

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 25/05/96

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 25 per Section.

UA 141/96

Prisoner of conscience / Fear of ill-treatment 11 June 1996

ETHIOPIA Zegeye Asfaw, aged about 50, lawyer, agronomist, head of a local development NGO, former government minister

On 9 June 1996, Zegeye Asfaw, a prominent member of the Oromo ethnic group, was arrested in Chancho, 40 kilometres northwest of Addis Ababa. He had travelled from Addis Ababa to Chancho, his birth-place, for a reafforestation project workshop run by *Hundee* ("Root"), an officially registered local non-governmental organization (NGO), which he founded and heads. He has not been charged with any offence or taken to court, and is detained in Chancho police station. It is believed that the local Oromia regional authorities have accused him of involvement with the armed opposition Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) -- which he denies. However, this accusation may have been made in order to justify closing down or restricting *Hundee's* activities because it is independent of the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO), which controls the Oromia regional state.

Amnesty International believes that Zegeye Asfaw is a prisoner of conscience, detained for his peaceful opinions and activities. It is concerned for his well-being in custody, in view of reports of torture and ill-treatment in the course of current widespread detentions of suspected OLF supporters.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Zegeye Asfaw was Minister of Agriculture after the Revolution in 1974 and later Minister of Justice, until he was detained in 1980. He was a prisoner of conscience from 1980 to 1989 under the Dergue government headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam. After the overthrow of the Mengistu government in 1991, Zegeye Asfaw was appointed Minister of Agriculture in the Transitional Government, but left the government and the country in 1992 when the OLF went into armed opposition. He returned to Ethiopia soon afterwards, no longer representing the OLF. He worked as a consultant agronomist for international organizations. He participated at one time in mediation moves in the armed conflict in the Oromia Region between the government and the OLF.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern at the detention on 9 June 1996 of Zegeye Asfaw in the course of the work of his development NGO in Chancho;
- appealing for his immediate and unconditional release as a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for his non-violent opinions;
- seeking assurances that he is not being ill-treated and urging that he be given immediate and regular access to his family and legal representative, and medical attention if needed.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Dr Negaso Gidada
President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Office of the President
P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Telegrams: President Negaso, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: +2511 552030

Salutation: Your Excellency

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: +2511 552030

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Mahteme Solomon
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: +2511 550722

Salutation: Dear Minister

Mr Kuma Demeksa
President of Oromia
Oromia Regional State Council
P O Box 62298, Addis Ababa
Ethiopia

Telegrams: President of Oromia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Dear President

COPIES TO:

- Mr Kinfe Gebre-Medhin, General Manager
Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs Authority
c/o former Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 5721, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Mr Kemal Bedri, President of the Supreme Court, Supreme Court, P O Box 6166,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 550278**
- Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 514300**

and to diplomatic representatives of ETHIOPIA accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 8 August 1996.