



350 Fifth Ave 34th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10118-3299
<http://www.hrw.org>
(212) 290-4700

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Some of us have been made heroes by the government, not that we intended to be heroes. And we have paid for it. . . . Seeing this, the public is scared. Even our friends are scared to talk to us. You can see how this affects freedom of speech! . . . [The government] should know better, having gone through the same thing before themselves [when the TPLF started as a student movement].

— Professor who was summarily fired in 1993, July 15, 2002.

ETHIOPIA LESSONS IN REPRESSION: VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN ETHIOPIA

1630 Connecticut Ave, N.W., Suite 500
Washington, DC 20009
TEL (202) 612-4321
FAX (202) 612-4333
E-mail: hrwdc@hrw.org

2nd Floor, 2-12 Pentonville Road
London N1 9HF, UK
TEL: (44 20) 7713 1995
FAX: (44 20) 7713 1800
E-mail: hrwuk@hrw.org

15 Rue Van Campenhout
1000 Brussels, Belgium
TEL (32 2) 732-2009
FAX (32 2) 732-0471
E-mail: hrwbe@hrw.org

ETHIOPIA

LESSONS IN REPRESSION: VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN ETHIOPIA

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ETHIOPIA: TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS AND ASSAULTS ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM SINCE 1991

1991 — The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) toppled the Derg military regime which had been responsible for the Red Terror, ending a decade of civil war and promising freedom and respect for human rights.

1992 — The EPRDF government began to target the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (ETA) for harassment after the association suggested reforms to the educational system. In the years to come, government tactics would include repeated discrimination against and arbitrary arrests of ETA leaders and sympathizers, assassination of a leading member in 1997, and confiscation of the organization’s assets.

January 4, 1993 — Students at Addis Ababa University (AAU) took to the streets in protest of a planned referendum on Eritrean independence. Security forces fired live ammunition into the crowd of unarmed students and beat and arrested large numbers of students.

April 1993 — AAU summarily dismissed more than forty professors who had been critical of the government. Several of them have since been repeated victims of arbitrary arrest and intimidation. Ten years later, intellectuals continue to cite the “chilling effect” these firings have had on academic freedom.

1996 — Arrests of ETA leaders Shimalis Zewdie and Dr. Taye Woldesmayat.

May 1997 — Assefa Maru, acting director of the ETA, gunned down by police. No proper investigation of the killing has ensued.

1998 – 2000 — Border war with Eritrea.

February – March 2000 — Arrests of Oromo AAU students protesting government failure to extinguish forest fires. High school students also protested; one was killed and up to 300 were arrested.

October 2000 — Oromo students protested the move of the capital of Oromia state from Addis Ababa to Nazret, leading to the arrests of at least four students.

December 2000 — Police responded violently to students protesting living conditions at Awassa Teachers College. Students were beaten and arrested.

December 20, 2000 — AAU students were arrested and beaten after a fight erupted when a Tigrean student used the word “galla,” a derogatory word for Oromos. A series of related incidents followed in colleges and universities across the country.

April 2001 — AAU students went on strike demanding academic freedom, including the rights to organize a student union and publish a student newspaper and removal of armed uniformed police from campus. Government forces killed some forty students and other civilians and arrested thousands, some of whom were tortured. High school, college, and university students around the country demonstrated in solidarity, and police responded to these demonstrations with excessive violence as well.

September 2001 — Government police on AAU campus were replaced by private security guards. The government did not remove other barriers to freedom of association and expression for members of the university community.

February 2002 — Government security forces disrupted an ETA conference on education for all and HIV/AIDS. More than forty teachers were arrested for attending the meeting.

March 11, 2002 — Minority groups clashed with local officials in Tepi over political rights leading to the deaths of at least eighteen civilians and one official. In the following days more than one hundred were killed, several villages reportedly were razed to the ground on the order of local authorities, and nearly one thousand civilians were arrested.

March 2002 — Oromia high school students protested against economic and educational policies. Security forces killed five students, wounded others, and arrested hundreds.

April 2002 — Students returned to AAU one year after the campus strike, agreeing to drop their demands for academic freedom.

May 24, 2002 — Government forces killed seventeen civilians protesting change in the administrative status of Awassa.

July – August 2002 — All teachers and university instructors underwent a mandatory seminar on “capacity building” at which government officials instructed them to teach their students to be good cadres and to disassociate themselves from the ETA.

December 2002 — Top administrators at AAU and at least five professors resigned after complaining that the government was using performance evaluations to interfere with university autonomy. The government had yet to promulgate a university charter granting the university autonomy despite repeated promises to do so since coming to power in 1991.

I. SUMMARY

Being educated can be a risky business in Ethiopia. Students and teachers, often among the most politically active elements of society, are frequent victims of human rights violations including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrest, and denial of freedom of association and expression. Ethiopian leaders since Haile Selassie have targeted the academic community; the current government's continuation of such abusive practices emphasizes the serious obstacles facing Ethiopia before basic rights are respected and enforced not only on university campuses but across the country.

This report focuses on three major abuses: repeated, unjustified use of lethal force by security forces to put down political protests by students; continued repression of the independent Ethiopian Teachers' Association, whose members include many of Ethiopia's most distinguished professors; and the stifling of independent thought through denial of university autonomy and government control of activities on university campuses. The government of Ethiopia, the ruling party of which has its roots in a student movement, has repeatedly failed to hold those responsible for these violations accountable.

The Ethiopian government has long enjoyed substantial international backing in spite of its human rights record. Eager to support Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, one of a generation of promising so-called new African leaders who came to power in the early 1990s in the wake of years of devastating armed conflict, the international community has been reluctant to criticize many of his government's human rights abuses. Foreign powers including the United States have said they preferred to support his efforts to bring peace. A senior State Department official told Human Rights Watch that, after the attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001, the U.S. is even less inclined to demand respect for human rights in Ethiopia because it is completely dependent on the cooperation of this strategically located country, which borders Sudan and Somalia in the horn of Africa, as an ally in the U.S. war on terrorism. Ethiopian government security forces have taken advantage of this international climate to systematically repress students, teachers, civil society organizations, and journalists.

Time and again, government security agents have used lethal force to disperse student protesters with deadly consequences. In March 2002, high school students in towns across Oromia Regional State took to the streets to protest poor economic conditions and changes in education policy. In protest after protest, state police forces used live ammunition to disperse unarmed students, resulting in five officially acknowledged deaths. In the aftermath, hundreds of people were arbitrarily arrested and detained for an average of two months. Some were tortured. Students and teachers bore the brunt of the arrests. The government dismissed a number of state officials in the wake of the protests, but they were reportedly accused of encouraging demonstrators, not of using force against them. The state president told reporters that the police had no choice but to shoot because police lack non-lethal means of controlling the crowds and that they would continue to shoot students if the students continued to misbehave.

Less than a year earlier, federal police Special Forces killed some forty civilians and arrested thousands when students at Addis Ababa University (AAU) went on strike to demand academic freedom. The university administration, ministry of education, and police commission all said publicly that the police acted illegally when they entered the campus and fired at the students. A parliamentary committee held a public inquiry into the police actions, but the government has not released any information concerning any prosecution or disciplinary measures for those responsible. Most students have since returned to class, but they have been forced to drop their demands for academic freedom. The government-dominated administration continues to ban the student union and student newspaper.

The Oromia and AAU cases vividly demonstrate the Ethiopian government's lack of respect for the rights of students and civilians to demonstrate. The government has also failed to hold accountable security forces accused of killing unarmed protesters in other cases. In June 2002, weeks after Special Forces killed at least seventeen civilian protesters in the southern town of Awassa in one of the most egregious abuses in 2002, the government claimed to have removed local officials implicated in the events. But these officials were reportedly

accused of having encouraged the demonstration in opposition to federal government policy—not of having killed unarmed protestors. Two months later, more officials were disciplined and some arrested, but diplomatic and NGO sources doubted the sincerity of the government’s actions, citing that the infraction of those being punished was actually having encouraged civilians to demonstrate.

The government has also been ruthless in repressing labor organizations, especially of teachers and their union. Teachers, who represent one of the largest organized segments of Ethiopian society, have been critical of developments in education policy. To silence their criticism, the government has sought to destroy the independent Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (ETA) for the past ten years by denying its members—the largest group of intellectuals in the country—the opportunity to meet to discuss anything, including education and politics. Tactics have included arresting many leaders and members and confiscating the association’s property and bank accounts. An ETA leader was assassinated in 1997. The government even created a new union with the same name, but teachers have maintained that the “old” ETA is their professional association. During mandatory meetings of all teachers this July (meetings the government used to instruct them on how to produce good cadres), government representatives threatened that there will be consequences for teachers who continue to support the union.

Hundreds of individual teachers who have criticized government policy have also been victims of arrest, demotion, firing, and intimidation in recent years. Eight teachers were arrested arbitrarily in Sendafa in May 2002 and detained for nearly two months. Their students wanted to protest, but officials warned them and their parents that students would be shot if they demonstrated. They called off the protest.

At AAU, the country’s largest and most important university, professors have likewise been forbidden to participate in ETA. This is part of a broader climate by the government-dominated university administration to stifle academic freedom. Threats on campus are more subtle, though. One professor said he declined to speak out during the student strike, although he was shocked that the government failed to resolve the situation before it led to so many deaths and arrests. He and other professors told Human Rights Watch that they refrain from criticizing government policies because there is no tenure in Ethiopia, and because, as government employees, all professors can be fired for speaking their minds even when they do so in their personal capacity. The government has made repeated promises to grant the university autonomy through a charter since 1991 but has yet to do so.

Educators and students are often among the first targets of governments that do not respect civil and political rights. In Ethiopia, as in many other countries, governmental power has been used to turn the educational institutions into a system that largely serves the interests of state power-holders. Academic freedom encompasses more than the freedom of professors to speak and write freely in their fields of specialization. It also recognizes the crucial role of academics as intellectual leaders of society. In countries such as Ethiopia where only a small percentage of the population completes secondary school, schoolteachers, and even high school students, are among the most educated members of society. Silencing such voices is not the way for Ethiopia, plagued by famine and insecurity, to emerge from its position as one of the poorest countries in the world.

This report is based primarily on research conducted in Ethiopia and Kenya in July 2002. Human Rights Watch researchers interviewed students, teachers, professors, members of civil society, and international diplomats. Because government surveillance is perceived to be nearly omnipresent, many people expressed fear when speaking about human rights violations. Human Rights Watch respects the confidentiality of these sources. Human Rights Watch wrote to the government of Ethiopia and the Addis Ababa University administration to solicit its response to violations we had documented but received no response.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

To Government of Ethiopia:

- Allow civilians to demonstrate peacefully in accordance with the Ethiopian constitution and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
- As a matter of urgency, provide federal and state police forces with the skills, knowledge, and equipment to respond to civil disturbances with less than lethal force and without conducting large-scale arbitrary arrests as set forth in the U.N. Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.
- Investigate and prosecute police killing of civilian demonstrators in Oromia, Tepi, and Awassa in 2002 and during the 2001 student strike.
- Prohibit military and intelligence forces from operating unnecessarily on school campuses, either to maintain ordinary security or to respond to disturbances.
- Cease the use of torture in prisons and police jails in accordance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
- Cease arbitrary arrest and other forms of intimidation of members of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association. Respect teachers' right to participate in the professional association of their choice in accordance with international covenants and principles of UNESCO and the ILO. Allow the original Ethiopian Teachers' Association to operate in accordance with the wishes of its members.
- Grant the universities autonomy through a charter.

To the AAU administration:

- Eliminate restrictions that prevent the student union and other peaceful student associations from meeting.
- Rescind the prohibition of the student newspaper *Hilina*. Allow students to have editorial control over the content of *Hilina* or other newsletters they wish to publish.
- Do not penalize students or professors for their independent political activities. The university should provide an environment that encourages activism and critical thought rather than an environment that requires self-censorship.
- Institute a system, such as tenure, that allows professors to exercise their intellectual freedom without fear their contracts will be terminated or that they will be subject to administrative penalties. Political considerations must not play a role in hiring or firing decisions.
- Ensure that university rules and regulations for the dismissal of any students and instructors are followed and that those affected are entitled to due process. Reinstate fourteen students who were summarily dismissed from the university from in 2002.

To international donors:

- Use your leverage to hold the government of Ethiopia accountable for the human rights violations it commits and to demand an end to impunity in Ethiopia. Denounce violations of human rights against students and teachers, as well as against others. The fact that Ethiopia is now a partner in the "war on terrorism" makes it even more crucial to demand respect for human rights.

- Pressure the government of Ethiopia to ensure that security forces respond to civilian disturbances with less than lethal force and are held accountable for their actions.
- Include support for academic freedom and human rights education in educational assistance programming.
- Conduct an evaluation of the state of academic freedom in Ethiopia.

III. BACKGROUND

Ethiopia is, by all accounts, a troubled country. It is one of the poorest countries in the world.¹ In a region known for recurrent famines, failed rains in some areas and a global decline in the price of coffee led to yet another humanitarian disaster in late 2002. With a population of nearly 65 million, Ethiopia is home to more than eighty ethnic groups. The country is still reeling from the negative effects of its 1998-2000 border war with Eritrea. Its neighbors in the Horn of Africa including Sudan and Somalia are hotbeds of insecurity.

The government of Ethiopia has failed to meet the basic needs of its population, to protect civilians from ethnic or communal violence, and to impose accountability for human rights violations. Political leaders have long sought to control and suppress members of the political opposition, journalists, intellectuals, and members of certain ethnic groups. Students and teachers have been victims of repeated human rights abuses since the present government came to power as well as under previous regimes.

Governance in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is the oldest independent country in Africa. Despite a brief period of Italian occupation, it was never colonized by Europeans. The current government, led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), came to power in 1991 in an atmosphere of great hope, ending a decade of civil war and overthrowing dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam. A coalition of armed groups, including the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), both ideologically driven Marxist organizations, banded together to overthrow Mengistu's "Derg" (an Amharic word meaning committee), which had been in power since 1974. The Derg was responsible for human rights violations on an enormous scale including the torture, murder, and "disappearance" of tens of thousands of Ethiopians during the 1976-1978 period dubbed the Red Terror. The Derg continued to commit widespread violations of human rights until its defeat in 1991.² Prior to the Derg, Emperor Haile Selassie ruled the country for more than forty years. His imperial rule was also characterized by widespread human rights abuses, autocratic control of the legislature and judiciary, and maintenance of an essentially feudal system in the countryside.

The EPRDF shepherded Ethiopia through a four-year transition culminating in the adoption of a constitution that has been praised internationally for its progressiveness and the holding of national elections.³ Having shed its Marxist ideology to win the favor of international donors, the EPRDF, under the leadership of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, now cites the promotion of "revolutionary democracy" and "ethnic federalism" as its major policy goals. In 2001, a new ministry was created to oversee an extensive program of capacity-building that aims to provide citizens and civil servants with the skills and knowledge necessary for sustainable

¹ Ethiopia was ranked sixth from the bottom in 2002. United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening democracy in a fragmented world*, July 2002.

² Africa Watch (now the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch), *Evil Days* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991). Thousands of people who were government officials under the Derg are currently in prison; some have been tried for crimes of genocide and other human rights violations. For an analysis of the prosecutions, see Human Rights Watch/Africa, "Ethiopia: Reckoning under the Law," *A Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol. 6 No. 11, December 1994. At least 600 remain in pretrial detention, although the Federal High Court has announced plans to complete their trials by September 2003. "Court to Reach Verdict on All Genocide Charges This Year," *Ethiopian News Agency*, October 2, 2002.

³ See Theodore M. Vestal, *Ethiopia: A Post-Cold War African State* (Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT: 1999), Chapter 9 "An Analysis of the Constitution of the FDRE." On the transition more generally, see Part I: "The Transition Period, 1991-1995."

development.⁴ Under article 39 of the Ethiopian constitution, which enshrines the policy of ethnic federalism, each “nation, nationality, or people” is entitled to self-government and the possibility of secession.⁵

The TPLF-dominated central government claims that its guiding principles are democracy, development, and minority rights, but maintains a tight grip over diverse segments of society and all potential political opponents. The government has enshrined ostensibly democratic institutions at local, regional, and national levels, but, in reality, party cadres remain in control.⁶ International advisors say that, for example, political decentralization, ostensibly meant to ensure democratic decision-making at local levels, has in fact been carefully crafted by the central government to ensure effective federal (and ruling party) control of regional and local government institutions.⁷ International observers have cited widespread interference and manipulation, including some political killings, in recent national and local elections. Some opposition parties boycotted the elections to protest a perceived uneven playing field.⁸

Foreign diplomats, aid workers, and members of civil society complain of a lack of transparency among security forces—for example, high level officials may denounce human rights violations but do not reveal who ordered them—which makes it extremely difficult to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable. One described forcible roundups of street children in June 2002 as an example. A police officer reportedly told one youth while abducting him, “You are an insult to the nation. The country should be cleansed of you. You should be devoured by the hyenas.”⁹ Sources in the police reportedly confirmed that police did in fact round up children and adults on the street and dump them in a forest. However, these sources were not able to ascertain who had ordered the roundup or why.¹⁰ Similarly, senior government officials including the minister of education and chief of police denounced the fact that police entered the AAU campus and attacked students there during the April 2001 strike. Yet, as discussed below, a parliamentary committee of inquiry at which they testified failed to ascertain who was responsible for the police actions and no one is known to have been held accountable.

Lawyers, journalists, human rights activists, and diplomats interviewed for this report alleged that the executive branch continues to exert decisive influence over the judiciary. Human Rights Watch documented the problems facing the judiciary and political manipulations thereof in a 1997 report.¹¹ Although the U.S. State Department’s report on human rights conditions in Ethiopia in 2001 said the judiciary had begun to show “signs of independence,”¹² an official with the department’s Bureau of Democracy, Rights, and Labor noted that the judiciary continues to be frequently manipulated.¹³ Research for this report confirmed that conclusion. Human Rights Watch documented several cases of judges who repeatedly adjourned hearings to allow police to investigate while detainees remained in prison on seemingly political grounds without charge. For example,

⁴ See, Government of Ethiopia, *The Program for Capacity Building Strategy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*, 2002 (in Amharic). Under this rubric, the government organized mandatory capacity-building workshops for all teachers in July and August 2002. As discussed below, teachers and university professors interviewed for this report said they perceived the workshops as a forum for government and party officials to indoctrinate teachers, coerce them to join EPRDF political parties, and pressure them to cease independent political activities and renounce membership in the professional association of their choice.

⁵ Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

⁶ “Synopsis of the Book: *Ethiopia Since the Derg: A Decade of Democratic Pretension and Performance*, Edited by Siegfried Pausewang, Kjetil Tronvoll and Lovise Aalen,” *The Addis Tribune*, December 20, 2002.

⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 14, 2002 and New York, October 9, 2002.

⁸ See, e.g., Siegfried Pausewang and Lovise Aalen, “Ethiopia 2001: Local elections in the southern region,” University of Oslo, Nordem Report 03/2002; Kjetil Tronvoll and Siegfried Pausewang (ed.), *The Ethiopian 2000 Elections: Democracy advanced or restricted?* (Norwegian Institute of Human Rights 2001); U.S. Department of State, “Ethiopia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2001,” March 2002, available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8372.htm> (retrieved September 30, 2002).

⁹ Ethiopian Human Rights Council, “Put a Halt to Violations of People on the Streets,” 52nd Special Report, July 1, 2002.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

¹¹ See Human Rights Watch, “Curtailed Rights,” *A Human Rights Watch Report* (New York: December 1997), pp. 9-12.

¹² U.S. Department of State, “Ethiopia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2001.”

¹³ Human Rights Watch interview, Washington, D.C., September 20, 2002.

police arrested an Addis Ababa businesswoman, Dinkinesh Deressa, in early June on accusations she had transported documents of the banned Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) in her car. She appeared in court five times over two months before the local court ordered her release for lack of evidence. Two days after her release on bail, she was rearrested in another district. As of December 2002, she was still in prison.¹⁴ Similar cases of the judiciary's complicity in arbitrary detentions following student demonstrations, including the prolonged illegal detention of a child younger than fifteen, are documented below.

Despite a professed commitment to ethnic federalism and minority rights, Tigreans, via the TPLF, remain the dominant force in Ethiopian politics and members of other ethnic groups wield little power in practice.¹⁵ The EPRDF created political parties in each regional state which are (with the exception of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS) where no ethnic group predominates) named for the majority ethnic group.¹⁶ These parties—including the TPLF, Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO), and Amhara National Development Movement (ANDM)—are members of the EPRDF coalition and are considered mere satellites of the ruling party. One observer found that the creation of these parties has done little to foster political development in some regions and that the offices of the OPDO and SEPDO were virtually deserted, in stark contrast with workers' party offices under the Derg.¹⁷ Ethiopian intellectuals interviewed for this report observed that, especially in Oromia, civilians who do not align themselves with the satellite parties risk being pegged as allied with armed insurgents or other subversive groups.

Oromia is Ethiopia's largest and most populous state and the Oromos, who constitute a majority in Oromia, account for approximately 30 percent of the national population. The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) participated in the campaign to oust the Derg and was initially part of the Transitional Government. Since the OLF split with the EPRDF in late 1991, however, it has waged an armed independence movement. Although the OLF does not appear to have the capacity to defeat the EPRDF, it has managed to serve as a persistent nuisance; in June 2002 it attacked military installations near the western border with Sudan and a fuel depot in the eastern city of Dire Dawa within the same week.¹⁸ The government has arrested thousands of Oromos suspected of collaborating with the OLF in recent years. Those who have been released or escaped and managed to flee the country have provided credible, detailed accounts of widespread and severe torture in prisons and detention facilities in Oromia.¹⁹ Many Oromos say that they have been persecuted for declining to support the OPDO and that they sympathize with the OLF because they feel marginalized by the Tigrean-dominated government, though not all of them favor independence for Oromos. Similarly, civilians in Ethiopia's Somali region are at risk of violence from the (Somali) Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF, which has been waging an armed struggle for years), the Somalia-based Al'Ittihad Al' Islami rebel organization, and the government's crackdown on suspected sympathizers of both organizations.

Friction between other ethnic groups around the country periodically results in violent clashes. The U.N. Emergencies Unit reported in July that clashes between the agriculturalist Afar and pastoralist Issas communities over access to water have exacerbated the effects of an already devastating drought in the Afar region.²⁰ Members of the Afar National Liberation Front reportedly launched an armed invasion from Eritrea in August 2002, claiming they had to defend themselves because the government of Ethiopia had teamed up with Issas and Somali groups against the Afar.²¹ At the same time, in July, fighting raged between members of the Nuer and Anuak

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 31, 2002 and, by telephone, Oslo, Norway, November 6, 2002.

¹⁵ For an analysis of ethnic federalism see, e.g., Lovise Aalen, *Ethnic Federalism in a Dominant Party State: The Ethiopian Experience* (Norway, Chr. Michelsen Institute).

¹⁶ See Human Rights Watch, "Curtailed Rights."

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, New York, October 9, 2002.

¹⁸ "Fighting on Ethiopia-Sudan Border," *BBC News*, June 26, 2002; "Ethiopia: OLF claims responsibility for bomb blast," *IRIN News*, June 26, 2002.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interviewed more than twenty torture victims who had recently fled to Nairobi, Kenya in April 2002.

²⁰ "Ethiopia: Ethnic clashes worsening effect of drought," *Irin News*, July 29, 2002.

²¹ "Regional Security threatened; 'Afar suffers mal-administration'; former fighters resume armed struggle," *Finfinne Post*, August 29, 2002, cited in *Ethiopia Press Digest*, September 5, 2002.

groups in the remote Gambella region. Although little news of this conflict reached the outside world, a journalist in Addis Ababa received credible reports that forty people were killed in just one day of fighting in mid-July.²² A month later, a government news agency reported that eighty people were killed in communal fighting in the North Wollo Zone of Amhara State.²³ The southern regional state has also been the scene of recurrent interethnic clashes, including angry protests by Sidamas in Awassa and communal violence following demonstrations in Tepi in mid-2002, as discussed below.

Ethiopians who have decried the splintering effect of ethnic federalism on the once highly centralized Ethiopian state form yet another element of political opposition, known as the Ethiopian nationalist movement (as opposed to Oromo and Somali activists, who are considered “narrow nationalists”). This movement is made up primarily, but not exclusively, of ethnic Amharas or Amharic speakers. In addition to the All Ethiopia Union Organization (AEUO, formerly known as the All-Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO)) and the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP)—both of whose members have been repeated victims of arbitrary arrest and intimidation—students at Addis Ababa University who organized the April 2001 strike have been among the advocates of Ethiopian nationalism.

The government has accused neighboring countries including Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, and Eritrea of harboring Oromo and Somali rebel groups that seek to destabilize the government in Ethiopia. Each of these countries has been plagued by insecurity in recent years, as well as by periodic drought and famine. In addition, Ethiopia is still reeling from the consequences of the war it fought against Eritrea from 1998 to 2000 over their disputed border. The war, which ultimately cost the country some U.S.\$3 billion according to government figures, led to widespread human rights violations including the recruitment of child soldiers and the forcible expulsion of Ethiopians of Eritrean descent.²⁴ Since the end of the war, many Ethiopians, especially in Tigray, have expressed anger that the government made peace on what they consider unfavorable terms, which has weakened the ruling party and led to a consequent crackdown on dissent.²⁵

Against this backdrop, the EPRDF government has succeeded in exerting substantial control over potentially critical independent voices. As Human Rights Watch has described elsewhere, the government has periodically used arrests, intimidation, and denial of freedom of association against the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) and the now defunct Human Rights League, against individual journalists and the Ethiopian Free Journalists Association,²⁶ against individual lawyers and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers’ Association, against the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions, and against members of opposition political parties.²⁷ Many of these organizations and individuals have been allowed to resume their activities, at least nominally, but the government’s threats and intimidation continue to have a chilling effect.

Targeting the Educated

This report documents a pattern of abuses by the government against students and teachers. Students and teachers, who have been at the forefront of Ethiopian opposition for decades, have been brutally repressed with lethal force and subject to widespread arbitrary arrests by three successive governments.²⁸ The TPLF, which

²² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

²³ “80 Killed in Feud in North Wollo,” *Walta Information Center*, August 17, 2002.

²⁴ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, “Child Recruitment and Forced Conscription in Ethiopia: Interview with the Oromo children – POW in Eritrea,” August 1999.

²⁵ See Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2002*, pp. 53-60.

²⁶ More than sixty Ethiopian journalists have been arrested since 1991 and a dozen publications closed down. See Center to Protect Journalists, “Ethiopia,” *Attacks on the Press 2001* (New York) and Reporters sans frontieres, *Ethiopia: Rapport annuel 2002*.

²⁷ See e.g. Human Rights Watch, “Curtailed Rights;” “Ethiopia: Government Attacks Women Lawyers,” Human Rights Watch letter to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, October 17, 2001; and “Ethiopia: Targeting Human Rights Defenders,” Human Rights Watch press release, May 19, 2001.

²⁸ For background on student movements in Ethiopia, see e.g., Fentahun Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Students: Their Struggle to Articulate the Ethiopian Revolution* (Chicago, 1990).

ultimately waged a successful civil war against the Derg, has its own roots in student activism at Addis Ababa University (AAU) as well. Some of those interviewed for this report question how government officials, having been victims of human rights violations when they themselves were students, could repeat the mistakes of their predecessors and continue to suppress student activism. Others believe this is precisely why the EPRDF government cracks down on academic freedom: the government is living proof of how powerful student movements can be.

Ethiopia is now home to four regional universities, each of which also has several colleges. A number of for-profit private colleges of various standards have also been created in recent years. The number of students wishing to enroll in higher education is still much greater than the number of places available.²⁹

AAU, established as Haile Selassie I University in 1950, is the oldest and most important university in Ethiopia. AAU has several colleges under its auspices. The emperor initially granted the university a charter and thus autonomy, but the Derg suspended this when it took power in 1974. The EPRDF government has announced plans to restore university autonomy but has yet to do so, as discussed below.

The emperor reportedly tolerated student demonstrations between 1964 and 1968. An Ethiopian academic interviewed by Human Rights Watch described the first egregious incident of student repression, which took place in 1969 when a Tigrean student demonstrator, Tilahun Gizew of the Ethiopian University Students Association, was killed by government forces.³⁰ Later during the Red Terror, “simply knowing how to read and write and being aged about twenty or less were enough to define the potential or actual ‘counter-revolutionary.’”³¹ Student protests were also quashed by the Derg. In 1990, during the waning days of the Derg, the military government brutally suppressed an AAU student demonstration following a pattern that has been repeated time and again. Students had protested for ten days after learning that twelve army generals had been executed in May 1990. Special Forces and members of Mengistu’s personal Palace Guard came to the campus and fired machine guns directly at the students; at least six students were reported killed. Hundreds of students were arrested and nine busloads were taken to the Sendafa Police Training School outside Addis Ababa where they were detained for several days.³²

Shortly after coming to power, the EPRDF demonstrated that, like its predecessors, it would not tolerate dissent in the academic community. On January 4, 1993, large numbers of AAU students marched to the hotel where then U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali was staying to express their opposition to a planned referendum on Eritrean independence. At the time the EPRDF supported the independence of Eritrea, an important ally in its campaign to topple the Derg. The students had apparently failed to request permission to demonstrate and, during the demonstration, some had chanted ethnic slurs at Tigrean police officers. In response, security forces fired live ammunition into the crowd of unarmed students and beat and arrested large numbers of students as they dispersed the protest. Some eighty-five students were reportedly hospitalized for injuries sustained during the crackdown on the demonstration. Government sources acknowledged one student death and the university was closed for more than three months.³³ Shortly thereafter, the government arrested Professor

²⁹ Pursuant to national education policy, high school students must now take an examination in tenth grade to determine if they will continue on an academic track or shift to vocational schools. The majority of rural students fail the exam, effectively limiting their educational possibilities to vocational training. Less than half of primary school-aged children are enrolled in school; the net enrollment ratio is 43 percent of boys and 28 percent of girls. The figures drop to 14 and 10 percent for children of secondary school age. More than half of Ethiopia’s population is under the age of eighteen. Unicef, Ethiopia statistics, available at http://www.unicef.org/statis/Country_1Page56.html (retrieved September 25, 2002).

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Washington, DC, September 23, 2002.

³¹ Rene Lefort, quoted in Africa Watch, *Evil Days*, p. 104.

³² Africa Watch, “Ethiopia: Violent Suppression of Student Protest,” *A Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol. 2, No. 27, August 1990.

³³ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 21 and 24, 2002 and Washington, DC, September 23, 2002; Ivo Strecker, “Addis Ababa University Under Siege,” 1993, available on International Ethiopian University Support Site <http://ntama.uni-mainz.de/~aau/titel.html> (retrieved August 16, 2002.).

Alemayehu Teferra, president of AAU, on charges of human rights violations under the Derg. As of November 2002, he was still in detention awaiting judgment, his trial reportedly delayed because of a shortage of magistrates.³⁴

After the university reopened in April 1993, the newly appointed university president imposed new contract requirements on all professors. The government-dominated administration also sent letters to forty-one professors who had been critical of the government, summarily informing them of their dismissal—in violation of their contracts, as well as of government and university policies. One of them told Human Rights Watch that their demand for an inquiry into the government response to the protest was among the “political activities” for which they were dismissed; the president of the university reportedly said they had incited students to demonstrate. They and other educators had also been critical of a new policy that local elementary schools teach in local languages and of other government policies.

Those dismissed at AAU in 1993 included five of the university’s eleven full professors, its only specialists in some fields, and professors who had won international recognition for their scholarship. Some of them were subsequently harassed by government soldiers. The government also made efforts to ensure their continued marginalization, for example by intimidating their families and friends and staff of NGOs that hired them. Yet another professor, Fesseha Zewde of the history department, was dismissed in June of the same year.³⁵ At the end of a three-week capacity-building workshop for university professors in July and August 2002, Prime Minister Meles was quoted as saying that the government had dismissed the professors because they had made the university their “political headquarters” and that he now “regretted the way the dismissal measure was taken.”³⁶ Despite the latter acknowledgment, the legacy of these firings continues to stifle academic freedom today.

Although the status of academic freedom in neighboring Eritrea (which gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991) is beyond the scope of this report, it is worth noting that the leaders of the newly independent country inherited the same disdain for academic freedom shown by Ethiopian authorities. In a 1993 study of prospects for academic freedom in Eritrea, Human Rights Watch detailed a sustained policy of brutal repression under both Haile Selassie and the Derg amounting to a “systematic policy of denying educational freedom to Eritreans” for more than thirty years.³⁷ Human Rights Watch has continued to receive frequent disturbing reports of arrests of students and other violations of academic freedom in Eritrea in recent years.³⁸

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Washington, DC, November 3, 2002.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 21 and 24, 2002 and Washington, DC, September 23, 2002; Ivo Strecker, “Addis Ababa University Under Siege”; Donald N. Levine, “Is Ethiopia Cutting Off Its Head Again?” *Ethiopian Review*, No. 8 1993.

³⁶ “Meles ‘regrets’ dismissing 42 university teachers,” *Menelik*, August 31, 2002, cited in *Ethiopian Press Digest*, September 5, 2002.

³⁷ Africa Watch (now Human Rights Watch/Africa), “Freedom of Expression and Ethnic Discrimination in the Educational System: Past and Future,” *A Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol. 5 No. 1, January 1993.

³⁸ In 2002, for example, the government of Eritrea embarked upon a campaign to conscript youths, including university students, who had not completed their mandatory service. An Asmara resident said the roundups were carried out ruthlessly and that the city streets were practically deserted—most boys and men between the ages of fourteen and forty had either been rounded up or had gone into hiding.³⁸ In May 2002, some forty Asmara University students were reportedly arrested and ill-treated for refusing to participate in a summer work program “Nearly Forty Dissident University Students Arrested,” *awate.com*, May 13, 2002. (retrieved May 15, 2002). The former leader of the student council told the press that the same thing happened to him and tens of others a year earlier; he managed to escape after spending a year in solitary confinement. Chalachew Tadesse, Interview of Semere Kesete, *Sub-Saharan Informer*, August 2002 available at www.waltainfo.com, (retrieved September 5, 2002).

IV. SUPPRESSION OF STUDENT ACTIVISM

Look at the seventeen students arrested in [my home town]. Is it because they were questioning education policy or that producing productive Oromos would take us backward? I fear no educated Oromo will be able to lead Oromia. We are ready to be jailed, even killed rather than accept this. It is immoral.

—Student who was arrested in 2002, July 25, 2002.

Students have been among the most vocal critics of government policies, and they have paid a heavy price for their dissent. On numerous occasions, students have taken to the streets to express their discontent with a range of political issues including changes in education policy, denial of academic freedom, and the negative impact of economic policies. High school and university students are among the most educated people in Ethiopia. High school students in particular are sensitive to the hardship government policies may cause as many come from rural areas where their families live in abject poverty. As a European diplomat said, “it is perfectly logical Students are always more idealistic and active!”³⁹ Yet the government appears to feel threatened by their protests and repeatedly overreacts in suppressing demonstrations, often using lethal force followed by large-scale arbitrary arrests.

Oromia 2002

In late March 2002, high school students in several towns in Oromia protested against economic and educational policies. Security agents used excessive, sometimes lethal force to quell the demonstrations, resulting in the acknowledged deaths of five high school students and the wounding of others. The Oromia State Council explained, “our local militia and police force are not armed with riot gear, like water cannon, tear gas, etc. the absence of which obviously and regrettably have resulted in some casualt[ies].” The state council also admitted having made a “few arrests” after the demonstrations.⁴⁰ A European diplomat told Human Rights Watch researchers, “We have received continuous reports of arrests of students and teachers since February. . . . At least 270 high school students were in jail, five schools were closed. People just got angrier.”⁴¹

Student Protests

The first of a series of student protests began in the western town of Nekemte on March 20, 2002 after a public meeting to discuss the government’s development policies. After expressing anger over the economic situation, students left the meeting hall to protest in the streets. Students reportedly became militant and damaged two vehicles. Police including state Rapid Deployment Forces, who had come to town that week in advance of the meeting, fired their weapons to disperse the students. State officials said that 102 students fleeing the scene were arrested and detained for two days but claimed that no protesters were injured.⁴² Journalists said they received reports that wounded students were in fact treated in the local hospital but that local officials did not allow the media to visit them or speak to hospital staff to confirm this. According to state officials, one police officer was killed, several militia members and police were injured in Shambu, and nine additional police were wounded in the Bako area. A journalist interviewed by Human Rights Watch was told that the officer had been killed by local residents who stabbed him later that night after quarrelling in a bar.⁴³

The atmosphere in Nekemte and other towns across Oromia reportedly had been tense in the weeks leading up to the demonstrations. Residents of the primarily agricultural region had complained that government

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

⁴⁰ Letter from Oromia State Council to “The Diplomatic Community International Committee of the Red Cross in Ethiopia Humanitarian Organizations” concerning “Facts about Student Arrests in Oromia Region,” not dated, available at www.waltainfo.com, (retrieved May 22, 2002).

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

⁴² Letter from Oromia State Council.

