

URGENT ACTION

OPPOSITION POLITICIANS ARRESTED, RISK TORTURE

Two political opposition leaders were arrested on 27 August in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, after meeting with Amnesty International staff. Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa are both at imminent risk of torture. The family of one of the men has been denied access to him. Both men are likely to be denied access to lawyers and family members for several weeks.

Bekele Gerba, of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement, a political opposition party in Ethiopia, and **Olbana Lelisa** of the political opposition Oromo People's Congress party, were arrested on 27 August, and are being held at the Federal Police Central Investigation centre Maikelawi. The government has announced that both men were arrested on suspicion of belonging to the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a banned terrorist group. This charge has often been used by the government to silence the legitimate Oromo political opposition.

Both men had met with Amnesty International staff just days before their arrests, and the organization is concerned that these meetings were the cause of the arrests. The Amnesty International delegation was subsequently expelled from the country.

There are countless reports of the use of torture at Maikelawi where the men are being held. The government refuses to investigate these reports or to allow independent monitors into the prison. The men are at immediate risk of torture and ill-treatment during interrogation.

It is feared that Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa might not be given access to their family or lawyers, as detainees in Maikelawi are generally denied access for periods of up to two months after their arrests.

Please write immediately in Amharic, English or your own language:

- Expressing concern that the men may have been arrested for exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression, and urging that they are immediately released, unless they are promptly charged and tried in proceedings that meet international standards for fair trial;
- Urging that Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa are given immediate and unrestricted access to legal representatives and family members;
- Urging the Ethiopian government to ensure that Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa are not subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment during their detention in Maikelawi;
- Expressing concern at reports indicating that torture and other forms of ill-treatment have been used at Maikelawi and calling for an independent investigation into these reports.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 14 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

Minister of Justice

Berhanu Hailu
Ministry of Justice,
PO Box 1370,
Addis Ababa,
Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 5517755

Salutation: Dear Minister

Director, Federal Police Commission

Gebeyehu Workineh
P.O. Box 29507,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 534253 / +251 11 5511213

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

And copies to:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Office of the Prime Minister,
PO Box 1031,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 552030

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Opposition politicians in Ethiopia have been subjected to frequent harassment and arrest. Journalists' right to freedom of expression has also often been disregarded.

Large numbers of ethnic Oromos have been arrested on the accusation of belonging to or supporting the Oromo Liberation Front, which is considered to be a terrorist group by the Ethiopian government.

Anyone held on accusations of criminal offences is entitled to be promptly charged and tried without undue delay in proceedings that meet fair trial standards, or else to be released. Even those charged with an offence must be released pending trial unless the state presents evidence to justify the detention before an independent and impartial court; the nature of the accusations cannot alone justify pre-trial detention.

The right to freedom of expression is guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, both of which Ethiopia is a state party to. The Ethiopian Constitution also guarantees freedom of the press and the mass media and prohibits censorship in any form. Article 29(4) of the Constitution states "The press shall be granted institutional independence and legal protection to enable it to accommodate different opinions and ensure the free flow of information, ideas and opinions that are necessary in a democratic society."

In 2010 Ethiopia agreed to the recommendation from the UN Human Rights Council's periodic review that it would "adopt all necessary measures to provide for free and independent media which reflect a plurality of opinions."

Name: Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa

Gender m/f: Both male

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