

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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6 January 1994

Further information on EXTRA 107/93 (AFR 25/15/93, 17 December 1993) - Legal Concern

**ETHIOPIA: Arrest of exiles returning for a Conference on Peace and Reconciliation**

Ibsa Gutama, representative of the Oromo Liberation Front	(OLF),
former Minister of Education (1991-1992), former	
prisoner of conscience (1980-1990) - <u>released</u>	
Abera Yemane-Ab, representative of the Coalition of Ethiopian	Democratic
Forces (COEDF) and the All-Ethiopia Socialist	Movement
(Me'isone)	
Genenew Assefa, representative of COEDF (but not of the	Ethiopian
People's Revolutionary Party, EPRP, as previously	stated)
Genet Girma (female), representative of COEDF and EPRP	
Seyoum Zenebe, representative of the Ethiopian Medhin	Democratic
Party (EMDP)	

**NEW NAMES:** Mesfin Teferra, representative of COEDF  
Alemayehu Deressa, Swedish citizen, representative of Ethiopian  
Democratic Forum in Sweden - released  
Lencho Latta, former deputy secretary general of OLF - released

and up to 40 demonstrators

Five of the above named people - **Aberra Yemane-Ab, Genenew Assefa, Genet Girma, Seyoum Zenebe and Mesfin Teferra** - remain in custody, held at Maikelawi prison in Addis Ababa. Conditions there are believed to be reasonable. They are allowed access to relatives, who can also take food for them. Access to the legal representatives designated for them by the conference was initially refused but has now been allowed.

**Mesfin Teferra** was arrested on 16 December 1993 when he returned to Ethiopia from the USA for the conference. **Alemayehu Deressa** was arrested on 16 December but was released after a few days. **Lencho Latta** was arrested on 23 December at the airport in Addis Ababa, when he returned to Ethiopia, offering to exchange places with the other imprisoned OLF representative, **Ibsa Gutama**. The OLF have dismissed Lencho Latta from his post on account of this action.

All seven prisoners (not Alemayehu Deressa) were taken to court some days after their arrests and remanded in custody for investigation into various offences. On 31 December they were all formally charged with raising or attempting to raise revolt or armed rebellion against the government, for which the maximum

penalty is death, and other imprisonable offences including spreading false rumours, incitement to breach of the peace, and defamation of the government.

All were refused bail. No date was set for their trials. Up to 100 people were arrested or beaten by police in peaceful demonstrations outside the courtroom: up to 40 were quickly tried and jailed for a month for contempt of court.

On 4 January **Ibsa Gutama** and **Lencho Latta** were released when the prosecution withdrew the charges against them. This was the result of a letter which they wrote from prison to the Minister of Justice, reportedly stating that they were working in their individual capacities for a peaceful settlement to the armed conflict between the government and the OLF. The government announced their release on the grounds that they had thus renounced violence.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Ethiopian government had justified the arrests of the returning exiles with the assertion that, in addition to the OLF's acknowledged armed opposition to the government, the US-based Ethiopian Medhin Democratic Party leader had advocated armed struggle, and that the EPRP [which had previously fought the Mengistu government and had also previously clashed with the Tigray People's Liberation Front, now heading the current government] had not renounced violence. It had previously also stated that some of those arrested would be charged with crimes relating to involvement in the Mengistu government's "Red Terror" campaign in 1977-1978, but none has yet been charged with this. It also claimed that the arrests had nothing to do with the Conference on Peace and Reconciliation.

The Conference of Peace and Reconciliation went ahead in Addis Ababa and was attended by 51 Ethiopian opposition groups, several non-governmental organizations and diplomats, but without any government participation. The conference demanded the formation of a new transitional government, which the government rejected, saying that it will remain in power until the elections scheduled for June 1994.

#### **FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters, either in English or your own language:**

- welcoming the release of Ibsa Gutama and Lencho Latta, who were evidently prisoners of conscience;
- urging further investigation into whether the five remaining prisoners, who face similar charges to them, might also be prisoners of conscience;
- stating that Amnesty International will continue to follow closely the government's treatment of these five political prisoners with regard to the protection of their basic human and legal rights;
- appealing for the release of the peaceful demonstrators outside the courtroom who were sentenced to one-month prison terms.

#### **APPEALS TO:**

1) President:

His Excellency President Meles Zenawi  
Office of the President, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: President Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Telexes: 21050 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**

**Faxes: + 251 1 514300 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

2) Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs (head of security):

Mr Kifle Wolde-Mariam

Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs

Ministry of Internal Affairs

P O Box 5721 (note correction), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Vice-Minister Internal Affairs Kifle, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Telexes/Faxes: as for the President**

**Salutation: Dear Vice-Minister**

3) Minister of Justice:

Mr Meheteme Solomon

Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice

P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Minister of Justice Meheteme Solomon, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Telegrams/Faxes: as for President**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Mr Hassan Shiffa, Coordinator of Police and Prisons Administration,  
Ministry of Internal Affairs, PO Box 2556 (corrected) 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 31 January 1994.