
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 247/94

TO: PRESS OFFICERS
FROM: IS PRESS OFFICE
DATE: 28 OCTOBER 1994

AI INDEX: NWS 11/247/94
DISTR: SC/PO
NO OF WORDS:609

INTERNAL

NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **ETHIOPIA** (This item is being sent to targeted media by the IS)

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

APEC - 3 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 243 AND NEWS SERVICE 212/94

Peru/Committee against Torture - 9 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 243/94

Iraq - 29 November - SEE NEWS SERVICE 212/94

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

News Service 247/94

AI INDEX: AFR 25/WU 03/94
28 OCTOBER 1994

ETHIOPIA: SPECIAL PROSECUTOR CHARGES DETAINED FORMER OFFICIALS WITH HUMAN RIGHTS CRIMES

Charges for human rights crimes filed in recent days against former Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile-Mariam and scores of his most senior officials are an important sign that there will be no impunity for massive human rights violators, Amnesty International said today.

"Trials of major human rights violators are essential – in the former Yugoslavia, Ethiopia, Rwanda or elsewhere in the world – to show that people responsible for political killings, torture and other violations don't get away with their crimes," the human rights organization said.

The charges, filed three days ago by the office of Ethiopia's Chief Special Prosecutor in the Central High Court, include "269 documented acts of genocide and crimes against humanity" over the 17-year period from the 1974 revolution to the defeat of President Mengistu's government in 1991.

They relate to the killing of 1,823 victims, including former Emperor Haile Selassie, the torture of 99 victims and 194 "disappearances", including Abuna Tewoflos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the Reverend Gudina Tumsa, head of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church.

However, Amnesty International is concerned that those now charged, and perhaps other former officials soon to be charged, will face the death penalty and possible execution if convicted.

"Although we agree that major human rights crimes such as those committed in Ethiopia deserve severe punishment, the human rights treaties which Ethiopia has signed in the past two years oblige it to protect the right to life," Amnesty International said.

The human rights organization advocates the worldwide abolition of the death penalty – a punishment which is always cruel, inhuman and degrading, as well as irrevocable.

"The International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia – which intends to prosecute major human rights violators there – will not be applying the death penalty."

Amnesty International is appealing to President Meles Zenawi's government to rule out the death penalty in Ethiopia too and is calling on abolitionist governments such as Sweden, whose aid is funding the Special Prosecutor's Office to join in pressing the Transitional Government of Ethiopia for no executions.

The charges include many cases of human rights violations against which Amnesty International had campaigned for years, particularly during the horrific 1977 "Red Terror" campaign of mass arbitrary detentions, torture and extrajudicial executions of government opponents.

"We support such trials in Ethiopia and elsewhere for the sake of protecting and promoting human rights, provided they meet international standards of fair trial", Amnesty International said.

The authorities have announced that the trials will be based on Ethiopian law, supplemented by international humanitarian law. They are to be held in open and normal courts, with the right of defence and appeal, and are to be open to international trial observers, including representatives of Amnesty International, and the news media. The preliminary proceedings could commence in about six weeks. Charges relating to war crimes and other offenses may be added later. It could take a year or two for all trials and appeals to be completed.

Some of those charged are among 1,315 men and women detained since 1991. They also include 29 who are charged in absentia (such as Mengistu Haile-Mariam, now in Zimbabwe) after fleeing the country: Ethiopia is seeking their extradition to stand trial.

ENDS\