

31 October 2007

UA 280/07 **Forcible return/fear of torture or ill-treatment/incommunicado detention/prisoner of conscience**

ETHIOPIA **Atanaw Wasie (m), aged 74, political activist**
14 Ethiopian refugees

On 27 September, the Sudanese authorities forcibly returned 15 recognized refugees to Ethiopia, handing them over at the Ethiopia-Sudan border. Their whereabouts are now unknown and Amnesty International believes they are at risk of enforced disappearance, arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture and unfair trials.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced on 11 October that the 15 had been part of a group of more than 30 Ethiopian refugees arrested in early July 2007 by Sudanese intelligence officers in Khartoum and Blue Nile state.

Among the 15 was Atanaw Wasie, who has chronic asthma for which he needs medical treatment. He was a leader of the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) political party, which opposed the Dergue government that was overthrown in 1991, but is no longer active. He was arrested on 7 July 2007 in the eastern town of Gedaref and held incommunicado.

Others who were returned and detained are reported to be alleged members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which is fighting the Ethiopian security forces in the Oromia Region. Several thousand members of the Oromo ethnic group have been arbitrarily detained and tortured in Ethiopia in recent years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Ethiopian foreign minister visited Sudan in June 2007. Shortly afterwards, in early July, hundreds of Ethiopian and Eritrean nationals living in Sudan were arrested. Many were asylum-seekers or recognized refugees. Many of the detainees had been living in Sudan as refugees since the late 1970s; others were opponents of the Ethiopian government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who have been arriving in Sudan since the 1990s to seek asylum.

Ethiopia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, both of which oblige the Ethiopian authorities not to torture individuals, detain them arbitrarily or detain them incommunicado. Both also oblige the authorities to allow detainees access to lawyers, relatives and all necessary medical treatment.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Atanaw Wasie and 14 other Ethiopian refugees, who were forcibly returned to Ethiopia on 27 September, in violation of international refugee protection law, and detained on arrival at the Ethiopian border;
- urging the Ethiopian authorities to disclose their whereabouts and legal status immediately;
- if the 15 are still being detained, calling on the authorities to explain why they were detained, ensure that they are not tortured or ill-treated and give them immediate access to lawyers, their families and any medical treatment they may require;
- if they are in detention, calling on the authorities to bring them promptly before a court and ensure they are either released or receive a prompt and fair trial in accordance with recognized international fair trial standards.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi, Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 1552020

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito, Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 5517775/ +251 11 5520874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

The official Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

Ambassador Dr Kassa Gebreheywot, Chief Commissioner, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

PO Box 1165, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 618 0041

Email: hrc@ethionet.et

Salutation: Dear Chief Commissioner

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 12 December 2007.*****