

PUBLIC

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UA 114/05 Fear of torture/arbitrary detention

ERITREA **Tewelde Gebremedhin (m)]**
 Minassie Andezion (m)] trade union leaders
 Habtom Weldemichael (m)]

The three trade union leaders named above are now known to have been arrested on or soon after 30 March, in the capital, Asmara. They are held incommunicado, which puts them at greater risk of torture or ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes they may be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their legitimate trade union activities.

They are not in any authorised place of custody, and are thought to be held in a secret detention centre controlled by the security service, possibly the *Wenjel Mirmera* security section of the Second Police Station (known as *Karchele* -“prison”). By law they should have been brought before a magistrate within 48 hours of arrest, but this was not done.

Tewelde Gebremedhin and Minassie Andezion were arrested on 30 March, reportedly at the office of the government-aligned trade union umbrella organisation, the National Confederation of Eritrean Workers (NCEW). Habtom Weldemichael was arrested on 6 April. It is not known why the three men were arrested, but it is believed to have been because of their trade union work, at a time when the government is said to be considering changes in trade union regulations and structures.

Tewelde Gebremedhin is the chair of the Food, Beverages, Hotels, Tourism, Agriculture and Tobacco Workers' Federation, which is affiliated to the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF); Minassie Andezion is the secretary of the Leather and Textile Workers' Federation; and Habtom Weldemichael is the chair of the Coca Cola Workers' Union and an executive committee member of the Food and Beverages Workers' Federation. Like all other trade unions in Eritrea, these organisations are controlled by the government and the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This is the first time that trade union leaders have been arrested in Eritrea, alongside other critics or suspected critics of the government. Several thousand people are believed to be detained as prisoners of conscience in the country, on account of their peaceful criticism of the government, their religious beliefs, their professional activities as independent journalists or their opposition to military conscription.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of trade unionists Tewelde Gebremedhin, Minassie Andezion and Habtom Weldemichael, arrested in Asmara on or soon after 30 March, who appear to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely because of their trade union work;
- calling for the three men, who are said to be held incommunicado in a secret security prison, to be either brought to court and charged with a recognizably criminal offence, or released immediately and unconditionally;
- asking the authorities to ensure that they are not tortured or ill-treated in custody, and are given access to their families and lawyers, any medical attention they may require, and access to representatives of a national or international humanitarian organization.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency President Issayas Afewerki
Office of the President
P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea

Fax: + 2911 126422

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Brigadier General Abraha Kassa
Head of Security

Office of the President

P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea

Salutation: Dear Brigadier General

Fax: + 2911 126422

Brigadier Abraham Andom
Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea

The Secretary General
National Confederation of Eritrean Workers
PO Box 1188, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: +291 1 126 606

and to diplomatic representatives of Eritrea accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 June 2005.