

PUBLIC

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20 April 2001

Further information on UA 99/01 (AFR 25/006/2001, 18 April 2001) - Fear for safety / Use of excessive force by security forces

NEW CONCERNS: Incommunicado detention / Fear of torture or ill-treatment

ETHIOPIA Students from Addis Ababa University
Civilian demonstrators in Addis Ababa, including students from secondary schools

New names: Lidetu Ayalew, EDP Secretary General
Tamerat Tarakegn] EDP Central Committee
Tadeos Tantu] members

Hundreds of people have reportedly been arrested and are being detained incommunicado following the riots in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, on 17 and 18 April. It is not known where the detainees are being held, and Amnesty International is concerned that they are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

Since the early morning of 19 April, security forces have been raiding church compounds and mosques, where demonstrators have sought refuge. They have reportedly arrested hundreds of people, many of them secondary school students, whom they are thought to accuse of having taken part in the riots. Others have been arrested from their homes and taken away. Some of those arrested are believed to be as young as 11 years of age.

More than 40 opposition politicians have reportedly also been detained, including the Secretary General of the opposition Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP), Lidetu Ayalew, the two members of EDP's Central Committee named above, and other members of EDP and the opposition All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO). The government has accused the opposition of trying to exploit the situation, and has issued a statement warning "certain political groups and other groups who claim to be advocates of human rights" to "refrain from ... promoting anarchy in the city".

The Security forces reportedly shot at, beat and kicked demonstrators during the riots. Unconfirmed reports have indicated that as many as 41 people may have been killed, and over 250 injured as a result. It has been reported that hospitals in Addis Ababa have been inundated with casualties, and that many of those injured suffered gunshot wounds. Most of the dead and injured are said to be high school students and unemployed youths.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Detainees are routinely reported to be tortured in Ethiopia, particularly in certain police stations and security centres in Addis Ababa. In the past, prisoners, including students, have been ill-treated, for example by being forced to carry out harsh physical exercise.

The situation in Addis Ababa is reported to be calm but tense following the riots. Security forces have been deployed throughout the city. The authorities have closed Addis Adaba University until further notice, and have advised parents not to send their children to school before Monday 23 April. Students from a number of schools in southern and eastern regions have reportedly expressed their solidarity with the students in Addis Ababa.

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

- expressing concern that hundreds of people, including school children, students and opposition politicians, have reportedly been arrested and are being held incommunicado;
- calling on the Ethiopian authorities to clarify the reasons for the arrests, to reveal where the detainees are being held, and to either charge them with a recognizably criminal offence or release them;
- calling for the detainees to be given immediate access to legal assistance, members of their family and adequate medical care;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that none of those detained will be tortured or ill-treated;
- urging the Ethiopian authorities to comply with its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child by refraining from arresting, detaining or imprisoning children, except as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate time;
- acknowledging that the Ethiopian authorities have a duty to uphold public security and to prosecute those responsible for criminal actions, but expressing serious concern at reports that as many as 41 people might have been killed during the riots and urging the authorities to publicly clarify the number of those killed or injured;
- urging the authorities to respect relevant international standards when enforcing law and order, and calling for any member of the security forces who is found to have acted in breach of such standards to be brought to justice.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency
Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: + 251 1 552020
Salutation: Your Excellency

Commissioner of Police
Office of the Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Justice
PO Box 21321, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax:+251 1 550278
Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

Mr Kinfe Gebre-Medhin
General Manager, Public Security
Office of the Prime Minister
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Fax: + 251 1 552020
Salutation: Dear Sir

Ms Genet Zewdie
Minister of Education
PO Box 1367, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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Salutation: Dear Minister

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 1 June 2001.