



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **OLLAA CALLS FOR ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE AND RELEASE OF OLF POLITICAL PRISONERS**

*Falls Church, Virginia (03/23/2022)* – In February, as previously [reported](#) by OLLAA, several detained leaders of the OLF launched a hunger strike to protest their unlawful detention and detention conditions at prisons throughout Ethiopia. During this hunger strike, [Bate Urgessa](#), the Head of OLF Public relations, fell ill and was rushed to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with Hepatitis B. Although he was eventually released from prison on bail in order to receive treatment, the OLF has claimed that he was routinely denied access to adequate medical care while he was detained without charges or a trial for nearly a year.

OLLAA has recently spoken with members of the OLF leadership, who claim that Bate Urgessa's treatment in prison, including his routine denial of medical treatment, was not an aberration. Reportedly, Gada Gabisa, a political admiral for the OLF, was also diagnosed with Hepatitis B on March 16th, 2022, at the same time as Bate Urgessa, and has yet to receive treatment. Another OLF leader, Kensa Ayana, also became critically ill during the hunger strike, but was denied the opportunity to be tested for Hepatitis B. Several other OLF political prisoners also have health conditions, including Michal Boran, Dr. Gada Oljira, Lami Beyana, Dawit Abdata, Abdi Ragasa, and Dembi Teshome, but have been routinely denied access to medical treatment. For example, Dembe Teshome has been diagnosed with Tuberculosis for months, but was only recently allowed access to medication. Dr. Gada Oljira has experienced frequent fainting spells due to a heart condition, but has not received medical treatment. In addition, the OLF contends that the detention centers are overcrowded and do not meet minimum standards of hygiene, particularly in Awash Melkasa, where prisoners have been kept inside a chicken coop, leading to further adverse health outcomes for detainees.

OLLAA notes that international law protects individuals from arbitrary arrests and detentions, and ensures that individuals who have been deprived of their liberty have certain rights, including the right to access medical care. In addition, the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules) set out that States have a responsibility to provide health care for its prisoners. [Policy briefs](#) published by the UN have called for all prisons to have “a comprehensive hepatitis programme, including the provision of free hepatitis B vaccination for all prisoners, free hepatitis A vaccination to those at risk, and other interventions to prevent, diagnose and treat hepatitis B and C equivalent to those available in the community”.

OLLAA calls on the Ethiopian government to meet its international legal obligations, including by releasing all members of the OLF who are unlawfully detained, and ensuring that all prisoners are afforded access to medical care. The Ethiopian government should also establish a comprehensive hepatitis programme for its prisons. Finally, we call on the international community to urge the Ethiopian government to free all remaining political prisoners, including leaders of the OLF, and to ensure that all prisoners are provided access to medical care in line with international standards.

*OLLAA is an umbrella organization that represents dozens of Oromo communities around the world.*