and commitments including under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment that Ethiopia has ratified.

AHRE urges the international community, particularly the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, to urgently demand the Ethiopian authorities to comply to UN standards and agreements Ethiopia has signed and to the country's own constitution regarding treatment of prisoners. We also urge the Special Rapporteur to conduct fact-finding country visits in Ethiopia.

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