

News: More than a dozen killed by security forces in Ethiopia's Oromia; region hit by yet another boycott

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Addis Abeba, March 05/2018 – Following the news of the state of emergency, which the speaker of the house of people's representatives (Ethiopian parliament) said was approved by the majority in the house, albeit a "mathematical error", which led to the speaker to apologize, protests have flared up in various cities across Oromia against the news, leading to the death of at least seven people so far.

In addition to the death, more than 20 were also wounded, most of them by bullet, while some were severely beaten, according to various information obtained by Addis Standard and other media reports. However, not all casualties were related to protests as is the case for Kelbessa Mekonnen, 24, who was "shot from the back" in Gimbi, western Ethiopia, on Sunday. He was "on his way to see a doctor for a headache he was experiencing," according to Abdi, a relative who wants to be identified by his first name only. "Kelbessa died on the spot," Abdi told Addis Standard, adding "there was no protest in the city when Kelbessa was killed." He was raised by Likilu Haile, a single mom who is working as a waitress in a restaurant in the town, Abdi said. Four other people, including Israel Deresu, Kelbessa's friend who was accompanying him to the hospital, were also wounded. "He is now admitted at Gimbi Adventist Hospital." Over the weekend, a graphic picture showing Kelbessa's disfigured face was making rounds in the Ethiopian social media space. Abdi confirmed the picture was indeed that of the victim's.



Kelbessa Mekonnen. This picture is sent by his family members to Addis Standard

And in Chiro, west Harargehe zone of the Oromia regional state in eastern Ethiopia, one person, Ibrahim Abdella, was killed by security forces, according to Mustafa Kadir, a relative who spoke to Addis Standard by phone. "He was killed from a close range on his way to work; there was no protest in the city and we were all going about our daily lives," Mustafa said. Ibrahim's body was taken to Chiro hospital before it was discharged to his family this afternoon. Addis Standard's attempts to talk to the city police were to no avail.

Other cities affected by protests include Ambo, Ginchi, Guder as well as Qellem Wollega, where the deaths of six people was reported on Saturday and Sunday. According to DWAmharic, three people were killed yesterday in Ginchi town. 81 km west of Addis Abeba. And on Saturday three people were killed in Ambo, 125 km west of Addis Abeba. Both places are where the 2015 Oromo protests began.

Quoting doctors at hospitals in the Nekemte, Gimbi, Ambo and Dambi Dolo Bloomberg news said "on Sunday they've handled 18 casualties with bullet wounds since the government suspended the constitution on Feb. 16. Ambo General Hospital documented two deaths on arrival and 13 casualties on Saturday, according to Garoma Shure, a doctor at the facility."

Twitter post from Addis Standard (@addisstandard) dated Mar 5, 2018. The tweet includes Amharic text and a map of Ethiopia highlighting the West Wellega region.

The incident in Gimbi was also confirmed by the VOAAmharic news.

And on Saturday, Terefe Digafe and his father Digafe Danda'a were both "shot by security forces in Guder town, about 12 km west of Ambo, Arega Huliso, a relative, confirmed to Addis Standard. "Both of them were together when they were shot not far from their house. The whole community is devastated," a sobbing Arega said by phone. "Digafe died on the spot, while his son Terefe is admitted to Black Lion hospital in Addis Abeba, where he is currently at critical condition.

On February 27, amidst continued anti-government protests and reports of casualties, including death, in parts of the Oromia regional state, particularly in Dembi Dolo and Nekemt, in western Ethiopia, the Command post established to oversee the reinstated state of emergency said its patience against what it called anti-peace elements has run out and it no longer tolerates any form of disruptions of public peace; it said it instructed security forces "to take necessary measures" to restore peace."

Three days boycott, again

Three days strike called by online activists to protest the state of emergency has also began in Oromia region today. Scores of businesses, civil service offices and schools have been shuttered since early this morning. Transport services to and from the capital Addis Abeba are also affected.

Twitter post from Addis Standard (@addisstandard) dated Mar 5, 2018. The tweet contains Amharic text and a screenshot of a document with highlighted sections.

Addisu Arega, head of the communication bureau of the Oromia regional state, confirmed that lives are lost, properties are damaged & ongoing road blockages & other forms of protests are happening in the region. He called on the public to ask their questions while continuing to work.

And according to the state run television EBC, there were no activities in cities within Oromia regional state, including Ambo, Gimbi, Hirna, and Jimma. The strikes are happening despite the prohibition from command post enforcing State of Emergency. This morning, the command post led by Siraj Fegessa, minister of defense, urged "the society to carry out their normal day-to-day activities by ignoring information being circulated via social media to incite violence."

According to the implementation direction of the state of emergency text, which was released today, activities such as boycotting markets, missing from work places without reason, disrupting transport activities, unlicensed public gatherings, and protesting in educational facilities, among others, are prohibited.

Twitter post from Mohammed Ademo (@OPride) dated Mar 5, 2018. The tweet discusses the state of emergency in Ethiopia and includes a screenshot of a document with highlighted sections.

One of the cities affected by today's boycott is Bishoftu, 45 km south of the capital Addis Abeba, where "there were no businesses, schools and government offices opened," according to Alemayehu Huriso, a resident of the city. "We just woke up to an empty city; it looks like a ghost town." AS

Ed's Note: This story has been updated to clarify that "Digafe died on the spot, while his son Terefe is admitted to Black Lion hospital in Addis Abeba, where he is currently at critical condition.

In the earlier version, we reported that both Digafe and Terefe were killed on the spot. The discrepancy in the story occurred due to a language barrier with our interviewee who spoke only in broken Amharic mixed with Afan Oromo.

A compilation of interviews given in Afan Oromo and Amharic by families of the victims and is translated to English by OPride website can be available here.

We regret the error.

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