

## THE ADVOCATES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

### **Official Statement regarding the Ethiopia Government's Crackdown on Oromo Student Protests**

The Advocates for Human Rights remains deeply concerned about the continuation of the Ethiopian government's brutal crackdown on students protesting in Oromia Regional State, particularly in light of recent information provided to us about the arrest on May 27, 2014 of ten Haramaya University students. Witnesses said that the students were arrested without warrant by federal police and taken from their dormitories to an unknown location. They reportedly remain detained incommunicado without charge or trial. One of the students, a second year electrical engineering student, died on June 1, 2014 while in government custody, reportedly after collapsing while being tortured.

On April 25, 2014, students began protesting the Ethiopian government's plan to expand the territory of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital city; the plan would in effect annex thousands of hectares of Oromia's fertile agricultural lands. Oromo students sounded the alarm about the plan, recognizing that it would displace Oromo farmers and leave them without a livelihood or access to their traditional lands.

Since April, The Advocates has been deeply involved in monitoring the Ethiopian government's crackdown on Oromo students. The government controls the media and telecommunications in Ethiopia, effectively strangling any open debate and criticism of the government. The government has gone to great lengths to keep the story quiet about what is happening to Oromo students. For example, The Advocates received reports that students at Madawalabu University in Bale Robe were unable to get the word out that the military had started beating students who were demonstrating because cell phone and internet service had been turned off.

Also, [Oromia Media Network \(OMN\)](#), a Minnesota-based satellite news network that has been covering the student protests, [reported](#) that on May 2, the Ethiopian government blocked access to its website, and on May 13, began jamming OMN's satellite transmission. The station found a way to resume broadcasting, but was jammed again in late May. The jamming has been condemned by the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and other major international news stations who have been affected by it (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2014/ethiopian-broadcast-jamming>). A U.S.-based reporter also told us that hospital personnel in Ethiopia refused to speak to him about casualties, fearing for their jobs.

But the Ethiopian government is incapable of eradicating the close ties between the Oromo diaspora and Oromos in Ethiopia, and those ties have become a lifeline to get the word out. "Contacts with family and friends of the Oromo students who have been arrested and injured reveal a grim picture of the Ethiopian government's use of arbitrary arrest, detention and excessive force against protesters," said Jennifer Prestholdt, deputy director of The Advocates.

In addition to the information reported to The Advocates about the May 27 mass arrest of ten students, detailed information has been provided to us about more than 270 Oromos who have

been arbitrarily arrested in Ethiopia since April 25. While most are university students and teachers, some of those arrested and injured include high school and junior high school students – some as young as 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Based on this information, The Advocates will be submitting an Urgent Appeal on behalf of the students to the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention.

The Advocates for Human Rights calls on the Ethiopian government to immediately release the students and others arbitrarily arrested during the protests. The government must investigate and hold accountable security officials who are responsible for human rights abuses. The Advocates also calls upon the Ethiopian government to grant the outstanding requests for country visits from the United Nations [Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression](#), the [Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education](#), the [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#), and the [Special Rapporteur on Torture](#).

The Advocates has worked for more than 30 years advancing human rights throughout the world. Headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota—referred to by the Oromo as “Little Oromia” because it is reportedly home to the largest population of Oromo outside of Ethiopia—The Advocates has worked extensively with members of the Oromo diaspora. Since 2004, The Advocates has documented reports from members of the Oromo ethnic group living in diaspora in the United States of human rights abuses they and their friends and family experienced in Ethiopia.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> See The Advocates for Human Rights, *Human Rights in Ethiopia: Through the Eyes of the Oromo Diaspora* (December 2009), available at [http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/oromo\\_report\\_2009\\_color.pdf](http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/oromo_report_2009_color.pdf).