

URGENT ACTION

OPPOSITION LEADERS DENIED MEDICAL TREATMENT

Olbana Lelisa and Bekele Gerba are being denied medical treatment. The two men, political opposition leaders and prisoners of conscience, are reported to be ill in Kaliti prison, Ethiopia. Olbana Lelisa's friends believe his condition may be life-threatening.

Several months ago **Olbana Lelisa** and **Bekele Gerba** were moved from Ziway prison south of Addis Ababa, to Kaliti prison on the outskirts of the capital city, reportedly after a doctor in Ziway referred the two men for hospital treatment. However, since the transfer, the men have been denied access to a hospital. It is not clear what is wrong with the two men as they have not access to a full diagnosis.

Olbana Lelisa and Bekele Gerba were arrested in August 2011, within days of meeting with Amnesty International staff. They were charged with crimes against the state based on alleged support for the proscribed group the Oromo Liberation Front – a charge regularly used to silence members of ethnic Oromo political opposition parties. After a trial marred by irregularities, they were both convicted in November 2012. In a subsequent sentencing hearing Bekele Gerba was sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment and Olbana Lelisa was sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment. Both sentences were later reduced on appeal to 3 years and 7 months, and 11 years respectively. Amnesty International considers the two men prisoners of conscience, imprisoned because of their legitimate and peaceful political activity, and should be immediately and unconditionally released.

Please write immediately in Amharic, English or your own language:

- Urging that Olbana Lelisa and Bekele Gerba are given immediate and unrestricted access to a hospital for diagnosis and treatment, and that they are permitted to remain in hospital until the treatment is concluded;
- Expressing concern that Olbana Lelisa and Bekele Gerba, as well as other prisoners, are denied medical treatment during imprisonment;
- Expressing concern that the men were arrested and prosecuted for exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression, in belonging to political opposition parties, and urging that they are immediately released.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 6 JUNE 2014 TO:

Minister of Justice

Berhanu Hailu
Ministry of Justice,
PO Box 1370,
Addis Ababa,
Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 5517755

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Federal Affairs

D. Shiferaw Teklemariam
Ministry of Federal Affairs
P.O.Box 5718
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Email: shiferawtmm@yahoo.com

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Hailemariam Desalegn
Office of the Prime Minister,
PO Box 1031,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 552030 (keep trying)

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 263/11. Further information:
<http://amnesty.org/en/library/info/AFR25/007/2011/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Olbana Lelisa was a party official in the Oromo Peoples' Congress (OPC) party when he was arrested. Bekele Gerba was deputy chairman of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) party and an English teacher at Addis Ababa University. Both men had met with Amnesty International delegates just days before their arrests. The Amnesty International delegation was expelled from the country on the same day that Olbana and Bekele were arrested. During pre-trial interrogation both were questioned about their meetings with Amnesty International.

During their trial, around May 2012, Olbana complained to the court that he has been attacked by a violent fellow prisoner who had been placed in his cell. The court took no action on his complaint.

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners provide that "Sick prisoners who require specialist treatment shall be transferred to specialized institutions or to civil hospitals."

Since the arrests of Bekele and Olbana, the OFDM and OPC parties have merged to form the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC). The OFC reported that another member – Mohamed Negashi, an OPC candidate in Dire Dawa during the 2005 elections, died of unexplained causes in detention in early 2014. His wife was denied access to his corpse for burial.

The OFC further reported that in March 2014 two young OFC activists were shot dead by police in Ginmir town, Oromia region. Seifu Oda, a 33 year old father of two, was reportedly taken from his home and shot in the mouth by police. The following day during protests about the killing, Seifu's friend Abdi Bilya also an OFC supporter, was also reportedly shot dead.

The Ethiopian government is extremely hostile to dissent. Members of opposition parties and independent journalists are regularly harassed, arrested and prosecuted.

Large numbers of ethnic Oromos are regularly arrested on the accusation of supporting the Oromo Liberation Front. This includes many members and supporters of Oromo political opposition parties, and other people from all walks of life. These arrests are based on an actual or imputed opposition to the government.

In early 2011 – the year that Olbana and Bekele were arrested – hundreds of members of Oromo opposition parties were arrested, apparently as a result of the government's fear that the Middle East and North Africa style uprisings would spread to Ethiopia. Large numbers of students from universities across the Oromia region were arrested during the same period.

The OFDM and OPC parties told Amnesty International that a number of their members arrested in March and April 2011 subsequently disappeared, leading to concerns that these individuals were being held in arbitrary detention.

Name: Olbana Lelisa, Bekele Gerba
Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 263/11 Index: AFR 25/001/2014 Issue Date: 25 April 2014