⁴³ Letter from Oromia State Council; Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

Ethiopian Human Rights Council, “Human Rights Violations Committed in Oromiya Region,” 48th Special Report, April 2002; Oromia Support Group, “Human Rights Abuses in Ethiopia,” Press Release no. 37, July 2002.

economic policies were exacerbating the impact of inadequate rainfall and a recent decline in the prices of coffee and grain. High school students, many of whom commute from rural villages to attend school, were protesting against the economic depression they saw among their families and communities. During the Nekemte protests, the students reportedly shouted, “Let’s go to the market and see how much grain there is. Then let’s go see how many people are going hungry.”⁴⁴ Underlying the discontent was frustration among some Oromos resulting from sustained government pressure to support the pro-government Oromo Peoples’ Democratic Organization (OPDO) or be branded as pro-OLF. The demonstrations all took place around a series of meetings and celebrations marking a seven-day period of “renewal” leading up to a celebration for the eleventh anniversary of the OPDO scheduled for March 27.

Students in other towns around the region soon began to take to the streets as well. A week later, on March 27, high school students in the town of Shambu staged a protest in their school compound, boycotting classes as well as the OPDO celebration. Police and local militia members approached the school and, when students attempted to march out of the compound, some reportedly fired directly at them. Based on conversations with eyewitnesses, the Voice of America reported that five students were killed that day. State officials claimed that three students “who tried to disarm local militia” were killed and four more injured.⁴⁵ The state president, Junedin Sado, justified the police shootings as follows:

I really did not see anybody being shot at the head. Even if there were aims at heads . . . the two students that were shot at the head were struggling to wrestle the gun from one of the authorities. This is illegal. They could be shot anywhere [on their bodies]. This could happen again. For example, anyone who tries to overtake a police officer could be shot and will be shot in the future. I want to assure you of this. They can have peaceful demonstrations. They can go out on the streets for two days to demonstrate. But attempting to wrestle guns from security forces and other transgressions are illegal. This kind of act is unconstitutional. There is nothing worse than breaching the constitution.⁴⁶

An employee of the Shambu hospital was arrested after he gave a journalist information about students being treated there.⁴⁷ The Oromia Support Group reported that security agents again fired on demonstrators in Shambu on May 3 and wounded three, the day of the funeral for another student who had been killed.⁴⁸

In Ambo town, police initially responded to student unrest without the use of lethal force but, after the third day of escalating protests, shot a student to death. Protests in Ambo began during a March 26 meeting when students chanted slogans and announced their intention to demonstrate. Local police arrived on the scene and sent the students home. Local police, police trainees, and Rapid Deployment Forces then came to town to help control the situation. Residents told a journalist that six trucks of police officers were brought in from the nearby Senkele police camp. As announced, students came to town the next morning and began shouting antigovernment slogans as residents gathered for the OPDO anniversary celebration. When a small group of students was said to have torn down the OPDO flag, police fired into the air to disperse them and arrested the ones who took the flag.⁴⁹ Students continued to protest and riot during the ensuing days, adding the killing of students in Shambu to the list of their grievances. On March 29, police shot a high school student to death in Ambo. State officials reported that one student was injured and “one innocent student who was walking by was shot dead by accident.”⁵⁰ Residents told journalists that police chased the boy into the compound of a private home and shot him in the back.⁵¹ A published photo of the dead boy’s jacket showed a bullet-hole in the back.⁵²

⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁴⁵ Letter from Oromia State Council; Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁴⁶ VOA Interview with Junedin Sado (unofficial translation from Amharic by Human Rights Watch), March 29, 2002.

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 16, 2002.

⁴⁸ Oromia Support Group, “Human Rights Abuses in Ethiopia.”

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁵⁰ Letter from Oromia State Council.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

The Oromia State Council also reported one student killed and six wounded in Gedo. The council's statement said that, in addition to the five students who were killed, three militia members, five policemen, and ten civilians were injured in the disturbances and that angry mobs killed a policeman, burned forty houses, and engaged in looting in eastern Wollega outside Shambu. The statement added that nine policemen were wounded in Bako and reported disturbances in Ghimbi, Najo, Dembi Dolo, and Guder. The state claimed that the OLF had infiltrated schools, organized students and teachers, and "instigated them into engaging in violence and acts of lawlessness."⁵³ A journalist who had been on the scene told Human Rights Watch that angry residents in a village outside Shambu, some of whom possess illegal firearms, shot at police who were pursuing a student leader seeking refuge in the village.⁵⁴

Subsequent Arrests

"In [my home town], every educated person is a criminal to [the authorities] no matter what you do," said an Oromo university student who lives in Addis Ababa. He told Human Rights Watch researchers he was afraid to go home to his village because so many people had been arrested in the wake of the protests.⁵⁵ Since March, Human Rights Watch has received hundreds of reports of arrests of students, teachers, and others in towns throughout Oromia including Ambo, Bale, Guder, Jimma, Nazret, Nekemte, and Shambu and in the eastern city of Harar. Intellectuals have borne the brunt of these arrests.⁵⁶ In the cases that Human Rights Watch has documented, most detainees were arrested in March or April 2002 and held for weeks or months in the central prisons of major regional towns. Some were ill-treated. Most had been released on bail by late July, although Human Rights Watch received isolated reports of continued detention including, the detention of Gelana Nada and two other high school students in Ambo and high school teacher Rago Ali in Nazret.⁵⁷

The largest number of arrests was reported in Ghimbi. A student told Human Rights Watch that 1,798 people were detained at the Ghimbi central prison while he was there in March 2002.⁵⁸ He estimated that up to half of them had been arrested in the wake of this year's student protests and that the remaining detainees had been there as long as five or ten years on suspicion of collaborating with the OLF. He was arrested in late March in his home village some twenty kilometers away, where he had been tutoring high school students while he was suspended from Addis Ababa University in the wake of the 2001 student strike (discussed below). He was detained for one week at his local district police station along with two other university students and fourteen high school students. Police who interrogated him asked, "Why are you teaching high school students to be full men?" He and another university student were then transferred to the central prison in Ghimbi. "They didn't beat me, but others faced that," he said. "I know of at least ten or thirteen prisoners who were tortured. . . . I saw them tie someone's hands with an iron chain and make him sleep on the ground for a week without shelter."⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch also received reports of a priest and a group of high school students from Bila including a girl named Lalise Abose who were detained at Ghimbi.⁶⁰

Hundreds of arrests were reported in Ambo town, where police housed detainees in Haile Selassie's former palace when their growing numbers overwhelmed the local jail. One Ambo teacher arrested at his office on April 16 along with a teacher, a school administrator, and a shopkeeper was taken to the Ambo palace. The first night, he was kept outdoors in the cold without a blanket or mattress. Later, he was held in a three meter by

⁵² "Oromia Shakes with Student Uprising," *Finfinne Post*, April 11, 2002.

⁵³ Letter from Oromia State Council.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁵⁶ For the most comprehensive list of arrests reported, see Oromia Support Group, "Human Rights Abuses in Ethiopia."

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with an individual recently released from prison in Ambo, July 31, 2002 and with an intellectual from Nazret, July 29, 2002.

⁵⁸ Oromos living abroad told Human Rights Watch that relatives living near Ghimbi estimated some 1,500 were detained at the town's central prison in June. Human Rights Watch interview by telephone, Oslo, Norway, July 1, 2002.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 26, 2002 and Nairobi, July 12, 2002.

three-meter room with about fifteen other detainees. One month later, he was transferred to the jail at the Ambo police station, where he was confined in a small room with approximately sixty other detainees. Because of the lack of space, they had to take turns lying down to sleep. He was brought before a local judge four or five times, and each time the court granted the prosecution a continuance to continue investigations and he was not charged with any crime. He was released on June 14, 2002 on 3,000 birr (U.S.\$360) bail. After his release, local officials prevented him from returning to work at the school, and he had no income.⁶¹

Another intellectual arrested at Ambo was Dr. Ephrem Mamo, a veterinarian who had previously been a professor at AAU and dean of Alemayehu Agricultural College. Dr. Ephrem, who was released in early July, told acquaintances he had not been ill-treated.⁶² A university graduate working for the district agriculture office in Bako was also detained at the Ambo palace for approximately two months.⁶³

Human Rights Watch interviewed two other Ambo men who said that they saw several detainees beaten and tortured while they were detained at the Ambo palace. One said prison guards treated student detainees the worst. The other recounted how police burned a student with a hot iron all over his body and clubbed another local man with a metal bar that peeled off skin on his buttocks and arms. The two, who were detained at the palace from April 8 until June 13 and 19, respectively, said they had not been physically ill-treated. However, one said that police had threatened him and, while interrogating him, had written down the names of his children.⁶⁴

Even some primary school students, some as young as nine, were detained. A professor at Addis Ababa University lamented that his eleven-year-old nephew, whose father had died of natural causes the year before, had been arrested in early April in Dembi Dolo and detained for nearly three months. "I talked to him on the phone. He doesn't understand. . . . The boy's mother almost died of grief; first she lost her husband and now her first born and only son was taken away. There are hundreds of cases like that."⁶⁵ A European diplomat who visited the prison in Dembi Dolo met an eleven-year-old detainee who had been in prison for a week and suspended from school for a year for writing "I support the OLF" on the blackboard at school.⁶⁶ A resident of Gella told a journalist that twenty-seven children were arrested there and forced to walk thirty kilometers to the prison in Dembi Dolo, where they were detained for two months for singing a song insulting members of the TPLF.⁶⁷ Eleven children aged nine to thirteen were also reportedly suspended from school in Dembi Dolo for wearing black clothing to school to indicate that they were in mourning for the students who were killed in Shambu.⁶⁸

Human Rights Watch has continued to receive reports of arbitrary arrest by Oromia police even though most of those arrested in the wake of the protests have since been freed. In Guder on July 5, 2002, at least eleven civilians were arrested, including the director of Guder Senior Secondary School and five teachers.⁶⁹ Police in Nazret reportedly detained four students, along with one of their fathers, on October 25 and 26, 2002, and announced plans to arrest thirty-six more students. The students are members of the Gumii club of Nazret (Adama) Senior Secondary School and a local junior high school. Sources in exile reported that their alleged infraction was printing a textbook on Oromo cultural history.⁷⁰

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 27 and 31, 2002.

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with a foreign researcher who met Dr. Ephrem, July 13, 2002.

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 31, 2002.

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 17, 2002.

⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, New York, July 8, 2002.

⁷⁰ Union of Oromo Students in Europe, Swiss Branch, "Urgent Action: Fear of disappearance, arbitrary arrest," November 2, 2002.

AAU Student Strike, April 2001

In the early months of 2001, tension mounted among students at Addis Ababa University. Their principal complaints were threefold: they wanted to publish a student newspaper that the administration had blocked; they wanted freedom to organize a student union without university interference; and they wanted armed uniformed police removed from the campus. The university administration and the ministry of education failed to respond to the students' satisfaction, transforming the situation into a standoff by the beginning of April. In response, large segments of the AAU student body, as well as high school and university students and others around the country, mobilized to strike for academic freedom.

Government forces responded to the protests with extreme brutality, killing more than thirty people, wounding some four hundred, and arresting thousands. Academic life ground to a halt for one month around the country, and most AAU students who participated in the strike did not return to class for one year.⁷¹ About 250 students fled to Kenya; others went to Djibouti or Sudan.⁷² Their demands for academic freedom have yet to be met.

Student Demonstration and Violent Security Force Crackdown

The strike began on April 9, 2001. According to one student leader who participated in drafting a letter to the university administration outlining the students' demands:

We decided to boycott class and put forward our demands peacefully. We demanded the right to assembly, freedom of speech, removal of the police station from campus [since the 1993 student strike, there has been a police station on each of the seven campuses]. We also demanded better administration—the AAU administration is stacked with politicians not academics, we want competent administrators who are able to design [an] up-to-date academic environment. We were also concerned that the student union had been dominated by the government.⁷³

The day before, hundreds of students had attended a public meeting led by former AAU professors Dr. Berhanu Nega and Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, members of the executive committee of Ethiopian Human Rights Council. At that meeting, students resolved to stand up for their human rights and academic freedom. When the university administration resisted, increasing numbers decided to boycott class, leading to a large-scale student strike that soon became fatal. Dr. Berhanu and Professor Mesfin were arrested a month later, detained for one month, then released on bail and charged with challenging the constitution through illegal means and inciting riots under the pretext of promoting human rights.⁷⁴ Their criminal trial is still in the preliminary stages.

On April 10, students gathered outside the university administration office waiting for a response to their letter. Eyewitnesses told Human Rights Watch that they discovered undercover security forces posing as students in their midst and, upon learning that they did not have student identification cards, they “captured” them, essentially holding them hostage.⁷⁵ Shortly thereafter, in a sign of the brutal tactics to come, hundreds of Special

⁷¹ The following is based on more than twenty interviews with students who participated in the strike in Nairobi in April and July 2002 and in Addis Adaba in July 2002; interviews with journalists, professors, university officials, and politicians who followed the events; and close reading of news articles, reports, and calls for help posted on various websites including International Ethiopian University Support Site (<http://ntama.uni-mainz.de/~aau/>), the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (<http://www.ehrco.net>), and Worldwide Protest to Stop the Brutal Treatment of Addis Ababa University Students and Human Rights Activists (<http://www.geocities.com/lmak27455/>).

⁷² For a discussion of the human rights violations to which these students and other refugees have been subjected in Nairobi, see Human Rights Watch, *Hidden in Plain View: Refugees Living Without Protection in Nairobi and Kampala* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

⁷⁴ See, “Ethiopia: Targeting Human Rights Defenders,” *Human Rights Watch Press Release*, May 19, 2001. An unofficial English translation of the Amharic-language charges can be found at the International Ethiopian University Support Site, <http://ntama.uni-mainz.de/~aau/Mesfincharges.html> (retrieved August 16, 2002).

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, Nairobi, July 10 and 11, 2002.

Forces surrounded the campus, approaching each of AAU's six gates. The students dispersed, and the police actively pursued them to their dormitories. "They broke down doors and attacked us. They were so brutal. . . . We heard gunfire in the campus. Students jumped from the third floor, especially in the [first-year] dorm," said one student.⁷⁶ Another described students fighting back, including a fourth year student who threw stones at the approaching police and urged her friends not to retreat:

Students tried to defend themselves, but how could they? The fight was between trained, armed, and firing Special Forces, and innocent students armed with pen and pencils only. Disturbing cries, bullet explosions, and tension reigned for more than half an hour.⁷⁷

When the police left, the dormitories were spattered with pools of blood, and broken glass littered the campus. More than fifty students were injured that day. Police reportedly initially refused to allow ambulances to take wounded students from the campus to the hospital.⁷⁸

Police also apprehended a few students including Mesfin Gabre Selassie and a blind student, made them take off their shoes, and put them on trucks to take them to the nearby Special Forces' police camp. The students were reportedly mistreated. As one student who saw them shortly after their release said, "Each bitterly complained about the police—some were wounded on their heads, others on their hands, they were crying, it was terrible."⁷⁹

At that point, Minister of Education Genet Zewde came to the campus, denounced the police intrusion as illegal, and ordered the police to leave, which they did. She then met with the student leaders, but the students refused to discuss any substantive matters until those who had been detained were freed. They said she resisted taking immediate action, but that they stood firm. After some discussion, the students said the minister called the police from her cell phone and, thirty minutes later, the detained students were released and came and joined the crowd. "First the government denied that they had been detained, then later admitted it and released them with one phone call. This is when I realized the government could arrest or free whomever it wanted with no procedure," said one student who was present at the meeting.⁸⁰

The April 10 meeting with the minister ended in a stalemate. Students say they left the meeting as a group chanting protest slogans. On their way back to the dorms, police attacked once again and arrested twenty-two science students. Student spokesman Fasil Eshetu was among those taken and beaten after the meeting. "They pushed us into a car and took us to a military compound that is just behind the ministry building near the university," he said. "They beat us there for one hour and then released us. . . . The minister knew we had been beaten. She saw the wounds on the heads and faces and arms of the students who went to meet her [later]."⁸¹

According to another student, instead of discouraging the students, police violence actually reinforced support for the strike. "This was the turning point. More students then went to the streets in protest, and the government response was even stronger."⁸² Students at Mekele University in Tigray were the first to demonstrate in solidarity, on April 12. The next day the body of business student Sime Terefe, an Oromo, was found by a river some seven kilometers from the Mekele campus. His throat had been slit. Many Oromo students interviewed for this report said they joined the strike only after Sime had been murdered. According to an

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 11, 2002.

⁷⁸ "Ethiopia: Government Attacks Universities, Civil Society," *Human Rights Watch Press Release*, May 10, 2001. Ambulances were reportedly allowed to transport wounded students after "initial difficulty of access to the compound." "Red Cross Steps up Humanitarian Activities During Riots in Addis," *Walta Information Center*, April 20, 2001.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, April 4, 2002.

⁸² Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

Amhara student, “Even some Tigreans joined. Then the government paid some attention.”⁸³ Soon, students at universities and colleges at Jimma, Bahir Dar, Mekele, and Awassa began to strike in solidarity as well, as did many high school students around the country. A former Oromo student, who has since sought asylum in Kenya, added, “They imprisoned two students who took [Sime’s] body to AAU, saying they did that to provoke students to revolt.”⁸⁴

Police intimidation extended to high schools and college campuses around the country. A student at Awassa Agriculture College told Human Rights Watch that he and his colleagues kept silent during the demonstrations out of fear. He said that soldiers had come to their campus, warned them not to demonstrate, and ordered them to go home. Awassa high school students had been bolder, he said, but the police brutally repressed their demonstration. “At that time there were policemen and soldiers, and I saw them shoot the students.”⁸⁵

The AAU students met with the minister of education again on April 16, and the meeting again resulted in deadlock. The minister had reportedly agreed to allow the students to form a student union of their choice and resume publication of the student newspaper. She had also agreed to the removal of police from the campus in principle, but said she was not in a position to set a deadline for this.⁸⁶ Students also expressed anger that police had entered the campus and attacked students on April 10 (one student shouted, “Who let the dogs out?”) and demanded an inquiry and accountability for the police actions.⁸⁷ That evening, the minister gave the students an ultimatum to resume class or leave the campus by April 18. “Instead of dividing the students,” said one student leader, “this pulled people together. We all started demonstrating in the streets.”⁸⁸

On April 17, students said, the situation grew “out of control.”⁸⁹ Police came to the campus in the morning and found students leaving in response to the minister’s ultimatum. Many, particularly those who came from outside Addis Ababa, sought refuge in the nearby St. Mary’s church, where Special Forces came and surrounded them. According to a first-year science student who was in the church, between ten and twenty police entered the church, followed by ten military “commandos.” The security forces then ordered them all to return to the campus. The military commander threatened to have them shot if they refused or shouted. They were ordered to remove their shoes. They were held on campus for the rest of the day and, as described below, were taken to a police jail that night.⁹⁰

The arrests triggered massive student protests. For the next two days, as many as 10,000 AAU students began demonstrating; they were joined by thousands of high school students, unemployed youths, and others who angrily took to the streets in solidarity and to express their frustration with the government. Student leaders have acknowledged that some of them became violent, burning at least ten cars and vandalizing government buildings and private businesses including a hotel and a bank in the Arat Kilo neighborhood. The police responded with excessive force, and the situation escalated. More than forty demonstrators were killed by police bullets on April 17 and 18.

