

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 25/001/2003

UA 12/03

Disappearance/excessive use of force/impunity/
detention without charge or trial

10 January 2003

ETHIOPIA

Daniel Zerfu (m) Deacon
Scores of others

Amnesty International is extremely concerned about the whereabouts of Deacon Daniel Zerfu. He "disappeared" following an intervention by the Federal Police Special Forces in a church dispute over the appointment of a new church leader in the town of Mekele, in the Tigray Regional State.

Deacon Daniel Zerfu was detained on 27 December 2002 and has not been seen since. His "disappearance" follows a dispute which broke out between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church authorities, the Lideta Church clergy and its congregation. The courts had decided that the Lideta Church should be handed over to the newly appointed church leader of Mekele town by the Dioceses council and head of the church. Members of the congregation opposed this and on the morning of 18 November 2002, gathered outside the church to sing and say prayers. At 4.30pm the Federal Police Special Force arrived and cordoned off the area. The members of the congregation continued to voice their opposition by holding hands to prevent the police from gaining access to the church. The police responded by beating up the peaceful demonstrators and arresting 73 people, around 50 of whom are still in detention. The abuses were documented by the Ethiopian human rights organisation, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council in their report into the incidents.

The protestors continued to demonstrate day and night outside the Lideta church and on 26 December, the leader of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is reported to have called on the Ethiopian government to take forceful measures against the demonstrators. The following day scores of people were beaten up and 36 people were arrested by the Federal Police Special Force. They were taken to the Federal Police Special Force camp of Kolfe. Seventeen of those arrested were taken to Woreda 22 police station near the Lideta Church. Those arrested were reportedly ill treated by the police while in custody.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

There have been a number of recent reports of the use of excessive force by Federal Police Special Forces against peaceful demonstrators in the Southern town of Awassa. These include beatings and extrajudicial executions. In September 2002, the European Union (EU) sent a delegation to Awassa and Tepi (another town in the Southern Region) to conduct its own investigation into events in the region. Unfortunately the report produced was not a public document. However the EU has continued to put pressure on the Ethiopian authorities. On 18 October 2002 it was reported that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi publicly pledged to take action against regional officials implicated in the killings in Awassa and Tepi. However Amnesty International has received information suggesting that Federal Security Forces are also implicated in the killings.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of Deacon Daniel Zerfu who "disappeared" on 27 December 2002, - urging the government to reveal his whereabouts immediately and ensure that he be held in an officially designated place of custody;
- calling for him to be given immediate and regular access to his family and legal representative, and allowed access to humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross;
- reminding the government that the Ethiopian constitution states that anyone who is detained should be brought before a court within 48 hours and either charged with a recognizably criminal offence and given a prompt and fair trial according to international standards, or released;

- urging the government to adhere to the principles set out in the Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and in particular Article 4:1 which states that “All acts of enforced disappearance shall be offences under criminal law punishable by appropriate penalties which shall take into account their extreme seriousness”,
- calling for the authorities to ensure that those responsible for the forced “disappearance” of Daniel Zerfu be arrested and tried in accordance with internationally recognised legal standards;
- reminding the government of their obligations to ‘ensure that no one is subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention’ under Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister

Prime Minister's Office

PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles Zenawi,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Fax: + 251 1 552 020 (this number may be difficult to get through to but please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Harke Haroye
Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice

PO Box 1370

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 1 517775

Salutation: Dear Minister

Major Befkadu Tolera

Federal Commissioner of Police

Ministry of Justice

PO Box 21321, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Federal Commissioner of Police,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Fax: + 251 1 517775

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

Mr Getachew Assefa

General Manager of Public Security

Prime Minister's Office

P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 1 552 020 (it may be difficult to get through to this number, but please keep trying)

Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES TO:

His Holiness *Abune* Paulos

Ethiopian Orthodox

Church Headquarters

P O Box 1283

Addis Ababa

Salutation: Your Holiness

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 21 February 2003.