

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 25/20/97

11 November 1997

Further information on EXTRA 153/97 (AFR 25/19/97, 6 November 1997) - Fear of torture / Probable prisoners of conscience

ETHIOPIA  
Beyene Abdi  
Beyene Belissa  
Hussein Abdi  
Haji Sahlu Kebte  
Gabissa Lemessa

new names:  
Tilahun Hirpasa  
Zewde Chamada  
Adam Hassen  
Adugna Fitee  
Mohamed Wayu  
Gadissa Boltossa

and others

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The above 11 detainees remain in incommunicado detention after being remanded in custody without charge subsequent to appearing in court. They are among up to 20 prominent members of the Oromo ethnic group (or "nationality") arrested in Addis Ababa between 4 and 6 November 1997 publicly accused of having links with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and of involvement in recent bombings in Addis Ababa and other towns. The OLF, which has been fighting government troops in the Oromia region since 1992, denies responsibility for the bombings.

Amnesty International believes the majority of the detainees to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned as a result of their human rights activities and non-violent opinions. The first six named are board members of the newly-established Human Rights League (HRL), formed among the Oromo community in Addis Ababa.

Amnesty International is concerned about possible ill-treatment of the detainees whilst in police custody. Political prisoners are often denied medical treatment and conditions in the police Central Investigation Bureau (known as Maikelawi) are harsh with reports of torture and "disappearances" of political prisoners.

There is particular concern for Beyene Belissa, disabled, a senior Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency employee, Tilahun Hirpasa, a former teacher and board member of HRL, Hussein Abdi, a former Ministry of Foreign Affairs official reportedly transferred to a secret prison in the Menelik Palace and several other detainees who are elderly and require regular medical care.

Beyene Belissa is disabled since having a leg amputated in 1991 as a consequence of an accidental shooting by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) forces. Police are said to have smashed his operational and spare artificial limbs during arrest and he has reportedly been refused his walking stick in prison. Tilahun Hirpasa is in poor health and has undergone a recent chest operation. His health has suffered as a result of torture he was subjected to as a prisoner of conscience between 1992-1993.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Tilahun Hirpasa and Gabissa Lemessa were prisoners of conscience over many years in the 1980s (much of the time in Maikelawi prison) during which they were tortured and detained by the previous Dergue government who falsely accused them of being OLF members.

**FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or in your own language:**

- appealing for the immediate and unconditional release of the detained members of the Human Rights League (Beyene Abdi, Beyene Belissa, Hussein Abdi, Haji Sahlu Kebte, Gabissa Lemessa, Tilahun Hirpasa) who appear to be prisoners of conscience detained on account of their human rights activities, and of other detainees arrested on account of their non-violent opinions;
- urging that they are treated humanely in custody and given immediate and regular access to their families, lawyers and medical doctors (particularly the more elderly detainees and Tilahun Hirpasa);
- expressing concern at the transfer of Hussein Abdi to a secret prison, where he may be at risk of torture, and calling for his immediate return to an official prison;
- expressing concern over the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of the disabled detainee Beyene Belissa, demanding that his artificial limb be immediately replaced and that he be allowed his walking stick and any other necessary humanitarian assistance in prison.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency Meles Zenawi  
Prime Minister  
Prime Minister's Office  
P O Box 1031  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Faxes: + 2511 552030**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde (*please note corrected name*)  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
P O Box 1370  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Faxes: + 2511 550278 (*please note amended fax number*)**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Colonel Legesse Tegegne  
Commissioner of Police  
Ministry of Justice  
P O Box 1370  
Addis Ababa

**Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Faxes: + 2511 550278 (*please note amended fax number*)**  
**Salutation: Dear Colonel**

**COPIES TO:**

- His Excellency President Negasso Gidada, Office of the President, P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 552030**

- Mr Kemal Bedri, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, P O Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 550278**
- Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 514300**
- Human Rights League, P O Box 20600, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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 25 December 1997.