In the words of one witness:

There was lots of gunfire. Teenagers were fighting with police, grabbing their rifles. High school students were armed only with stones (not guns) and took stones only to defend

⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 16, 2002. They said they had been reluctant to join earlier because Amhara students had largely failed to come to their defense when police beat and arrested tens of Oromo students in December 2000, as discussed below.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 12, 2002.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002.

⁸⁶ “Minister, AAU Students Meeting Ends Inconclusively,” *Walta Information Center*, April 16, 2001.

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 11, 2002.

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

themselves from police. They burned cars because they were angry that two students were shot dead, then angry when they saw the national examination building. Some of the Land Rovers and pickups they burned belonged to Special Forces.⁹¹

A doctor at the Tikur Ambessa Hospital told a journalist he was shocked. “Why did they use live ammunition to control the crowds when they could have used teargas or plastic bullets?” he asked.⁹²

On April 18, the ministry of education ordered the indefinite closure of Addis Ababa University, temporarily closed primary and secondary schools in Addis Ababa, and advised parents around the country not to send their children to school for the time being.⁹³ Only the AAU law faculty remained open. The rest of the university reopened less than two weeks later and classes nominally resumed by early May.⁹⁴ A number of students—many of whom expected to graduate that July—chose to return to class to complete the academic year. They described a tense atmosphere in which students were frequent victims of intimidation. Daniel H., one of a group of graduating students who had attempted to organize a memorial and expression of solidarity with the students who had been killed during the strike, told Human Rights Watch: “We were going to raise our hats for a moment and hold candles in the graduation hall.”⁹⁵ But authorities did not allow this expression of solidarity. “Before that, the police came to my home at night,” Daniel said. “They told me to keep out of unnecessary things, keep your dignity or lose your life. They said if anything happens in the hall, ‘you are the first responsible and we will kill you.’ I was really scared. I didn’t go to the graduation ceremony—I hid in the dorm and went to find my mother afterward.”⁹⁶

Most students suspended their education for one year. The government arranged for many of them to tutor high school students in their home areas from December 2001 through March 2002 and provided stipends for this work. The students returned en masse on the anniversary of the strike in April and completed the academic year in July.

It is worth noting that students joined the strike for many reasons; not all were immediately motivated by the lack of academic freedom. One student who believes he was harassed repeatedly for attempting to organize Catholic students said he joined the strike when he realized that, “Our generation was slipping because we weren’t demanding that our rights be respected.”⁹⁷ “At the beginning of the strike in Mekele, the issue was solidarity [with students at AAU],” said a professor at Mekele University. “As time went on, they started claiming academic freedom at Mekele as well.”⁹⁸

Many viewed the student movement through the prism of ethnic politics, as they do with many aspects of Ethiopian political life. Amhara students, who account for a substantial number of student leaders, hoped to stop a trend toward ethnic polarization on campus, which they consider destructive to the student movement. Some Oromo students, on the other hand, perceived such efforts as a direct attack on their constitutionally granted autonomy as an ethnic group. Whether or not, as an Oromo professor put it, “academic freedom became an issue articulated for the students,”⁹⁹ the students were exercising their political rights, and the government response was grossly out of proportion to any threat they posed.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

⁹² Quoted in Nita Bhalla, “Anarchy in Addis,” *BBC Focus on Africa*, p. 23.

⁹³ “Ministry Orders Indefinite Closure of Addis Ababa U,” *Walta Information Center*, April 18, 2001.

⁹⁴ “AAU Students to Resume Classes Tomorrow,” *Walta Information Center*, April 29, 2001.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002. His name has been changed to protect his identity.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Daniel H. was not physically harmed but the threats continued. Three months after the May incident, a man followed him and threatened him in a bar saying, “we will [teach] you to keep out of political activities.”

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 16, 2002.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 18, 2002.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Professor Gemetchu, Addis Ababa, July 17, 2002.

Subsequent Arrests

Police silenced the protesters by arresting thousands on the spot and hunting down others in the days and weeks that followed. Many were beaten and ill-treated. Family members, if they knew where their loved ones were detained, were harassed when they tried to visit or bring food to the places of detention. Some of the detainees were released after eight to ten days; most university students were released within a month. Others including high school students, unemployed youths, and members of opposition parties were held for months.

At midnight on April 18, police brought seventeen large trucks and two buses to transport some 3,000 students, many of whom had sought refuge at St. Mary's church, to the Sendafa Police camp. One told Human Rights Watch he was beaten on the back with a club as he boarded a truck.¹⁰⁰ Another said he was beaten when he was arrested and when he was brought to Sendafa.¹⁰¹ The students were also ill-treated while in detention at Sendafa, including being beaten with rifle butts. A third student detained there said, "The commander kicked me, walked on me with his boots, and inserted his [pistol] into my mouth."¹⁰² The detainees received no food or drink for the first thirty hours of captivity. Most were held in a single barracks where, because of lack of space, they had to take turns lying down on the cement floor to sleep. They were compelled to engage in "sports" consisting of barefoot running and kneeling races on gravel. Some reported that police beat their backs, shoulders, and buttocks while they performed these "exercises."¹⁰³ A Sendafa resident told Human Rights Watch that police did not allow students' families to give them food, clothes, or blankets and even abused those who came to Sendafa in search of their detained family members. "When the AAU students were here, their families came with food and clothes. This whole street was crowded with their families. The police stopped them and beat them. I saw them make a fifty-five year-old man take his shoes off and walk fifty meters barefoot."¹⁰⁴ These students were freed after ten days, after being fingerprinted and forced to sign confessions.

Hundreds more students, and thousands of local residents, were arrested in Addis Ababa in the following days. Police at campus gates reportedly had a list of 125 students to be arrested. One, a Tigrean student of political science named Muzgede, was reportedly briefly detained and seriously beaten.¹⁰⁵ Fasil Eshetu, spokesman of the student movement, was abducted near the campus on April 20. He told Human Rights Watch he was held for nine days during which police tortured him.

They pushed me into a police car and took me to an unknown place. I later learned it was Ketema Hulet [a village] where there was an old, unused air force military compound. They started shouting at me even when I was just in the car. They shouted, "You are the one! You are the leader causing these problems!" They started beating my legs in the car. Once we arrived at the compound, they pulled me out of the car. They started beating me everywhere. They slammed me on my ears, and blood started to come out. They beat me on my back, legs, arms and hands. I don't know how I spent that night—I was unconscious much of the time.

Then, two uniformed higher officers came. They were called Tesfaye and Genano. They said "you are the one coordinating this against the government." . . . The officers tied my hands and my ankles together with rope. They threw me down into the sand, and at night they torched me with electricity. When they beat me, they did it with a stick. They pushed my head into a bucket of water so I could not breathe, and I was so weak I couldn't resist, and my hands were tied together. The hardest thing for me is that those people knew my feelings, they were also Ethiopians. They knew what they were doing to me . . . They tortured me like that for three days.

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 12, 2002.

¹⁰² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 17, 2002.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interviews, Nairobi, July 12, 2002 and Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Sendafa, July 30, 2002.

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with a student, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

Then, the same two officers came to me and said that the political roots of the organization are known, and even though I know there could be no evidence of that [because we were merely students requesting academic freedom, we had no ulterior political motivation], they said that other students gave them the evidence. I was not political, I only wanted to pursue my chance to have an education. I gave up everything to go to university. I even sold my property to have the chance to pursue my education. They were linking my motives with the destruction that happened in the country—but I was not in control of what other people did. One night they put pistols in my mouth and made sounds like it was going off. They played with my life this way. . . . I had no information about those people. I could tell them nothing, and still they tortured me. . . .

They told me to separate myself from the student riots and to call all the students back to the University. They told me to retract everything I had said and done and to tell the other students that everything they did was a mistake. Otherwise, they told me I would be charged under a provision of the criminal law, but they showed me no evidence that I had done what they said I did.

They forced me to tape seven videocassettes saying these things. They beat me every time to say I had not done it properly, and then I had to start over again. They told me to retract the demonstration. They told me to [denounce] the intellectuals that spoke at the human rights meeting. They told me to take responsibility for the three students who had been killed in Addis. Later I learned that they had cut those seven tapes together with a speech they already had on tape from before. I had given a talk about the need for unity of everyone, and I said that the fire that occurred in the Oromo area is doing harm to all of us. I was calling for unity, saying that what the OLF does is wrong, but saying that we should all be one country. They [edited] that speech with the others and made it look like I spoke against the Oromo.¹⁰⁶

Another leader of the student movement, Daniel H., told Human Rights Watch he was arrested at home on April 19.

I tried to escape out the window when the police came to my house. My mother said I wasn't there. They said they would take my older brother as a guarantee; he is a student at the commercial college. My mother fell to the ground and cried, so I came and turned myself in. My brother had not demonstrated.¹⁰⁷

He was taken first to a central police station for three days, then to his district police station for two days and later transported overnight to Zewai prison. Police beat him at the district station and at Zewai. At the district station, they beat him and forced him to sign a confession. At Zewai, police threatened to kill him and hit him with a rifle butt. "I was never so afraid in my life," he said. "I thought I would lose my life the next morning."

His family had no idea where he was. They looked for him at prisons and police stations throughout Addis Ababa and at Sendafa and Shoa Robit prisons, where large numbers of students had been detained, but had not known to look at Zewai. He was released after twenty-two days in detention. He says he asked for documentation confirming the time he had spent in detention, but the police refused. "They said, 'do you want to go home or not.' I said 'yes.' They said, 'then don't ask such questions.'" He was never charged with a crime.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ The detainee escaped from detention and fled the country. Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, April 4, 2002.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002. Human Rights Watch interviewed three other people who also said their families had no information about their whereabouts while they were detained at Zewai. One, an unemployed man aged twenty-four, contracted tuberculosis there and almost died due to lack of medical care. Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 23, 26, and 29, 2002.

Most of the hundreds of others detained at Zewai were high school students, unemployed youths accused of looting, members of opposition parties accused of instigating the strike, and people who had been arrested by accident or along with family members. One of them told Human Rights Watch that he saw at least twenty detainees at Zewai who were fifteen or younger and thus entitled to be held separately from adults and afforded special protection as “young persons.”¹⁰⁹ He said that a local judge ordered the release of a twelve-year-old on the detainees’ first court appearance but that prison authorities did not release him. Instead, police returned the boy to the Zewai prison and simply did not bring him to court again so the judge would assume he had been released.¹¹⁰

Hundreds more were taken to Shoa Robit prison about 220 kilometers from Addis Ababa. According to a human rights activist, family members who traveled to Shoa Robit to bring food and supplies were turned away by police.¹¹¹ One hundred twelve members of the Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP) alone were arrested after the strike, as were many members of the then All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO, now AE.U.O). Most were released on June 1 but the EDP said in July 2002 that one party member, Shewangzaw Eshetew, was still being held at that time. EDP members, like other detainees, described ill-treatment, including lack of medical care, poor sanitation, and beatings.¹¹²

AAPO member Gebrehana Wolde Medhin was one of four prisoners who died in detention after the strike. The government claimed that he died of tuberculosis, but AAPO asserted that he died as a result of having been beaten, citing the fact that the family had not been informed that he was hospitalized and that the body had not been returned to the family.¹¹³ Hundreds of detainees were eventually brought to court and charged with vagrancy, joblessness, and inciting riots.

Several students told Human Rights Watch police had sought them out in the days and weeks following the strike at the homes of family and friends in Addis Ababa and in the countryside. One Gurage student, who had participated in the strike but was not a leader, said a local security official threatened him when he went to his home village. The official warned him not to be involved in any more antigovernment activities and said, “I can kill you because I have the right.”¹¹⁴

Another student of Oromo origin stayed with several different people in Addis Ababa when he was released from Sendafa but then went home to his village, Bila, because security forces had come looking for him where he was staying. In Bila, a relative told him that party cadres and police had questioned him about what the student was doing there and threatened to arrest him. The student then went to another village in Wollega province, where his brother works as a teacher, and the same thing happened. He returned to Addis Ababa after two weeks to find that police were still asking his uncle for his whereabouts, so he fled the country. He recalled, “My father said, ‘I don’t want to see you dead here. So go away from here.’”¹¹⁵ Another student told Human Rights Watch he fled in June, two months after the strike, because uniformed police came to the friend’s house where he was staying in Addis Ababa and searched it, and because police in civilian clothes had repeatedly visited his family twenty kilometers outside of town looking for him. When interviewed by Human Rights Watch, he was continuing to receive threatening emails from unknown persons.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ Penal Code of the Empire of Ethiopia of 1957, articles 53 and 161-173.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 26, 2002. According to a lawyer, there is no juvenile detention facility in Ethiopia. Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 18, 2002. There is a juvenile court in Addis Ababa, but woreda (district) courts are empowered to hear all juvenile cases outside the capital. Second Periodic Report of Ethiopia to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, U.N. Doc, CRC/C/70/Add.7, March 23, 2000, p. 16 para. 33.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 26 and 29, 2002.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch World Report 2002, p. 54.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 16, 2002.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 12, 2002.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

Harassment of Oromo University Students

Students of various ethnic groups agreed that Oromo students have been the primary targets of harassment on the AAU campus since the 2001 strike. In late April 2002, more than two hundred Oromo students gathered in Addis Ababa's central Meskel Square after their letters to the Oromia state government expressing outrage at the government's reaction to the high school student protests described above and subsequent requests for meetings had gone unanswered. When they arrived at the square, they found soldiers in battle gear waiting for them. One who was present that day said a soldier approached him and five others and ordered them into the back of a military vehicle. Once they got in, the soldier asked, "Do you want to leave or do you want to be jailed?" and permitted them to leave the protest site. Some 253 others were arrested and detained for the day at the Kolfe Police College. They were not charged with any crime. Their identity cards were confiscated and returned to them the following week.¹¹⁷

Later that week, fourteen Oromo first-year students were dismissed from the university. The AAU administration did not respond when Human Rights Watch asked for an explanation and clarification of the rule pursuant to which the students were expelled. Students, professors, and Oromo activists interviewed for this report believe the reason for their dismissal was their suspected involvement with the OLF. One of those expelled told Human Rights Watch that a security guard approached him as he tried to enter the campus, ordered him into the security office, then told him to surrender his student identification card and vacate the premises. When he protested, another security officer grabbed him by his shirt front and pulled him out of the office saying, "You can join the OLF in the bush." He was not given a chance to retrieve his belongings from his dorm room, and he never received notice of his expulsion in writing. Security agents reportedly told another student being expelled, "you can go to the forest and fight like we did," apparently referring to the TPLF's origin as a guerrilla movement of former students.¹¹⁸

Other students known as Oromo activists likewise report ongoing intimidation and threats of arrest. A fourth year student said plain-clothed security agents had accosted him in town numerous times in 2002. On May 22, 2002, someone threatened him and said, "Why don't you stop organizing students. It is not good for us. [Stop or] else we will have to destroy you." Earlier that month a car ran into him while he was walking on the side of a road, and he considered this to be an assassination attempt or a warning to cease his political activities. He told Human Rights Watch that he felt so intimidated by these and other events that he had left school before taking his examinations.¹¹⁹

Other Oromo students chose to remain in Addis Ababa for the summer because they feared arrest if they returned to their home villages, particularly in the wake of the large-scale arrests following the high school protests. Two university students returned home to Tafo village just outside Addis Ababa. One of them, Kebede Bayisa Tukura, was arrested on July 28, 2002, within days of his arrival.¹²⁰

Oromo students have repeatedly been the victims of human rights violations in the past four years. Some point to the beginning of the Ethiopia-Eritrea war in 1998 as the start of heightened tension between the students and the government. At that time, the government forcibly recruited large numbers of Oromo youths, including children, for the war.¹²¹ A group of students met the then parliamentary spokesperson to discuss their opposition to the war in general and the recruitment of Oromo youths in particular. In response, according to one of the students at the meeting, the spokesperson told them they must go home and urge others to fight for Ethiopia's sovereignty or suffer the consequences. "She said we had to act as cadres," he said. "This was a turning point in organizing ourselves."¹²²

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 17, 19, 20, 22, 26, and 27.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 20 and 26, 2002.

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, July 30, 2002.

¹²¹ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Child Recruitment and Forced Conscription in Ethiopia: Interview with the Oromo children – POW in Eritrea," August 1999.

¹²² Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

The next major confrontation between Oromo university students and the government came two years later, in February 2000, when raging forest fires in Bale and Borana were destroying much of the countryside of Oromia. Oromo activists believed the fires had been deliberately set and grew increasingly angry as they perceived the government had taken no action to extinguish the flames for more than five weeks. More than four hundred Oromo university students in Addis Ababa organized themselves to fight the fires. “They accused us of provoking people to revolt,” one of the organizers said.¹²³ Batle File, then a third year university student in mechanical engineering, was arrested in Oromia during the effort to extinguish the fires. Later in February 2000, university students requested permission in writing to demonstrate to express their anger that the fires were still burning and that high school protests of failure to put out the fires had been put down brutally, as discussed below. Several Oromo university students reportedly were harassed by security agents after making this request, including seven students whom two armed uniformed police threatened in a dorm room on campus on March 30, 2000.¹²⁴ According to students interviewed by Human Rights Watch in July 2002, Batle File reportedly was still in detention in Nekemte.¹²⁵ High school students also demonstrated during this time, and police reportedly used excessive force to disperse their peaceful protests, as noted below.

