



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**OLLAA EXPRESSES CONCERNS ABOUT THE SAFETY OF POLITICAL PRISONERS
AS PRIME MINISTER ABIY AHMED JOINS THE FRONT LINES**

Falls Church, Virginia -- OLLAA is alarmed by the latest development coming from Kaliti prison in Ethiopia. Today's statement issued by the families of Oromo political prisoners, including Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba, shows that NISS security agents recently attempted to gain access to these prisoners. OLLAA calls for the international community to take active measures to ensure their protection, including by calling for their immediate release.

As previously reported by OLLAA, several leading members of the Oromo non-violent, pro-democracy movement have been imprisoned since June 2020, including Jawar Mohammed and Bekele Gerba. These political prisoners were arrested following their participation in protests following the assassination of Oromo activist and singer, Hachalu Hundessa, and continue to be detained to this day on terrorism charges. As the conflict in Ethiopia has escalated in recent months, OLLAA has been increasingly concerned about the safety and security of these political prisoners.

Today, the families of these political prisoners issued a [statement](#) alleging that, on the evening of November 18, 2021, several NISS security agents arrived at Kaliti prison, where Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, and their colleagues are currently being held, and asked to be taken to their cell. When the guards refused their request, which was made without authorization, an altercation ensued, and only ceased when the prison's commander on duty arrived and asked the men to leave the compound. The families of these prisoners believe that the NISS security agents planned to assassinate or move the prisoners to unknown locations, and have called on the Ethiopian government and the international community to ensure their safety, including by calling for their immediate release.

OLLAA shares the concerns of these families, and is also concerned that the recent [statement](#) issued by the Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, in which he announced that he would lead the Ethiopian Defense forces "from the battlefield", shows a growing desperation in his attempts to respond to rebel forces. As such, OLLAA is increasingly worried that he will consider utilizing similar tactics as his predecessors to quash political opposition. Political prisoners have

previously died under suspicious circumstances in Ethiopia, including Lij Iyasu in 1935, who some have [alleged](#) Emperor Haile Selassie ordered killed while he was imprisoned.

OLLAA echoes the calls of these families for the international community to ensure the safety and security of these, and all other, political prisoners in Ethiopia, and also calls for their immediate release. We urge all concerned parties in the US to call or write to their representatives to alert them to this increasingly dangerous situation for Oromo political prisoners and urge them to call for their release. OLLAA has drafted email and call-in templates regarding this situation, available [here](#).

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