

Press Release

Mr. Chehem Ahmed Houmad, the Wazir of Tadjourah and the traditional leader of the Afars was arrested in Djibouti on November 5, 2015, after arriving from France. The Wazir has been under medical care in France for heart conditions for past few years. Upon arrival from France he was arrested on allegation that he is a sympathizer of FRUD, an armed opposition group against the government in Djibouti. The Wazir of Tadjourah has been advocating for peaceful resolution of the conflict between the government of the Republic of Djibouti and rebellion. The northern and southwestern part of Djibouti is inhabited by the Afars who are marginalized by the Somali-Issa dominated government in Djibouti City.

In recent months, the government has been conducting massive repression on the civilian population by blocking their movement. Accusing the innocent civilians as collaborators with FRUD and daily arbitrary arrest and harassment has become a norm. The civilian population has become increasingly victim of rouge Somali-Issa ethnic dominated army.

The northern part of the country where the Afars live has been deliberately kept marginalized and undeveloped. There are no functioning schools, health facilities and sufficient food for the population. The socioeconomic aspects of the Afar community is diminishing with highest unemployment rate and lost opportunist for the youth. Systematic exclusion, and denied opportunities could be a fertile ground for radicalization of the youth and further destabilizing factors for the region. Recent unholy move by the government includes resettlement of Somalia-Issa people on the indigenous Afar land that further deepens the conflict among the two communities.

In light of these atrocities by the government on the Afars, the Wazir of Tadjourah has been vocal to speak-up about the injustices committed to his people. The Wazir is a man of peace and garners respect and support among his people. The arrest is nothing than to silence him and to create fear on the Afars and those who advocate for democratic change and peaceful co-existence. The aspiration for justice and advocating for just and peaceful resolution of thirty eight years of injustice against the Afars by the Somali-Issa dominated government is considered to be heinous crime that should not be tolerated. Those who speak up against the injustice are locked-up, terminated from government jobs or became refugees around the world.

The Afar Forum demands an immediate release of this noble peace loving and respected Wazir of Tadjourah. We fear his life is in danger due to his poor health. We also demand the release of Abdo Mohamed Ali and Kassim Mohamed Ali who were arrested along the Wazir.

We call upon human rights organizations and the international community to pay attention to the unbearable and unacceptable conditions under which the Afars in the Republic of Djibouti are subjected.

Afar Forum Executive Committee
November 5, 2016