On October 11, 2000, university students demonstrated again, this time against a government decision to move the capital of Oromia from Addis Ababa to Nazret, and at least four students were arrested.¹²⁶ One of them, who was apprehended shortly after he gave an anonymous interview to the BBC World Service correspondent in Addis Ababa, was detained for approximately twenty-four hours and beaten. “They released me on the condition that if I do such bad things again, I will be shot dead,” he told Human Rights Watch.¹²⁷ “After that, the situation for students became worse and worse,” said another student. “We became always afraid.”¹²⁸

Controversy has also surrounded the use of a derogatory term for Oromo. In a number of instances on various campuses, students or professors have used the word “galla.” The term, from the Amharic-language, was a common term for Oromo until the 1960s, but has now developed derogatory connotations similar to the word “nigger.” Oromo students reacted violently when a Tigrean student used the word “galla” when quoting a historical book in a class presentation on December 20, 2000; large numbers of students gathered on the scene and a group fight ensued. Police then came to arrest the Oromo students who had started the fight, but other students lay down in the road and blocked police egress until they let the students go. The police relented and left, but returned later that night. At around midnight, police entered the campus dormitories without warning, broke into Oromo students’ rooms, and violently pulled students out. Police took ten students to a police station, 157 to Sendafa Police College, and eighteen to Makalawi (Central) Prison. The eighteen taken to the central prison were brought before a judge and released on bail on January 1, 2001; they have not yet been tried. Human Rights Watch interviewed two students who were detained at Sendafa and the central prison, and both said they were beaten.¹²⁹

Oromo students on other campuses soon began to stage demonstrations in solidarity. Mohammed, a third year biology student, and two others were dismissed from Bahir Dar University on December 23 after they participated in a demonstration. Mohammed went home to Bale on December 26, and, two days later, militia in civilian clothes carrying Kalashnikovs came to his family’s house to arrest him. He was detained at Adaba, a military camp, for one month, along with twenty others including two high school students, Aman Hasi and

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002. The government reportedly planned to prosecute individuals accused of setting the fires. “Fire Suspects to be Prosecuted Next Week,” *The Addis Tribune*, March 17, 2000.

¹²⁴ Letters from AAU Oromo Students to the AAU Student Union Office, March 2000.

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 17, 2002.

¹²⁶ Letter from AAU Oromo Students to the AAU Vice President, October 13, 2000.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 12, 2002.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with students and professors, Addis Ababa, July 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, and 23, 2002 and Nairobi, July 10 and 12, 2002.

Mussa Hufeen. He was released on 3,000 birr (U.S.\$350) bail on January 26. He fled the country the following week after being warned of plans to rearrest him.¹³⁰

Disturbances resulting from inflamed passions in response to the use of the word “galla” have been reported on campuses elsewhere in Ethiopia as well. Oromo students became angry when a student used the word “galla” at Mekele University in June 2002, but the situation was diffused when the administration gave the student a stern warning.¹³¹ In 2001, a student at Wanduganet Forestry College attacked an instructor who had called him “galla.” Three or four students were arrested for attacking the teacher but were not charged. Oromo students appealed to state authorities and the ministry of education; Oromo students across the country, and the president of Dobu University (to which the forestry college is subordinate) reportedly came to address the students’ concerns.¹³² “All that over the mere quotation of a word,” said a professor of social sciences. “Some of us prefer to avoid teaching about that. It is hard to teach about anything constructive!”¹³³

Most of those interviewed for this report said they were not surprised that the government believes that Oromo students might be acting in support of the OLF, particularly in the wake of renewed OLF military activity in June 2002.¹³⁴ In the words of a European diplomat, “It is perfectly logical that the OLF is looking for support among students. . . . But any Oromo critical of the government is labeled OLF, and then branded a terrorist or a security detainee. So he will get [a] closed-door court or no court at all.”¹³⁵

The students say they are willing to continue to fight for their rights. One student who was arrested after the high school student protests lamented, “Look at the seventeen students arrested in [my home town]. Is it because they were questioning education policy or that producing productive Oromos would take us backward? I fear no educated Oromo will be able to lead Oromia. We are ready to be jailed, even killed rather than accept this. It is immoral.”¹³⁶

Pattern of Excessive Force in Response to Political Protests

Demonstrations on high school and university campuses mentioned above are just some of the civilian protests state and federal police have put down with lethal force and excessive brutality in recent years. Taken together, they reveal an alarming pattern of police brutality against citizens expressing their political views. A retired police officer who served under the Emperor and the Derg, two regimes known for their brutality, expressed outrage at recent events. “It wasn’t like this when I was a police officer,” he said. “For example, there were massive student demonstrations some thirty-five years ago when students wanted the government to give land to the tillers instead of the feudalists. I was [part of] an emergency force then. We had tear gas, not bullets.”¹³⁷

The following observation made by EHRCO in January 2001 is even more relevant today:

At different times in the past, misunderstandings between students and officials of educational institutions have been common. As of recent years, it has become customary for officials of educational institutions and government to try to resolve these misunderstandings by forcing and terrorizing the students. The use of force has repeatedly failed to lead to a peaceful settlement of

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 12, 2002.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with a Mekele professor, Addis Ababa, July 18, 2002.

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

¹³⁴ See Nita Bhalla, “Fighting on Ethio-Sudan Border,” *BBC News*, June 29, 2002.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 15, 2002. As noted above, student leader Tilahun Gizew was reportedly killed by police in 1969.

the disputes. On the contrary, they have often led otherwise peaceful students to take unplanned actions that have eventually resulted in destructions.¹³⁸

The crackdown on high school protests in Oromia in 2002 described at the beginning of this chapter was reminiscent of a crackdown in the same region two years earlier. On March 9, 2000, high school students in Ambo demonstrated after authorities arrested four students who were sent to express concerns about the raging forest fires. EHRCO reported that students threw stones at police who tried to enter the high school compound to disperse the demonstration and that police responded by first firing into the air and then beating students indiscriminately, beating one student to death and wounding nine others. The Oromia Support Group reported that 300 civilians had been detained after the protest.¹³⁹ An educator said a woman boldly stood up in an Ambo community meeting he attended and accused security forces of having beaten her nephew to death. He recalls that local officials claimed the boy had been killed by stones thrown by other students but promised to investigate his death. As far as Ambo residents know, he told Human Rights Watch, nothing came of the investigation.¹⁴⁰

A group of Oromo university students demonstrated in protest and raised the issue of the death of the Ambo student in a meeting with then president of Oromia Regional State, who reportedly dismissed their concerns and claimed that students had stoned another student to death.¹⁴¹ High school students also protested in towns around Oromia and police reportedly killed a girl in Dembi Dolo.¹⁴² EHRCO reported a similar chain of events in Nekemte, where students initially attempted to enlist local officials to help extinguish the fires but, considering their overtures to have been rebuffed, staged a demonstration on April 13. Special Forces surrounded the school compound and fired into the air. A melee ensued in which students threw stones and police chased and beat them. Several students were wounded and dozens arrested.¹⁴³

Another student demonstration was put down violently in Awassa in December 2000. Local and college officials reportedly grew angry when students at Awassa Teachers College went on a hunger strike to protest living conditions on the campus. Tensions quickly escalated, and, on the first day of the strike, large numbers of students began to protest. Armed security forces came to the campus and beat students. The following day, students again clashed with police, who fired their weapons reportedly killing one student. Junior high and high school students demonstrated to express their solidarity with the college students the following week, a demonstration police dispersed by firing into the air; some sixty students fleeing the scene were arrested and others beaten. A high school student died after being hit in the neck by a stone. Schools in the town were closed for two weeks.¹⁴⁴ High school students in Awassa demonstrated again in May 2001, this time protesting conditions of peasants in Hossana and Hadiya where many of their families lived. Police again responded with guns, reportedly killing six students.¹⁴⁵

Lethal repression of political protests has unfortunately been a recurring theme in Ethiopia, not only in protests involving students. The most deadly crackdowns on demonstrations in 2002 took place in the towns of Awassa and Tepi of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' State. On May 24, 2002, thousands of Sidama residents of Awassa and neighboring villages came to town to demonstrate against a plan to change the city's administrative status. The police apparently claim that demonstrators shot each other.¹⁴⁶ However, eyewitnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, journalists, and other researchers unanimously confirm that

¹³⁸ Ethiopian Human Rights Council, "Stop the Repeated Violation of the Rights of Students," 37th Special Report, January 23, 2001.

¹³⁹ Ethiopian Human Rights Council, "Human Rights Violations in Ambo," 31st Special Report, April 20, 2000; Oromia Support Group, Summary Press Release no. 31, July 2000.

¹⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 26, 2002.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

¹⁴³ Ethiopian Human Rights Council, "Repeated Violation of Freedom of Expression," 33rd Special Report, August 31, 2000.

¹⁴⁴ Ethiopian Human Rights Council, "Stop the Repeated Violation of the Rights of Students."

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 26, 2002.

¹⁴⁶ "Ethiopia: Interview with president of the southern nations region (SNNPR)," *IRIN News*, July 19, 2002.

some demonstrators carried spears but most were unarmed. A researcher who visited Awassa after the protest and interviewed eyewitnesses and local officials said:

The riot, which was really more of a massacre, lasted only a matter of minutes. It is utter rubbish that the protesters were armed; the government just spread that. No eyewitnesses indicate anything like that. There had been widely publicized plans for a long time for people to come demonstrate the change in status of Awassa town, and nobody discouraged them. Then on the set day, people started marching into town, and the government just shot them down with machine guns. That's really all there was to it.¹⁴⁷

The government acknowledged seventeen civilian deaths, in addition to the deaths of two policemen; EHRCO reported twenty-five killed, including eleven students aged thirteen to sixteen; the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Coalition (SEPDC) published a list of forty-six people killed, sixteen of whom were students. Both EHRCO and SEPDC listed high school students among the wounded.¹⁴⁸

In the remote town of Tepi, also in the SNNP region, members of the Sheko and Majenger minority groups clashed with local officials and police over political rights on March 11, 2002, leading to the deaths of at least eighteen civilians and one local official. In the following days, more than one hundred were killed and several villages reportedly razed to the ground by order of local authorities. Approximately one thousand civilians were arrested after the disturbance, and 269 were still in detention when a European Union (E.U.) delegation visited Tepi in June 2002.¹⁴⁹

An editorial in a local English-language newspaper charged:

First it was the killings in Oromia region. And now we have the revolting spectacle in Awassa And still the Machiavellian policy continues in the guise of punishing a 'handful of vigilantes' that are working undercover to disturb the peace and complicate matters for the 'democratically elected government of Ethiopia.' . . . The government, for its part, continues to cover up the scene by issuing through the government media smaller [casualty] figures, using childish expressions like 'only fourteen people dead' as if human lives were match sticks [The government is] becoming even more vengeful and striking hard blows at everyone [who] presents legitimate and genuine points of concern.¹⁵⁰

Impunity of Security Forces

The government's lack of transparency and failure to hold security forces responsible for killing protestors has perpetuated a culture of impunity for police. One human rights activist said that the government rarely follows through with announced intentions to prosecute Special Forces accused of killing civilians. Most often, he said, an officer accused of committing such crimes is simply transferred to another region.¹⁵¹ A lawyer who follows the criminal justice process also said this.¹⁵² An American diplomat cited the lack of transparency in

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

¹⁴⁸ Ethiopian Human Rights Council, "Serious Human Rights Violations in Awassa and Its Environs," 51st Special Report, June 4, 2002; Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Coalition, *Information on the Massacre of the Sidama in Awassa by the TPLF/EPRDF Government*, 2002. The SEPDC report cited fifty-one deaths but five of the victims were unnamed, reportedly because their cadavers had been eaten by hyenas.

¹⁴⁹ Nita Bhalla, "E.U. wants Ethiopian 'atrocities' inquiry," *BBC News*, July 16, 2002. See also Ethiopian Human Rights Council, "A Conflict that Resulted in Many Deaths in Tepi, Shekicho Zone," 49th Special Report, May 2, 2002; SEPCD and Coalition of Alternative Forces for Peace and Democracy in Ethiopia, *Human carnage of the Sheko, Mejjenger and the Manja peoples in Kaffa, Bench-Majjii and Shaka zones in the SNPP Region*, April 3, 2002.

¹⁵⁰ "Is there an end to all this?" (Editorial), *The Addis Tribune*, June 14, 2002. The editorial was written before news of the Tepi killings, which happened in March, became widely known.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 18, 2002.

Ethiopian security forces, as described above, as a major obstacle to accountability for rights abuses.¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch asked the Ethiopian ambassador to the U.S. if the government had taken any steps to hold those accused of killing civilians accountable, but received no reply.

In the wake of an E.U. demand for an inquiry into the events at Awassa and Tepi, the Ethiopian government claimed it had arrested ten officials for instigating violence in Tepi and five for involvement in the riot in Awassa.¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch welcomes this development and strongly urges the government to prosecute these and any others found responsible to the full extent of the law. However, diplomatic and NGO sources have reported that those arrested might not have been the ones responsible for civilian deaths.¹⁵⁵ Two months earlier, before the E.U. demand for accountability, government sources had reported that disciplinary action had been taken against some municipal officials shortly after the Awassa riot. Dr. Beyene Petros, chair of the southern region opposition party, SEDPC, warned that this was misleading. He said that those disciplined were actually accused of having encouraged civilians to demonstrate—not of having killed unarmed protestors.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, a journalist told Human Rights Watch that government officials who had been dismissed after this year's high school protests in Oromia were accused of encouraging the demonstrations, not of using excessive force to quell them.¹⁵⁷

Local officials claimed to have arrested a police officer immediately after he had shot a student to death in Ambo in March 2002. Residents said they had not received any further information about the prosecution as of July; the boy's mother was still waiting for promised compensation in July.¹⁵⁸ Local newspapers published the names of five security agents suspected of killing students in Shambu, but journalists say that, as far as they know, these individuals have not been disciplined or accused of any crime. Worse yet, Shambu residents reported that a militia member accused of having shot a student was given a promotion; his alleged crime was not investigated.¹⁵⁹

After the April 2001 AAU student strike, the Parliamentary Committee on Social and Legal Affairs held a widely publicized inquiry into government excesses. Officials of the university, the ministry of education, and the Federal Police Commission all denounced the police entry into the campus and loss of life. Getachew Erena, representative of the Federal Police Commission, told the committee that, "mishaps had indeed occurred" and that the police lacked rules and regulations to govern police conduct during civil disturbances.¹⁶⁰ But if the parliamentary committee's investigation led to any disciplinary action or criminal prosecution, the government has not publicized the outcome. According to an AAU professor:

I don't know if there was any discipline or corrective action for excesses in the strike. First the minister of education denounced the police, but they kept coming into the campus. I don't know who made the decision. The parliamentary committee discussed the matter and broadcast its hearings on television. The police chief said he didn't order police to come in. Their report must be somewhere.¹⁶¹

Human Rights Watch researchers asked students (including one who had given testimony before the committee), professors, journalists, human rights activists, and a member of parliament what the results of the parliamentary inquiry had been. No one knew whether anyone had been prosecuted or disciplined, if a report had been produced, or if any reforms had been instituted in response. A year later, a local newspaper accused the

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview, Washington, D.C., September 20, 2002.

¹⁵⁴ Nita Bhalla, "Ethiopia officials held over violence," *BBC News*, August 21, 2002.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, Washington, D.C., September 20 and 23, 2002.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 27, 2002.

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 27 and 31, 2002.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 17 and 27, 2002.

¹⁶⁰ Nita Bhalla, "Ethiopia police admit excessive force," *BBC News*, June 8, 2002.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview, July 24, 2002.

parliament of abdicating its responsibility by remaining silent in the face of reports of killings in Oromia and Awassa.¹⁶²

¹⁶² “Is there an end to all this?” *The Addis Tribune*.

V. DENIAL OF TEACHERS' FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

It is a professional association, not a political party! But I don't know what will happen in the future. There is a risk that a civil servant can lose his job for opposing education policy. In the [July 2002 mandatory teachers] conference they said that all civil servants are employed at the will of the government and the ruling party.

—Ethiopian teacher, July 30, 2002.

The Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA), essentially banned by the government, has continued to struggle to protect the rights of teachers in the face of sustained harassment for the past ten years. In addition to ETA's vocal criticism of education policy, the organization's membership includes some of Ethiopia's most influential citizens, and apparently is considered as threatening for this reason. A foreign professor currently residing and teaching in Ethiopia explained why, in his opinion, teachers have been singled out for persecution. "Teachers are one of the largest groups in Ethiopia, the best educated, and the most liberal."¹⁶³ ETA is active in ten of twelve regional states, with the exceptions of Tigray and Somali regions, and has 80,000 registered members out of an estimated 120,000 teachers in more than 6,000 schools nationwide.¹⁶⁴

The Ethiopian government's curtailment of educators' freedom of association has not escaped international censure. Since 1996, the government's continuing interference with the ETA's freedom of association has elicited criticism from the International Labor Organization (ILO) every year. In addition, on several occasions the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has criticized the government's mistreatment of the ETA, the resulting impact on educational policy, and the poor status of Ethiopian teachers.¹⁶⁵

In March 1993—less than one year after the ETA submitted a memorandum to the Transitional Government of Ethiopia outlining its demands for better treatment of teachers, including that teachers participate in shaping education—the government registered a new association under the same name as ETA and anointed it the official teachers' union.¹⁶⁶ Since then, the government has continuously pressured teachers to participate in the "new" ETA rather than the old one, frozen the original ETA's assets, and arrested numerous teachers and ETA leaders including then Acting Secretary General Shimalis Zewdie and president of the association Dr. Taye Woldesmayet in 1996. Assefa Maru, acting director of ETA after Taye's imprisonment, was assassinated in May 1997.¹⁶⁷ Shimalis died in April 1999. His health had reportedly been weakened when he was detained yet again and spent one month in prison without charge in September 1998 for refusing to hand over ETA offices and papers to the new ETA.¹⁶⁸

Dr. Taye, who had been in prison since 1996 and was convicted of conspiracy against the state in 1999, was released in May 2002 after an appellate court reduced his sentence to less than the time he had already served.¹⁶⁹ Since then, Dr. Taye has declared that he intends to remain active. "Unless the life of teachers is improved, there is no hope for our children," he told the BBC.¹⁷⁰ Taye was first arrested by the current government in 1992, on the spurious charge of having fomented religious strife. The arrest came shortly after he

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 18, 2002.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Abate Angore, July 15, 2002.

¹⁶⁵ Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, Report of the Seventh Session (2000), Appendix C.

¹⁶⁶ In some cases, the new ETA even acts on the government's behalf to intimidate teachers exercising their political rights. See, e.g., confidential communication dated April 25, 2002 (in Amharic).

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Curtailed Rights," pp. 36-41.

