

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**EXTRA 107/93**

**Legal Concern**

**17 December 1993**

**ETHIOPIA: Arrest of exiles returning for Conference of Peace and Reconciliation,  
to be held 18 to 23 December**

**Ibsa GUTAMA, representative of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), former Minister  
of Education (1991-1992), former prisoner of  
conscience (1980-1990)**

**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 and the Ethiopian People's  
Revolutionary Party (EPRP)**

**Genet GIRMA (female), representative of COEDF and EPRP**

**Seyoum ZENEBE, representative of the Ethiopian Medhin Democratic Party (EMDP)**

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The five people named above were arrested on 15 and 16 December in Addis Ababa after returning to Ethiopia to represent their respective political organizations at a Conference of Peace and Reconciliation due to be held from 18 to 23 December. Ibsa Gutama was arrested at his home on 15 December, the day after his return from 18 months' exile, and the other four were arrested at the airport on 16 December upon their return from exile in the United States of America and, in Genet Girma's case, France. All apparently possess valid Ethiopian or foreign travel documents and entry visas.

The main reason for the arrests seems to be to prevent prominent exile opponents from receiving public exposure and possible support in a political conference inside the country.

Amnesty International fears they could be detained without charge or trial, and without proper legal status, for a prolonged or indefinite period, and that other exiles intending to return for the conference could also be detained.

They are held in the police Central Investigation Bureau, known as *Maikelawi*, in Addis Ababa. They have not been charged with any offence. The government said that Ibsa Gutama was held in connection with the OLF's armed struggle. The OLF stated its wish to participate with the government in the Conference and declared a 10-day ceasefire while the Conference takes place.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Conference has been convened by opposition groups, some operating openly in Ethiopia and others remaining in exile, mainly from the US-based Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces (COEDF). The purpose of the Conference is to review the Transitional Charter (the 1991 interim Constitution) in the run-up

to elections in mid-1994 and public debate on a new Constitution. The government has not banned the conference, which diplomatic observers are due to attend, but it refused the invitation to participate in it. The government said that any exiles who returned would be arrested if suspected of involvement in crimes and human rights abuses committed between 1974 and 1991 by the former government of the *Dergue* and Mengistu Haile-Mariam.

Scores of political parties operate in Ethiopia or belong to the Council of Representatives (the interim parliament). However, government opponents have also been detained without trial in the past year, particularly alleged members of the OLF.

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

- expressing concern at the arrests of five exiles who have returned to Ethiopia for the planned Conference of Peace and Reconciliation;
- requesting a full explanation for the detentions and of the legal status of the detainees;
- urging that they be given immediate and regular private access to their families and legal representatives;
- appealing for them to be released without delay if they have been detained solely on account of their opinions or are not promptly charged with a recognizable criminal offence.

**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 Kinfe Wolde-Mariam  
Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs  
Ministry of Internal Affairs  
P O Box 2556, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Vice-Minister Internal Affairs Kinfe, 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  
P O Box 2556, 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 14 January 1994.