

Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners (SOCEPP – Canada)

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Stop the Eviction of Mekele Residents

Reports trickling out of Mekele (Tigray) in Northern Ethiopia indicate an increasing and disturbing violation of rights of the residents of the city including the forceful eviction and displacement, violent suppression, imprisonment and beating of peaceful protesters.

It was reported that, in the week of April 20, the government decided to demolish dwellings of more than 5000 residents of the city of Mekele. The demolition targeted the houses of individuals who have lived in the same location for many years as well as others who settled in the city after their displacement from Eritrea. It was also reported that the government's demolition plan included an Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Sadly, residents were informed of the planned demolition only three days before the actual plan was to be implemented.

Thousands of people who took to the streets protesting this abrupt and outrageous decision of the authorities were denied the right to peaceful demonstration and were dispersed forcefully. Again, within a few days when the authorities moved in to begin marking the houses slated for demolition, residents resumed protesting. It was at this point that the security forces moved in once again using force including beatings and use of tear gas to disperse the residents. During this skirmish, security forces arrested several people including children, the elderly and women.

According to reports, a journalist by the name Yonas Belay of the Tigrigna Language TIHLO News Paper/Magazine who attempted to investigate and report the situation was arrested for the second time. In addition to his arrest, his camera, mobile phone and recording equipment were also confiscated by the police.

This forced eviction and demolition of dwellings constitutes the violation of the right of individuals to adequate housing which is guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ill-treatment and detention of demonstrators, their families and the journalist is consistent with the ruling regime's long history of cruel and inhumane treatment of anyone who questions its authorities. This is also consistent with the government's punitive attempt to silence dissent through brutal use of force.

SOCEPP Canada unequivocally condemns this disgraceful violation of the rights of the residents of Mekele and calls on the ruling group to stop demolishing dwellings, free the detained, end the repression against peaceful protestors and journalists.

- We express our solidarity with the internally displaced residents of Mekele as well as those who stand up for justice in that region and elsewhere in Ethiopia.
- We call upon the international community to condemn this latest violation of rights by the ruling EPRDF/TPLF authorities in Ethiopia and demand an immediate end to such repression.
- We would also like to alert the international Community about the plight of other displaced Ethiopians in places such as Gambella due to the massive land-grab policy of this regime as well as ill-advised projects such as the one around Gilgel Gibe.

The international community should refrain from providing any type of support for such destructive projects which negatively affect hundreds of thousands of endogenous people, the social fabric of society and the environment.

Ethiopians shall be free from the long hands of the authoritarian regime!

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