¹⁶⁸ Education International, "Death of ETA Acting General Secretary Shimalis Zewdie," April 29, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ Amnesty International, "Dr. Taye Wolde-Semayat Released!" May 14, 2002; Nita Bhalla, "Freed Ethiopian dissident to fight on," *BBC News*, June 11, 2002.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002; Bhalla, "Freed Ethiopian Dissident. . ."

had made a video cassette depicting conditions in a poor school in his home town of Nazret which he intended to distribute abroad to raise funds for the school.¹⁷¹

The old ETA has persevered and continues to play an active role in defending teachers' rights despite ongoing harassment and government interference with its property (for example, police have sealed most of the rooms of ETA's office). However, as Dr. Taye told Human Rights Watch, "Harassment is increasing at an alarming rate. Teachers cannot even talk to each other to discuss teaching math!"¹⁷² When ETA attempted to hold a meeting at its Addis Ababa office on August 31, 2002, armed Special Forces came and ordered them to leave.¹⁷³ A month later, police disbanded another ETA meeting for teachers from the capital and surrounding areas. Acting under authority of the city's demonstration and association licensing department, the police claimed that the association was "illegal" and, therefore, could not hold a meeting to discuss a national issue.¹⁷⁴

In February 2002, the government and new ETA attempted to sabotage an ETA conference in Awassa on education for all, the role of teachers in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, and human and trade union rights. Despite pressure from local officials, schools, and the new ETA, 587 teachers from around the country attended the conference. Tafari Gassessa and another member of ETA's executive board were arrested in Jinka while conducting preparations for the conference, including handing out brochures on HIV/AIDS; they were detained for twenty-six days. Officials and police forces in Awassa twice tried to interrupt the conference on the first day, February 4. "We asked the federal and regional governments for permission and paid the government to rent the meeting hall and there was no problem. But when we arrived there the state police tried to force us to stop," said one teacher who attended the meeting. Only after European diplomats intervened in Addis Ababa, did authorities allow the meeting to go forward.¹⁷⁵

Some of the teachers who attended the conference were later harassed for doing so. At least forty teachers from Oromia and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State who attended the conference were arrested and detained for two weeks when they returned home. A member of the National Council on HIV/AIDS made a presentation during the conference and was subsequently dismissed from the council.¹⁷⁶ Immediately after the conference, the government-sponsored teachers association wrote a threatening letter to teachers from Wolayta zone in the SNNP region claiming that actions taken by some of them had been harmful and ordering them to halt their movement.¹⁷⁷

The government has engaged in sustained harassment of teachers who support the old ETA. For example, the high school in Sendafa, Oromia requires its teachers to pay two birr per month (approximately U.S.\$0.25) to the new ETA while the government prevents them from paying the original ETA. "As teachers we want to relax and have our own organization, but we are not in a position to do that," said one teacher in Sendafa. "There is always fear and suspicion. They always suspect the teachers, those who don't go to the party or to the government-sponsored ETA."¹⁷⁸

Most recently government officials used the occasion of a mandatory workshop on revolutionary democracy in July to pressure teachers to participate in the new ETA. Teachers in numerous locales including

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 15, 2002. As noted above, the abuses against ETA and individual teachers are unfortunately not exceptional—Human Rights Watch has expressed concern about similar tactics employed by the government of Ethiopia to silence a diverse range of actors in civil society in recent years.

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview, Washington, DC, September 20, 2002; "Police stop teachers' conference," *Tomar*, September 3, 2002, cited in *Ethiopian Press Digest*, September 5, 2002.

¹⁷⁴ "City Administration Bans Teachers' Meeting," *The Addis Tribune*, October 4, 2002.

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 15 and 30, 2002; Andre Dumont and Steve Sinnot, "Ethiopian Teachers' Association Conference, Awassa: 4-6 February 2002," Trip Report for Education International, 2002.

¹⁷⁶ Education International Mission Report, 17-22 June 2002; "Tortured, Detained Teachers – 2002," June 2002.

¹⁷⁷ Letter dated February 8, 2002 (in Amharic).

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, July 30, 2002.

Addis Ababa wrote letters to the old ETA complaining that the government representatives had spent hours berating them for belonging to the association of their choice. Teachers in Hossana said that, when they refused to be swayed, the government delegate essentially threatened them, concluding the discussion by saying, “we will meet again.”¹⁷⁹ The government delegates took the occasion of these teachers’ workshops in some places to announce that school districts would soon lay off teachers, twelve teachers in Alertu district of Oromia and 15 percent of teachers in Sendafa, and insinuated that those who cross the government would be at risk. A teacher at Sendafa, who has already been arrested, threatened, and transferred away from his family over the past five years, said that during the workshop he attended district officials warned him yet again to stop working for the old ETA. “It is a professional association, not a political party,” he complained. “But I don’t know what will happen in the future. There is a risk that a civil servant can lose his job for opposing education policy. In the [mandatory government workshop] they said that all civil servants are employed at the will of the government and the ruling party.”¹⁸⁰

Fasil Eshetu, a former teacher, enumerated the means he had seen the government use to harass teachers, including himself, who criticize government policy:

Teachers are expected to applaud . . . everything the EPRDF says in meetings, follow the EPRDF line, or else they will be blacklisted. To be blacklisted includes not getting promoted, not getting a salary increase, being transferred to remote areas, being transferred away from your family, having your salary docked, losing your housing, getting fired, and even being excluded from social events like weddings.¹⁸¹

A teacher in Addis Ababa told Human Rights Watch that he has been a victim of similar government harassment on and off for the twenty-eight years he has been teaching. Most recently, he was denied an annual salary increase in 2002.¹⁸² A teacher from Konso in the southern region made a similar complaint to ETA. He has been transferred from school to school, denied salary, and threatened over the past four years. Civil service officials tried to force him to resign in 2002.¹⁸³ Both teachers believe they are being punished for criticizing aspects of government education policy. One of their major complaints is that students must now take an exam after tenth grade to determine whether they can continue on an academic track or will be relegated to as yet undeveloped vocational training programs. They and many other teachers are also concerned that classes, many of which are already much larger than the regulation fifty students per class, are slated to become larger still. The Addis Ababa based teacher said he has seen reports of many more teachers being arrested in rural areas than in the capital. He has not been arrested.¹⁸⁴

Teachers in Sendafa said high school students were also predictably angry about the tenth grade examination that was now to determine who could continue on to twelfth grade and thus to tertiary education. One teacher estimated that only some 10 percent had passed the test in 2001. He and the other teachers said that students and teachers alike had only “mumbled” their criticism of the policy. “We can’t complain publicly or we will be arrested,” he said. “The students are afraid of such things. Not only the students. We teachers, too.”¹⁸⁵

Teachers interviewed for this report said they were especially frustrated that the government had not consulted them in developing education policies. But they are afraid to criticize too openly as others paid a heavy price for such criticism in the past, such as when the government mandated that the language of instruction would be the major language of each regional state rather than Amharic.¹⁸⁶ ETA documented that some 6,700 teachers

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa and Sendafa, July 25 and 30, 2002.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

¹⁸³ Letter dated June 18, 2002 (in Amharic).

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, July 30, 2002.

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 18, 2002.

were obliged to move to other areas of the country to accommodate the language change, and many of these were demoted, sent to remote areas, or otherwise harassed as punishment for having criticized the policy.¹⁸⁷

Fasil, who taught in Hossana from 1992 to 1998 and has now been granted asylum in Canada, was one of the teachers who complained. He described the impact being “blacklisted” had on him as follows:

I was blacklisted three times, once for dissenting over the language policy. . . . For example, they wrote the education office and told them to cut off my salary as a warning, when I went to complain they said they would make enquiries. . . . Because I am not married and I do not have wife and children to support, these problems don’t hurt me as much. I could eat with friends. Another physics teacher and a math teacher were also blacklisted. They had families At one time, they demoted me to teach in junior high school (seventh and eighth grades), and not in my specialized field.

I applied for teacher training in Nazret, and was denied. I got no response to requests to attend summer courses for continuing education. The government refused to let me go accept a scholarship for further studies in Germany. I was the only teacher who had studied electricity, but when I applied to Nazret Teachers College to study teaching electricity, the Education Office refused to issue me a letter saying that I had been a teacher during the past years. I complained to the ministry of education that I was refused these opportunities and tried to assure them that I only wanted further training so I could come back and teach. The ministry did not respond.¹⁸⁸

Many teachers continue to suffer abuses as a result of the still-evolving policy of ethnic federalism, as they were when ETA sent the above-mentioned memorandum of teachers’ concerns to the government in July 1992. In Nazret, for example, in the Oromo Regional State, Amharic-speaking teachers complain that all non-Oromos are treated as second-class citizens. At the same time, Oromo-speaking teachers who have chosen not to join the OPDO lament that they are branded as sympathizers of the OLF. A government delegate present at the mandatory July teachers’ workshop in Nazret did not dispute that non-party members may be marginalized: “There is no seat between two chairs,” he told the Oromo teachers, suggesting that failure to belong to the government satellite party could lead to their dismissal.¹⁸⁹

Thirteen Oromos including seven teachers, a former teacher who produced educational radio programs for the Oromia State Education Bureau, a twelfth grade student, a civil servant, and two traders were arrested and detained in Sendafa from May 1 to June 21, 2002 on charges they collaborated with the OLF.¹⁹⁰ One of the detained teachers said his sister had come to visit him at the Sendafa police camp and, while one guard had told her she could speak to her brother, another came and threatened to beat her if she didn’t leave. Family members of another said that police had insinuated they must be OLF members if they were visiting OLF members in prison and threatened to arrest them if they continued to visit. A lawyer who attempted to visit one of the detainees said the guards refused to allow him in.

One of the teachers said that police officers told him that the district court declined to release them on bail earlier because high-level politicians had instructed them not to. They appealed the denial of bail to the Oromia State Supreme Court, which later ordered their release on bail. When Human Rights Watch interviewed them in late July, they had yet to be reinstated in their jobs despite written requests to local, state, and national authorities.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 10, 2002. Fasil enrolled in AAU in 1999 to study educational administration. He was active in the student community and became spokesman for the students during the strike. As noted above, he fled the country after being arrested and tortured in the wake of the 2001 student strike.

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

¹⁹⁰ The following is based on Human Rights Watch interviews and review of documents, Addis Ababa and Sendafa, July 30, 2002.

The teachers in Sendafa were outraged that, while the above thirteen were detained, a representative of OPDO had said on the Voice of America that no suspected OLF members were in prison.

Sendafa authorities have used the threat of arrest to stifle solidarity with the thirteen detainees. A teacher who was not arrested said that high school students had planned to protest after their teachers had been arrested, but a district council administrator had warned the students, their teachers, and their parents that the students would be shot if they demonstrated. Officials then closed the high school for approximately one week. The students did not demonstrate. "I destroyed all written material in my home, got rid of all the newspapers and books," a teacher told Human Rights Watch. "I know it would be trouble if they came to search my house, too."

VI. CHILLING FREE EXPRESSION AND FREE OPINION IN UNIVERSITIES

Some of us have been made heroes by the government, not that we intended to be heroes. And we have paid for it. Professor Asrat died; Dr. Taye was in prison for more than six years. Seeing this, the public is scared. Even our friends are scared to talk to us. You can see how this affects freedom of speech! Of course, they haven't completely muzzled speech. [The government] should know better, having gone through the same thing before themselves [when the TPLF started as a university movement]. I think it will explode again.

—Professor who was summarily fired in 1993, July 15, 2002.

The Ethiopian government's heavy-handed tactics have stifled free opinion and expression in Ethiopia. While the immediate effect of government surveillance and control has been to curb political dissent, such measures also have cast a pall over academic inquiry and stifled independent research. The chilling effect of the government's tactics is keenly felt on Ethiopia's university campuses, where academics and students are afraid to carry out what is ostensibly their main objective: examining and questioning their social and material surroundings. Nevertheless, political turmoil inevitably has found an important outlet on Ethiopia's campuses, particularly because other channels of expression have been limited or closed.

University Professors

Just beyond the entry to Addis Ababa University's main campus, there is a sign pointing to the office of the teachers' association. But the association has not existed for years. While university professors used to participate actively in ETA, in the words of one professor, "no one picked up the pieces" on the campus after the ETA came under attack by the government.¹⁹¹ Another explained:

There used to be a teachers association at the university with the status of a province-level association because there were so many teachers. It was disbanded when we took sides with Dr. Taye when he was arrested. So it stopped existing, we have no association now. There is no way to respond as a group to problems like the student riots, three weeks of mandatory indoctrination, forced resignations for traveling abroad! Not even informally. There is no advocate for our interests. All we have is a credit and saving association. No one even mentions it since the arrest of Taye. We have to pay dues to the new ETA, but we have no chapter, no ID card, and haven't gotten any benefit from it at all.¹⁹²

Professors interviewed for this report all said they felt no link to the new ETA, and have not used it as a forum to organize. In fact, they said they have grown accustomed to the absence of a professional association. When asked what steps professors take to discuss issues of common concern, he replied, "Professors at AAU have different views. I don't see that kind of spirit, to organize."¹⁹³

Those interviewed for this report cited a whole host of problems linked to government interference with the university administration. First and foremost, they complain that, despite repeated promises, the government has failed to grant the university autonomy through a charter. One former professor who left academia in 1999 due to frustrations with the AAU administration explained:

The problem is that the government controls the university. I have heard the prime minister tell a professor that he is their employer so they better do what he wants. It would be better if the university had its own charter. They say this is in the works, that it will happen by September [2002], but it has been in the works since at least 1992.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with a professor, July 24, 2002.

¹⁹² Human Rights Watch interview, July 23, 2002.

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview, July 24, 2002.

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 20, 2002.

When the university was first created in the 1950s, Emperor Haile Selassie granted it independence, at least in name, through a charter. But when Mengistu Haile Mariam took over the country in 1974, his military regime, known as the Derg, suspended that independence. A European professor who taught at AAU during that period recalls that his employment contract had an explicit clause guaranteeing academic freedom, with the exception of anything deemed contrary to the principles of Marxism-Leninism.¹⁹⁵ Since the current government toppled the Derg in 1991, professors have been demanding university autonomy from the government through a charter. They say they were close to agreement in 2001, but discussions were suspended after the April student strike. In April 2002, the government reportedly promised to grant the charter by September.¹⁹⁶ As of December 2002, the issue had yet to be resolved.

The most egregious incident of government interference remains the 1993 firing of some forty professors discussed in chapter III above, and the ongoing consequences thereof. Some of those dismissed, including Dr. Taye and Professor Mesfin, have been imprisoned for advocating academic freedom. Professor Asrat Woldeyes died in 1999 after spending five years in prison for his activities with ETA, during which his health deteriorated seriously. Human Rights Watch interviewed two other professors fired in 1993, both of whom said they have attempted to remain active but have had to balance that activism against harassment that they, their families, and their friends have suffered. One repeatedly looked over his shoulder while speaking, explaining that he had recently been threatened with arrest, a threat he deemed credible since he and several of his colleagues in an educational organization already had been imprisoned in the previous eight months.¹⁹⁷ Another said that, though he had taken the university to court to grant him access to the university library which was open to the general public, he preferred to stay away from the campus because it is painful for him to go there. He said that professors whom he considered his friends now turn away from him on campus because of the stigma; they have been chastised for being associated with him. His mother-in-law had recently been threatened:

You can't imagine how difficult this is, to have to stay away from your friends. . . . Some of us have been made heroes by the government, not that we intended to be heroes. And we have paid for it. Professor Asrat died; Dr. Taye was in prison for more than six years. Seeing this, the public is scared. Even our friends are scared to talk to us. You can see how this affects freedom of speech! Of course, they haven't completely muzzled speech. [The government] should know better, having gone through the same thing before themselves [when the TPLF started as a movement of academics]. I think it will explode again.¹⁹⁸

Professors maintain that the legacy of the 1993 firings continues to have a chilling effect on them and would-be academics. The combination of this fear and direct government influence in university administration serves to stifle dissent and activism among the faculty. "I don't know of any other cases of professors being fired for sure," a professor told Human Rights Watch. "But it is definitely insecure."¹⁹⁹

In addition, some professors—including supporters of "narrow nationalism" and supporters of Ethiopian nationalism alike—believe the policy of ethnic federalism has been used against them. It is not always apparent whether political motivations have played a role when professors complain of arbitrary treatment by the university administration, whether there was some legitimate basis for the treatment, or whether the problem was merely bureaucratic politics. At least two professors of Eritrean origin were summarily dismissed when the border war

¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 22, 2002.

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 24, 2002. For a discussion of the importance of a charter, see Yakob Adugna, "The students do not have more rights than any other Ethiopian citizen: Interview with Dr. Tetemke Mahri, Academic Vice President of Addis Ababa University," *Sub-Saharan Informer*, July 12, 2002.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 15, 20, 22, 25, and 26, 2002 and Washington, July 3, 2002.

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 15, 2002.

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

began in 1998, one from AAU and another from the Civil Service College.²⁰⁰ Several other professors also told Human Rights Watch they feel they are discriminated against because of their ethnicity. An Oromo professor of anthropology said that he was one of two Oromos and eleven Amharas in his department. He accused the Amharas of practicing “tyranny of the majority” and using department politics to “stifle” his academic work. For example, he said the chair of the department denied him permission to accept a research fellowship at the University of Durham Royal Institute of Anthropology in the U.K. in 2001.²⁰¹ The Amhara professor who had been chair at the time in turn resigned from the university in 2002 after the university administration denied him approval to spend a year in the U.S. to complete a post-doctoral fellowship at Yale University, a decision he believes was taken in part because of his political views.²⁰² As noted, Professor Mesfin Woldemariam (who was among those dismissed in 1991) and other professors have been accused of supporting the Ethiopian-nationalist opposition movement and inciting students to do the same.

None of the professors interviewed for this report said the government had overtly interfered with what they taught or wrote as academics. But they consistently reported that government policies serve to encourage self-censorship, including the absence of tenure in Ethiopian universities, the authorities’ regular practice of hiring professors on limited two-year contracts, the fact that government-appointed officials have final say on all leadership appointments, and systemic lack of transparency.²⁰³

Particularly controversial has been that all university instructors are employed on two-year contracts, at the end of which they must undergo student and peer evaluations. In December 2002, professors accused the government of using evaluations to exert control over academia; the university president and vice presidents resigned in protest.²⁰⁴ A week later, five faculty deans and professors reportedly resigned in protest of continued government interference. A faculty dean was quoted in the press lamenting, “The academic staff of the university had expected better academic freedom and improvements in all fields after the face-to-face discussion with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi this summer. But things have turned out to be otherwise.”²⁰⁵ (He was referring to the mandatory capacity building seminar led by the prime minister in July and August 2002.)

A number of professors complained that the use of two-year contracts and the absence of tenure serve to stifle academic freedom. A professor who used to teach at AAU under the Derg recalled that any instructor possessing a Ph.D. automatically had tenure. Another professor clarified that tenure was effectively abolished after the 1993 firings.²⁰⁶ The university rulebook, which dates back to the Derg, regulates tenure only for expatriate professors, not for Ethiopians.²⁰⁷

Human Rights Watch does not know of any cases where the threat of termination has been used to influence professors’ teachings or writings directly. However, such threats clearly have contributed to a climate of self-censorship. A political science professor told European colleagues that he feels more comfortable writing about his discipline than he has in the past.²⁰⁸ And a law professor is proud that the administration has permitted

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 20 and 26, 2002. On abuses, including mass expulsions and arbitrary deprivation of nationality, against ethnic Eritreans during the war, see, Human Rights Watch, “The Horn of Africa War: Mass Expulsions and the Nationality Issue (June 1998 – April 2002),” *A Human Rights Watch Report*, January 2003.

