

News: After a daylong lull tension resurfaces in Wolaita

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Fresh protests erupted today in Gununo town in Wolaita zone.

Addis Standard staffs

Addis Abeba, August 12/2020 – After a daylong lull yesterday, tension is rising again in Boditi and Gununo towns of Wolaita zone, in SNNPRS. It followed rumors circulating about an arrangement of a new regional structure following the mass arrest of Zonal officials last Sunday, according to Nebiyu Marqosa, assistant lecturer at the school of law in Sodo University.

Nebiyu said that information circulating in several places claiming that Wolaita zone will be incorporated into a new regional state arrangement based in Arbaminch city as the new capital triggered fresh protests.

In an interview with state television aired yesterday, Alemayehu Bawdi, SNNPRS Peace & Security bureau head with a rank of deputy president, said that new zonal administrative members were selected and they have started talks with various groups including members of the regional security and religious and civil society organizations operating in the zone.

"I just arrived at Gununo town and protest has erupted and roads are being blocked with burning tyres and stones," Nebiyu said today. According to him a meeting attended by representatives from the Federal government as well as prominent people including former PM Hailemariam Desalegn, former Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia, Tekilewold Atnafu, and former SNNPRS Police Commission Commissioner Fisseha Garede was held in Sodo city. The meeting was also attended by Woreda and town executives and police chiefs of Wolaita zone and was aimed at resolving the situation. "However, the meeting ended with demands from local representatives for the federal government to reinstate all the zonal officials [who were arrested]."

Furthermore, Nebiyu said that the local participants demands transparent investigation into the killing of at least 21 civilians in the hands of the security and to release dozens of people who are detained in the aftermath of the protests as well as the withdrawal of the federal security forces from these streets. As tensions return, two more people are believed to have been shot Gacheno town, he said.

Background

Protests erupted in Sodo city and its environs late on Sunday after the arrest by members of the federal police and the federal army of at least 26 people, including Dagato Kumba, Wolaita Zone administrator. The arrested officials also include members of the council for Wolaita statehood request and opposition party members from Wolaita National Movement (WNM) during a meeting they were attending inside the city's Gutera conference hall. In a statement it released today, the opposition Wolaita People's Democratic Front (WPDF) said the number of people killed in various places has reached 21; countless others were also injured. AS

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