

This is an Amnesty International [news release](#) published on 2nd February, 2006

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Ethiopia: Amnesty International urgently appeals for thousands of students detained

Amnesty International is appealing to the Ethiopian government against the unlawful detention of thousands of students from the Oromo ethnic group following a series of anti-government demonstrations which took place in Addis Ababa, different parts of the Oromia region and in other towns across the country.

Eleven of the students who have been detained are incommunicado at a number of different locations, and are at risk of torture or ill treatment.

Amnesty International is calling for the detainees to be either brought to court, charged and given prompt and fair trials in accordance with recognized international standards, or otherwise released.

The arrests have taken place during a wave of student demonstrations which began on 9 November 2005 and which are still taking place in some areas.

Most of the students are from secondary school; some are under 18 years old, but teachers, farmers, people in the corporate sector and others have also been detained in connection with the demonstrations.

Most demonstrations reportedly began peacefully but in some places, some police and demonstrators were injured.

The demonstrations are said to have taken place after a call by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), an armed opposition group, for demonstrations against the government.

Among other political demands, demonstrators called for the release of Oromo political prisoners, including officials of the Mecha Tulema Association, a long-established Oromo welfare association.

Several demonstrators were reportedly shot dead and others wounded by the security forces. Many protesters were beaten by police.

Those detained have reportedly been accused of links with the OLF, although none of them has yet been charged.

Some detainees have been released, but others are being held in locations where torture has frequently been reported, such as Ambo Palace prison and Senkele police training centre, near the town of Ambo.

The whereabouts of many of the detainees, some taken to remote rural prisons, are not known.

In an incident which may have been related to the demonstrations, two Oromo detainees arrested in 2004, Alemayehu Garba (an Addis Ababa University student who is disabled and one of the subjects of UA 180/04) and Morkota Edosa, were reportedly shot dead by police or prison officers in Kaliti prison in Addis Ababa on 9 December.

Amnesty International is also urgently seeking an independent investigation into reports of killings of several demonstrators, and torture or ill-treatment of detainees, particularly in Ambo Palace prison and Senkele police training centre near Ambo.

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