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 17, 2002.

²⁰² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

²⁰³ Article 3(2) on Prohibited acts, Addis Ababa Contract of Employment for Academic Personnel.

²⁰⁴ “Leave the University Alone,” *The Addis Tribune*, December 13, 2002.

²⁰⁵ “University Deans, Instructors Tender Resignation: Prof. Andreas Appointed President,” *The Addis Tribune*, December 20, 2002.

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 22 and 26, 2002.

²⁰⁷ *Senate Legislation of Addis Ababa University (with revisions up to the end of the 1985-86 academic year)*, February 1987. Since 1987, the rules have been updated by circulars but the university has apparently not published current rules together. An administrator interviewed by Human Rights Watch said he was not aware of any relevant updates. Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

²⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview by telephone, New York, June 27, 2002.

the faculty to teach a human rights course in which students debate the current human rights situation and that he has published widely on legal topics of his choosing. Yet, because he is a government employee, he opted not to express his opinion that the government was at fault during the 2001 student strike. "I didn't speak out either way during the strike, because I consider myself a government employee," he said. "However, I think the government should have been more mature and given in to the students' demands."²⁰⁹

The government also has final say in the appointments to positions of leadership within the university. In the selection of chairs and deans, for example, the faculty nominates three candidates and forwards their names along with the number of votes each received to the government-appointed administration, which then may select any of the three for the position. In many cases, these procedures are non-controversial. In the law faculty, for example, two of the three professors nominated expressed their preference not to be chosen as they had already served as dean, and one professor said the entire faculty was content that the administration chose the third. However, three professors told Human Rights Watch researchers they felt even the possibility of government interference wielded substantial influence over their decision of whom to nominate and over their departments in general.²¹⁰

Academics also said that administrators abused their authority for political ends, most commonly to prevent certain professors from taking advantage of research and travel fellowships, as discussed above, but also to deny promotions and salary increases or otherwise discipline professors who displease the government. Human Rights Watch received four reports of professors whom the university had denied permission to travel abroad to conduct research. The Oromo professor mentioned above was forced to forego a research grant of approximately U.S.\$40,000 in Britain in order to keep his job.²¹¹ Another was denied an exit visa and was accused of supporting the OLF. Shortly thereafter police came to his home and threatened him, leading him to flee the country.²¹² The others resigned to pursue one-year fellowships, one in the U.S. and the other in Germany. They plan to return to Ethiopia after their fellowships, but say they will seek employment outside the university. Yet another lecturer got permission to continue her studies in Europe, but, in order to receive an exit visa, had to provide a guarantee that a family member would reimburse the Ethiopian government the entire amount of her scholarship if she does not return (approximately U.S.\$90,000 for two years tuition, room, and board).²¹³ The monetary guarantee is understandable given the devastating effects of the brain drain from Ethiopia, but such a severe financial burden imposed on academics by the government could be arbitrarily applied and may violate university autonomy.

The government has apparently left two prominent opposition politicians who teach at AAU, Professor Merera Gudina of the Oromo National Congress and Dr. Beyene Petros of the Southern Ethiopia Peoples Democratic Coalition, free to engage in their political activities. Dr. Beyene, who is also a member of parliament, attributes this to their high profile. He was originally on the list of those to be fired in 1993, but believes he was spared because he was so well known. He said it was a shame, though, that other professors are afraid to be active in politics.²¹⁴ A representative of the Ethiopian Democratic Party said that professors, like students, who are active in that party prefer to keep their role secret. Members of the EDP have been victims of frequent harassment including arbitrary arrests and government interference with party meetings.²¹⁵

Continued Denial of Students' Rights

As described above, AAU students paid a heavy price for demanding their academic freedom in 2001. Their demands have not yet been met. Students and professors complained to Human Rights Watch that when the students returned, they found that the student union and student newspaper remain banned, that students are still

²⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 26, 2002.

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 17, 20, 23, 24, and 26.

²¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 17, 2002.

²¹² Human Rights Watch interview, Nairobi, July 12, 2002.

²¹³ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 26 and 29, 2002.

denied freedom of association, and that the government remains in command of the university administration. One student told Human Rights Watch, “The students just dropped these demands when they went back.”²¹⁶ A professor expressed frustration that the strike had failed to achieve academic freedom. “Yesterday a student said the only change he sees since the strike is the color of the ID card,” he said. “They changed the president and vice presidents and put in a new dean of students. But those behind the scenes are still there. Directors, members of the senate, and the current [president and vice presidents] were hand-picked.”²¹⁷

Ironically, the only student demand that was granted was the one the government refused to grant during the strike last year: removal of uniformed police from the campus. On September 17, 2001, 272 private security guards took over campus security after two months of training.²¹⁸ Students said the climate is now freer than when police were there. A number of students recalled a particularly notorious police commander known as Yared who had repeatedly called students into the campus security office for questioning when the police maintained an official presence on AAU. Although students said that such practices have ended, some said that undercover security agents and students who double as informants continue to harass students, especially Oromos, on campus.²¹⁹

The administration apparently allows some student associations to operate. Dr. Tetemke Mahri, academic vice president, said in a news interview, “We don’t allow religious and political activities. Other than this [the students] are free to hold meetings.” He added that the university discouraged associations based on ethnic background.²²⁰

Students interviewed by Human Rights Watch, however, indicated that the university denied many the right to association. One said that even the poetry club had been banned. He told Human Rights Watch that students interested in poetry have met clandestinely since the strike: “They had asked for permission and the administration replied orally—it is not good, you should be dormant until the situation improves.”²²¹ Political parties do not carry out any activities on campus. A handful of students openly participate in opposition parties, but an official of the EDP said that most have requested to be secret members.²²²

Students told Human Rights Watch that religious associations (including Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, and Pentecostal) and associations of students from each regional state, divided largely according to ethnicity, do in fact exist on each university campus. They say the most active of these is the Tigrean Development Association. There is apparently an Oromo Development Association as well. However, all of the Oromo students interviewed for this report, as well as students and professors of other ethnicities, complained that Oromos consistently had been denied permission to form associations of their choice. One said, “Oromos must meet outside the campus. We ask the administration for permission to meet every year when freshman come, and they say no. We gave them a letter, and they said, ‘Why do you give this to us?’” Students or former students at Addis Ababa University, Bahir Dar University, and Awassa Agricultural College said they belonged to clandestine Oromo associations. Two students complained that security agents accuse them of sympathizing with the OLF and harass them when they gather in groups of even two or five students on campus. “As five students we cannot get together or police will come displace us. This happened to me last year. . . . We can’t talk about food on campus, . . . university elections, or anything.”²²³

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

²¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

²¹⁸ “Campus Security Force Replaced with Civilians,” *News and Views*, Addis Ababa External Relations Office, Issue No. 1, November / December 2001.

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Addis Ababa, July 16, 19, 22, and 29, 2002.

²²⁰ Yakob Adugna, “The students do not have more rights than any other Ethiopian citizen,” *Sub Saharan Informer*.

²²¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 19, 2002.

²²² Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 29, 2002.

²²³ Human Rights Watch interviews, Nairobi, July 10 and 12, 2002 and Addis Ababa, July 16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, and 24.

The student union first published its newspaper *Hilina* in 2000 in Amharic. Shortly thereafter, the university administration blocked the funds the union had raised by selling advertising in the paper and refused to allow the students to print any further issues. *Hilina* remains effectively outlawed though, in a press interview, AAU Academic Vice President Dr. Tetemke Mahri denied that the newspaper had been banned. He said that the university did not take issue with the factual content of the 2000 newspaper. Rather, he explained, the administration felt that the editors' decision to publish in the Amharic language as opposed to English was inappropriate "because of the ethnic and language difference that exists within the University." He admitted that the university had withheld the paper's money from the student editors, he said because the students failed to follow proper procedures to withdraw the funds from the university's bank account. He did not explain why the funds had still not been dispersed two years later.²²⁴ According to the university rules regarding student publications as published in 1982, students have "the same rights as other Ethiopians" to freedom of expression as well as a "responsibility" not to infringe on national law or the university code of conduct.²²⁵

VII. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The international community has done little to hold the EPRDF government accountable for widespread human rights violations since it came to power more than ten years ago. The EPRDF continues to receive substantial foreign assistance from the U.S., Europe, and multilateral agencies. Some of this, like recent announcements by the U.S., E.U., and U.N. to donate substantial amounts of humanitarian assistance in response to a worsening food crisis in many parts of the country, is commendable. They have also supported various aspects of democratization, educational development, and poverty alleviation. However, at times, donors have supported the security sector without demanding accountability.

Since the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, Ethiopia's international prominence has grown. Ethiopia is now a partner and a "frontline state" in the U.S. war on terrorism. Correspondingly, aid to Ethiopian security forces has increased and international criticism of the government has become even more muted. The newly designated U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia told Human Rights Watch that human rights and the "war on terror" are both important objectives for the United States.²²⁶ But a senior State Department official told Human Rights Watch that Ethiopia's cooperation in gathering intelligence from Sudan and Somalia and in other matters he was not at liberty to discuss is so important to U.S. interests that the U.S. effectively wields little if any leverage over the Ethiopian government. He said that, although the U.S. is aware that Ethiopia's interests do not always coincide with its own and listens to its partner "with a jaundiced ear," the country's human rights record is "not a factor" in the bilateral relationship "as a point of fact."²²⁷

The U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa has declined to take a strong stand against police shootings of protesters and other egregious abuses reported in its annual human rights report.²²⁸ Although the U.S. provides substantial support to the Ethiopian military, which reportedly has a budget of some U.S.\$300 million, the U.S. has not used its leverage to ensure that adequate funds be allocated to non-lethal crowd control techniques or that perpetrators of human rights violations are held accountable.²²⁹ Members of Ethiopian civil society organizations

²²⁴ "The students do not have more rights." *Sub-Saharan Informer*.

²²⁵ Rule 5.5 on Student Publications, *Senate Legislation of Addis Ababa University (with revisions up to the end of the 1985-86 academic year)*, February 1987, p. 208. Since 1987, the rules have been updated by circulars but the university has apparently not published current rules together. An administrator interviewed by Human Rights Watch said he was not aware of any relevant updates. Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 23, 2002.

²²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, U.S. ambassador to Ethiopia, Aurelia Brazael, Washington, D.C., Nov. 4, 2002.

²²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with a senior state department official, Washington, DC, September 30, 2002.

²²⁸ See, U.S. Department of State, "Ethiopia: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2001."

²²⁹ When a Human Rights Watch researcher asked an American diplomat responsible for economic affairs to comment on the government's claim that it could not afford non-lethal means of crowd control although it receives U.S. military assistance and its military budget is reportedly U.S.\$300 million, she curtly replied "For whatever reason, they don't have non-lethal

have told visiting U.S. government representatives that statements of embassy officials are at times indistinguishable from those of the Ethiopian government.²³⁰ A European diplomat expressed frustration with the U.S. attitude. “They think, what is one hundred deaths in a country of some 65 million?” he said.²³¹ Some expressed hope that the new U.S. Ambassador Aurelia Brazael, who criticized the large numbers of political prisoners in Ethiopia at her confirmation hearing before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in July 2002, would be more willing to denounce human rights violations.²³²

The E.U. has recently demonstrated an increased willingness to take a stand on human rights violations in Ethiopia, notably with its demand for an inquiry and accountability for civilian killings at Tepi and Awassa. However, European diplomats said they were reluctant to provide Ethiopia with assistance to improve its means of responding to civil disturbances. Germany and the U.K. suspended assistance to the Ethiopian police in 1997 after materials they provided had reportedly been used in the commission of human rights violations including the assassination of Assefa Maru. The Ethiopian government then rejected an agreement incorporating human rights into the training and reference to judicial oversight over police.²³³ One European diplomat said his government would only consider providing assistance if the Ethiopian government made a genuine effort to hold accountable those responsible for the Tepi and Awassa killings.²³⁴ Human Rights Watch takes the position that, because Ethiopia already receives substantial foreign aid that benefits its military and security forces, additional assistance should not be necessary to enable the government to respond to student demonstrations and civilian disturbances without lethal force.

crowd control methods!” and abruptly ended that subject of discussion. Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

²³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Washington, DC, September 23, 2002.

²³¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

²³² Human Rights Watch interview Washington, D.C., September 20, 2002. The statement Ambassador Brazael delivered at her confirmation hearing indicated that she intends to make the promotion of human rights a priority. Statement by Ambassador Aurelia Brazael, Ambassador-designate to Ethiopia, Before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, July 9, 2002.

²³³ Human Rights Watch, “Curtailed of Rights,” p. 51.

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview, Addis Ababa, July 25, 2002.

VIII. ETHIOPIA: A CASE STUDY OF VIOLATIONS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom encompasses more than the freedom of professors to speak and write freely on their fields of specialty. It also recognizes the crucial role that academics play as intellectual leaders of society. In countries such as Ethiopia where only a small percentage of the population completes secondary school, schoolteachers and even high school students are among the most educated members of society. Their role as community leaders is vital and must be protected. As this report demonstrates, academic freedom is a sensitive barometer of a government's respect for human rights. Educators and their students are often among the first targets of governments that do not respect their citizens' civil and political rights; education and academic institutions are often among the first to suffer at the hands of governments that do not provide their citizens with social, economic, and cultural rights. Because educational systems (and universities in particular) are public institutions or depend on government funding, and because such institutions are viewed by governments as prime instruments of national policy, governments have considerable power and incentive to influence what takes place in schools (and on campus). In Ethiopia, as in many other countries, governmental power has been used to turn the educational system into an institution that largely serves the interests of state power holders. This leads to violations of international human rights law, obstructing the fulfillment of other civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

International law has long recognized the cardinal significance of the right to education and the importance of academic freedom in fulfilling this right. The right to education is enshrined in Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which simply states "Everyone has the right to education." The International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) echoed this sentiment in Article 13: "The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education." Article 13 sets forth in some detail the right to education, the purpose and content of education, and the critical role of teachers and their associations in establishing and implementing national educational policies. The U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR Committee), responsible for authoritatively interpreting the content of the rights enumerated in the ICESCR, has explained the importance of the right to education thus: "Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights."²³⁵

The ESCR Committee has identified a clear link between academic freedom and fulfillment of the right to education: "the right to education can only be enjoyed if accompanied by the academic freedom of staff and students."²³⁶ It is useful here to refer in full to the Committee's definition of academic freedom:

Members of the academic community, individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation or writing. Academic freedom includes the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfill their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the State or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction.

As set out by the Committee, academic freedom includes two sets of rights: one, the individual rights of educators and their students, in particular the rights to free expression and free association, and two, the collective right of the academic community to conduct its affairs so as best to fulfill its central mission of transmitting knowledge and information, as encapsulated in the concept of institutional autonomy.

In the first category are those fundamental rights, applicable to all individuals under international law, that are particularly relevant in allowing educators and students as individuals to engage in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge and participate in the formation of educational policy. Chief among these are the

²³⁵ ECSCR Committee, Gen. Com. no. 13, para.1.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, para. 38.

rights to hold and express opinions and to freely associate in order to share these opinions.²³⁷ The situation in Ethiopia demonstrates how the violation of the right of academics to free expression and free association stifles their academic work and hence frustrates fulfillment of the right to education.

Freedom to Hold and Express Opinions

The freedom to hold and express opinions is a core constituent of the international human rights system. This right appears in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. As is set forth in this report, the Ethiopian government, like many other governments, views educators as public employees who can be punished at will for voicing critical opinions. But it is clear that this governmental behavior violates fundamental international human rights law.

This issue has been squarely addressed by the U.N. Human Rights Committee (H.R. Committee), the body entrusted with the task of authoritatively interpreting the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The H.R. Committee found the government of Togo in violation of article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) for dismissing and detaining two university instructors who had criticized the government.²³⁸ The H.R. Committee held:

The freedoms of information and of expression are cornerstones in any free and democratic society. It is in the essence of such societies that its citizens must be allowed to inform themselves about alternatives to the political system/parties in power, and that they may criticize or openly and publicly evaluate their Governments without fear of interference or punishment.

The status of the two instructors as employees of a university funded chiefly by state funds did not justify the government's actions in the H.R. Committee's eyes. Indeed, the Committee underlined the obligation of states "to ensure that there is no discrimination on the ground of political opinion or expression The rights enshrined in article 25 [regarding the right of citizens of all states to 'take part in the conduct of public affairs'] should also be read to encompass the freedom to engage in political activity individually or through political parties, freedom to debate public affairs, to criticize the Government and to publish material with political content."²³⁹

Self-Censorship

Self-censorship occurs when individuals modify their opinions or refrain from expressing them altogether on the basis of their conscious or subconscious evaluation of the consequences—consciously through fear of physical or economic reprisals, subconsciously through misinformation, lack of access to alternative ideas, or desire to conform to prevailing political views in the community in which they live.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Staff and students at institutions of higher learning engage in critical questioning of the material and cultural world in order to advance human knowledge and understanding, and therefore face disproportionate pressure from oppressive governments. This essential linkage has been expressly recognized by international NGOs and other organizations. The Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of Institutions of Higher Education, adopted by the World University Service in 1988 as a guidepost for the defense of academic freedom worldwide, states: "Every member of the academic community shall enjoy, in particular, freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association as well as the right to liberty and security of person and liberty of movement." The World University Service is an international nongovernmental organization focusing on education, development, and human rights.

²³⁸ The Human Rights Committee consists of eighteen independent experts who study reports provided by states parties to the Covenant and provide general commentary on the Covenant. Under the first Optional Protocol to the Covenant, a separate treaty open to States parties to the Covenant, the Human Rights Committee is authorized to receive complaints from individuals within the jurisdiction of those States that have acceded to the protocol.

²³⁹ U.N. Human Rights Committee, Communication No. 422/1990: Togo. 19/08/96. CCPR/C/57/D/422/1990 (Jurisprudence).

²⁴⁰ In "Routine Somersaults of Self-Censorship," Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon describe how people can develop a habit of regulating their own thoughts: "Self-censorship gains power as it becomes automatic. Former [U.S. Federal Communications Commission] commissioner Nicholas Johnson summarizes the process when he tells of 'a reporter who first comes up with an investigative story idea, writes it up and submits it to the editor and is told the story is not going to run. He wonders why, but the next time, he is cautious enough to check with the editor first. He is told by the editor that it would be

In his “Thematic Report on Freedom of Opinion and Expression,” presented at the fifty-sixth session of the H.R. Committee, the special rapporteur on freedom of expression focused mainly on self-censorship in relation to defamation laws and suppression of women, but also took particular notice of “actions taken by governments in relation to academic freedom.” These actions were found to include:

Suppression of research on such controversial topics as a national independence movement that was active in the past; a ban on campuses of any independent organizations that are considered political; refusal of permission to hold a seminar on human rights; state-supported harassment of independent libraries that were established to provide access to materials to which there is no access in state institutions; charges of having published a play that was considered blasphemous; charges against and conviction of the head of a political science department, who was also a contributor to a student magazine, for having defamed the religion of the state.²⁴¹

Knowingly encouraging self-censorship through government policies amounts to a violation of the freedom of opinion, which is considered to be absolute, and is protected as such in the ICCPR—as noted in a report by the special rapporteur at the fifty-first session of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights on December 14, 1994:

The freedom to form an opinion was held to be absolute [in the *travaux préparatoires* of the Covenant] and, in contrast to freedom of expression, not allowed to be restricted by law or any other power. It is for these reasons that the Covenant in article 19 (1) declares an independent right to hold opinions without interference. The absolute character of the protection offered by article 19 (1) is furthermore underlined by article 19 (3), which stipulates that special duties and responsibilities are only carried with the exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of article 19, i.e. solely the right to freedom of expression and not the right to hold opinions.²⁴²

Freedom of Association

Freedom of association for educators is a central component of academic freedom. The right to create and join the association or trade union of one’s choice is a fundamental right of every individual; according to the ICCPR, “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others, including the right to form and join trade unions for the protection of his interests.”²⁴³ The ICESCR similarly recognizes “[t]he right of everyone to form trade unions and join the trade union of his choice.”²⁴⁴ The African (Banjul) Charter for Human and Peoples’ Rights states in its article 10, “Every individual shall have the right to free association.”²⁴⁵ The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work has recognized freedom of association as one of the “fundamental rights” that all ILO members have an obligation to respect and promote.²⁴⁶ The ILO Convention

better not to write that story.’ Johnson continues: ‘The third time he thinks of an investigative story idea but doesn’t bother the editor with it because he knows it’s silly. The fourth time he doesn’t even think of the idea anymore.’” Jeff Cohen and Norman Solomon, “Routine Somersaults of Self-Censorship,” *Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting*, MediaBeat, Sept. 13, 1995.

²⁴¹ Report of the special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Abid Hussain, to the Commission on Human Rights, 56th Session, para.37, E/CN.4/2000/63 (2000). Mr. Abid Hussain (India) was appointed special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression on 2 April 1993, pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1993/45.

²⁴² Report of the special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Abid Hussain, to the Commission on Human Rights, 51st Session, para. 24, E/CN.4/1995/32 (1994).

²⁴³ ICCPR, article 22(1). Ethiopia ratified the ICCPR on June 11, 1993.

²⁴⁴ ICESCR, article 8(1). Ethiopia ratified the ICESCR on June 11, 1993.

²⁴⁵ African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, articles 10 and 11 (1981). Ethiopia ratified the African Charter on June 15, 1998.

²⁴⁶ International Labour Conference, ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 86th Session, Geneva, June 18, 1998. According to ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, “all Members, even if they have not ratified the Conventions in question, have an obligation arising from the very fact of membership in the

concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise states, “Workers . . . without distinction whatsoever, shall have the right to establish and . . . to join organizations of their own choosing without previous authorization.”²⁴⁷ The ILO has specified that educators at every educational level are entitled to these rights.

International law also explicitly envisages particular rights for teachers’ associations. In many cases, educators’ trade unions play a crucial role in protecting the material conditions of teachers and educational staff in order to allow them to pursue their pedagogical duties. Professional organizations for teachers are also essential for helping States develop and implement an adequate educational system. In many countries, as in Ethiopia, the same organizations carry out both professional and trade functions envisaged for teachers’ organizations under international law. Article 13(2)(e) of the ICESCR states, “with a view to achieving the full realization of this right [to education]: . . . the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.”²⁴⁸ In its authoritative commentary on this article, the ESCR Committee explicitly linked educators’ freedom of association with their ability to provide an adequate education to their students by noting “the relationship between articles 13(2)(e) . . . and 6-8 of the Covenant [regarding labor rights including the right to voluntarily form and join trade unions], including the right of teachers to organize and bargain collectively; . . . [and] Urges States parties to report on measures they are taking to ensure that all teaching staff enjoy the conditions and status commensurate with their role.”²⁴⁹

The nexus between students’ right to education and their teachers’ right to free association has been recognized by the two leading international agencies addressing these rights, UNESCO and the ILO. The two organizations issued the landmark joint Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers in 1966, which reiterates the general proposition that “The teaching profession should enjoy academic freedom in the discharge of professional duties.”²⁵⁰ Specifically, the Recommendation states: “Teachers’ organizations should be recognized as a force which can contribute greatly to educational advance and which therefore should be associated with the determination of educational policy.”²⁵¹ These recommendations were expanded upon in 1997 to address higher-education teaching personnel. The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel states clearly: “Higher-education teaching personnel should enjoy the right to freedom of association, and this right should be effectively promoted.”²⁵²

In light of the intimate link between the role of teachers in providing education and the significance of teachers’ organizations in facilitating this role, UNESCO and the ILO established a Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART) to oversee implementation of the two recommendations. CEART meets once every three years and has the authority to receive and analyze allegations by teachers’ associations concerning non-observance of the recommendations’ provisions.²⁵³ At its last meeting, CEART again underscored the important link between the right to education,

Organization to respect, to promote and to realize, in good faith and in accordance with the Constitution, the principles concerning the fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions.” Therefore, even countries that have not ratified the ILO Convention concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise and the ILO Convention concerning the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining are bound by this obligation.

²⁴⁷ ILO Convention concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (ILO No. 87), 68 U.N.T.S. 17, July 4, 1950, article 2. ILO Convention No. 87 was ratified by Ethiopia on June 4, 1963.

²⁴⁸ ICESCR, article 13(2)(e).

²⁴⁹ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 13, para. 27 (1999).

²⁵⁰ UNESCO, Recommendation Concerning Status of Teachers, para.61.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, para.9.

²⁵² ILO and UNESCO, Recommendation concerning the status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, para. 52, 1997.

²⁵³ The Joint ILO and UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendations concerning Teaching Personnel (CEART) is composed of twelve independent experts – six each appointed by each organization – who meet once every three years to study the application of the standards. CEART also analyzes specific allegations of noncompliance with the two Recommendations from teachers’ associations. The results of these analyses and CEART’s suggestions for

academic freedom, and freedom of association for teaching personnel, which it called a “fundamental truism”: “the status of teachers and the status of education are so intertwined that whatever produces change in the one will normally produce changes in the same direction in the other.”²⁵⁴

CEART has repeatedly called on the Ethiopian government to explain its denial of freedom of association and its generally poor record on educational policy. In its most recent report (in 2000), CEART concluded:

There were clear indications that one of the key findings and recommendations that the Joint Committee made in 1997, namely that the Government should seek to restore a healthy partnership with teachers and the ETA in the interests of Ethiopian education and with due regard to the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation, 1996, has been largely ignored. The evidence . . . underscores the continued allegations of harassment and refusal to consult with ETA.²⁵⁵

The ILO’s Committee on Freedom of Association has, since 1996, annually called on the Ethiopian government to allow the ETA to function freely, to provide due process to detained ETA members, to cease harassment and intimidation of ETA members, and to investigate the 1997 assassination of Assefa Maru. The conclusions were based on detailed information submitted by ETA and Education International, an international federation of teachers’ unions. In 2001, the ILO’s Governing Body—the chief decision-making body of the organization, representing governments, business interests, and trade unions—endorsed these conclusions and urged the Ethiopian government to respond to the complaints. Finally responding in 1997 after several ILO requests for information, the Ethiopian government again, without supporting evidence, simply accused Dr. Taye Woldesemayat and the other incarcerated leaders of the ETA of “armed rebellion and of terrorist activities against the government.” The government failed to address any of the ETA’s complaints.²⁵⁶

University Autonomy

The second category of rights comprising academic freedom is the collective right of the academic community to pursue its mission. Institutional autonomy is essential for fulfillment of this right. This concept is most often invoked when addressing institutions of higher education where, historically, students as well as educators are adults who operate in a setting that is intellectually—and often physically—distinct from its surroundings. UNESCO, in its 1997 declaration on the role of higher-education personnel, described autonomy as “the institutional form of academic freedom and a necessary precondition to guarantee the proper fulfillment of the functions entrusted to higher-education teaching personnel and institutions.”²⁵⁷ The ESCR Committee expanded on this definition in its discussion of academic freedom: “the enjoyment of academic freedom requires the autonomy of institutions of higher education. Autonomy is that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision-making by institutions of higher education in relation to their academic work, standards, management and related activities.”²⁵⁸

Institutional autonomy does not mean that educational institutions are free to operate as they please. In fact, the ESCR Committee explicitly states that autonomy must be balanced against accountability to the public’s needs and demands.²⁵⁹ But it has been demonstrated repeatedly that educational institutions can only meet their obligations to society—primarily satisfying the right of all individuals to education—if educators, staff, and students are free as a community to “enhance their prospective function, through the ongoing analysis of emergent

improvements are communicated to the Governing Body of the ILO and the Executive Board of UNESCO to be conveyed to the states’ parties.

²⁵⁴ Joint ILO/UNESCO Committee of Experts on the Application of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, Report of the Seventh Session (2000), para. 59, CEART/7/2000/10.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, Appendix C, Allegation Received from Education International and the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association, para. 10.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, paras. 6, 10.

²⁵⁷ UNESCO, Recommendation concerning the status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel, para.18, 1997.

²⁵⁸ ECSR Committee, Gen. Com. No. 13, para. 40.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

social, economic, cultural and political trends, acting as a watchtower, able to foresee, anticipate and provide early warning, thereby playing a preventative role.”²⁶⁰

Institutional autonomy encompasses many different elements. One important protector of institutional autonomy is a system, such as tenure, whereby educators are protected from politically motivated administrative meddling. The example of Ethiopian academics is instructive here. Lacking the protections of tenure, several were summarily dismissed from their positions due to their political and union activities, and the threat continues to this day to chill the activity of other academics. The Ethiopian government’s use of administrative appraisals and two-year contracts for university faculty perpetuates uncertainty and decreases institutional autonomy, to the detriment of academic freedom. Another, more obvious attack on institutional autonomy is the presence of security personnel, especially when armed, in educational institutions. Particularly in the case of university campuses that are self-enclosed or physically separated from their surroundings, the intrusion of armed troops intimidates both teachers and students and is a serious breach of institutional autonomy. It was precisely this sort of aggressive violation of academic freedom and institutional autonomy on the campus of Addis Ababa University that set off student protests and led to the government’s lethal reaction. In Ethiopia, as in too many other countries, academic freedom is often one of the first casualties of government repression.

Excessive Use of Force and Arbitrary Arrests in Repressing Demonstrations

All governments have a universally recognized obligation to ensure that their citizens are free from extra-legal or arbitrary killings. Article 6 of the ICCPR guarantees every human being the inherent right to life and states that “[t]his right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.” The Human Rights Committee, which monitors the compliance of all state parties with the ICCPR, has held that the state not only has a duty to protect its citizens from such violations, but also to investigate violations when they occur and to bring the perpetrators to justice.²⁶¹ The U.N. Economic and Social Council in 1989 adopted the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. Principle 9 states:

[There] shall be a thorough, prompt and impartial investigation of all suspected cases of extra-legal, arbitrary and summary executions, including cases where complaints by relatives and other reliable reports suggest unnatural deaths. Governments shall maintain investigative offices and procedures to undertake such inquiries. The purpose of the investigation shall be to determine the cause, manner and time of death, the person responsible, and any pattern or practice which may have brought about that death.²⁶²

The use of force by law enforcement officers is strictly governed. Article 3 of the U.N. Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials, states that force may only be used “when strictly necessary to the extent required for the performance of their duty.”²⁶³ Furthermore, the U.N. Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials requires that law enforcement officials shall not use firearms:

Except in self-defense or defense of others against the imminent threat of death or serious injury, to prevent the perpetration of a particularly serious crime involving grave threat to life, to arrest a person presenting such a danger and resisting their authority, or to prevent his or her escape and only when less extreme means are insufficient to achieve these objectives. In any event,

²⁶⁰ The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education adopted the World Declaration on Higher Education in the 21st Century: Vision and Action, in Paris on October 9, 1998. Representatives of over 180 countries were present, as well as representatives of the academic community, including teachers, students, and other stakeholders in higher education.

²⁶¹ See Report of the Human Rights Committee, 37 U.N. GAOR Supp. (no.40), annex V, general comment 7(16), para.1 (1982), U.N. Doc. A/37/40 (1982).

²⁶² Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of Extra-Legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, adopted by the Economic and Social Council, May 24, 1989, reprinted in Commission on Human Rights, Economic and Social Council, “Report by the special rapporteur S. Amos Wako, pursuant to the Economic and Social Council resolution 1988/38,” E/CN.4/1990/22, January 23, 1990.

²⁶³ UN General Assembly Resolution 34/169, December 17, 1979.

intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.²⁶⁴

In the event that firearms are used, principle 10 requires clear warning and sufficient time for the warning to be observed unless inappropriate to the circumstances. Even when the use of firearms is deemed necessary, principle 5 lays out clear guidelines for their use, including:

- Exercise restraint in such use and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved;
- Minimize damage and injury;
- Respect and preserve human life;
- Ensure that assistance and medical aid are rendered to any injured or affected persons at the earliest possible moment;
- Ensure that relatives or close friends of the injured or affected person are notified at the earliest possible moment.

Police are also required to ensure that assistance and medical aid are rendered immediately to injured persons, according to article 6 of the U.N. Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and principle 6 of the Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.

In addition, arrests made in the wake of civilian protests or under other circumstances must meet the criteria set forth in the ICCPR.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ U.N. Doc. A/CONF. 144/28/Rev.1 (1990) adopted at the Eighth UN Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana 27 August to September 27 1990, Principle 9.

²⁶⁵ ICCPR, articles 7 and 9.

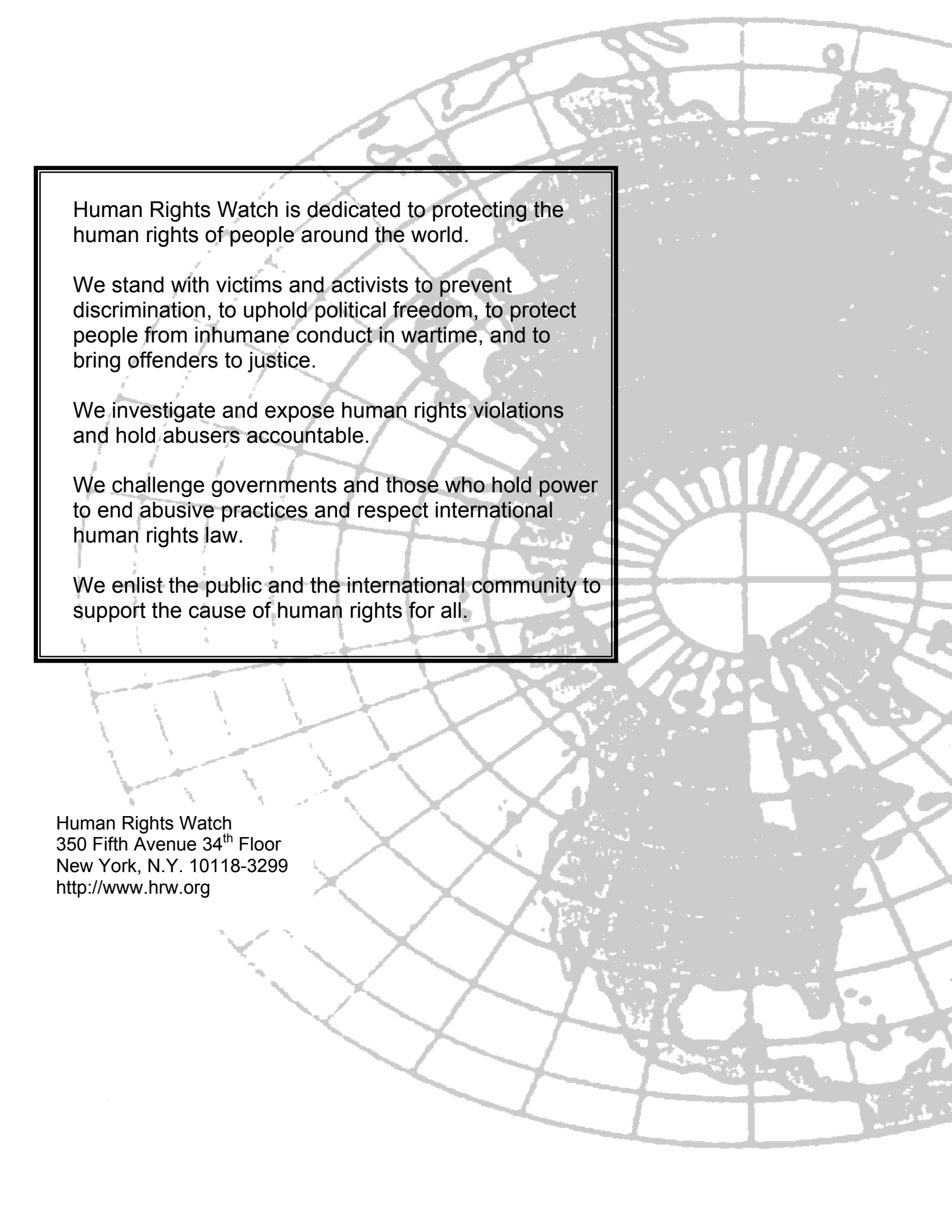
IX. CONCLUSION

The Ethiopian government has dismissed criticism of the violations of academic freedom documented in this report—the use of lethal force to repress student demonstrations, widespread arbitrary arrests of students and educators, the banning of the country’s foremost academic association, and the cultivation of a climate of self-censorship on campus—with the claim that academics are entitled to the same rights as all other Ethiopian citizens. Unfortunately, the claim is largely true: the government systematically violates basic rights of its citizens and its treatment of academics is just one manifestation of this broader problem. To the extent that the government’s claim is based on the premise that university life and continuing attacks on professors, educators, researchers, and students are of no particular significance in Ethiopian society, however, it is mistaken. The rights to education and to academic freedom are valuable not only in their own right but also because they facilitate the recognition and fulfillment of other rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights essential to Ethiopia’s future. Remedying the abuses detailed in this report should be an integral part of efforts to bring Ethiopian government practices into compliance with international standards.

X. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Human Rights Watch
350 Fifth Avenue 34th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10118-3299
<http://www.hrw.org>