

Further Information on UA 25/07 (AFR 25/002/2007, 02 February 2007) - Fear of torture or ill-treatment/incommunicado detention

ETHIOPIA Endalkachew Melese (m), aged 23, student
Daniel Hailemariam (m)
Hirut Kifle (f)
Menbere Tsegaye (m)
Tadesse Zenebe (m) - corrected name, aged 34, tyre factory security guard
And some 60 other supporters of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy

Released: Saba Mekonnen (f)
Tigist Tilahun (f)
Fantaye Beyene (m)

New names: Alemayehu Seifu (m)
Tilahun Ayele (m), teacher
Yonas Getachew (m)
Gedlu Ayele (m), army lieutenant
Wubitu Mosha (f), aged 36, detained with her four-year-old son

It is now known that over 60 officials or alleged supporters of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party, arrested in different parts of the country, have been detained incommunicado since mid-December 2006 or early 2007. Several have been released but there have also been further arrests. There have been further reports that some of the detainees have been tortured in detention.

All the detainees have been taken to court in the capital, Addis Ababa and remanded in custody while police conduct investigations, but none of them has yet been formally charged with a specific offence. Most are still held at the police Central Investigation Bureau (known as Maikelawi) in Addis Ababa but several were transferred to Kera police station in the Kirkos suburb of Addis Ababa. Five of those transferred were identified as Alemayehu Seifu, Tilahun Ayele, Yonas Getachew, Tadesse Zenebe and Gedlu Ayele. A mother, Wubitu Mosha, detained with her four year old son, is among the detainees. All the detainees have been denied access to relatives and lawyers, and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

New reports claim that several detainees have been beaten by police. According to sources, the detainees were accused of links with a little-known armed opposition group in northern Ethiopia, the Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front (EPPF). Alleged confessions by Tadesse Zenebe, Alemayehu Seifu, Tilahun Ayele, Yonas Getachew and Gedlu Ayele, at least one of whom had facial injuries, were broadcast on state television in late February. The authorities have claimed that these detainees had links with an alleged violent conspiracy mounted by the Eritrean government in the unresolved aftermath of the Ethiopia-Eritrea border conflict of 1998-2000. In a media interview, the Ethiopia's Federal Police Commissioner denied that the detainees whose confessions were broadcast had been tortured, saying that torture is illegal in Ethiopia. He wrongly accused Amnesty International of publishing a fake torture photograph supposedly related to one of the detainees. It had been posted briefly on a website based outside Ethiopia before it was identified as a photograph from East Timor, but it had never been published or endorsed by Amnesty International.

Amnesty International fears that some of the detainees may have been arrested in account of their peaceful activities in support of the CUD, and others on account of statements made as a result of torture or other unsubstantiated evidence of violent opposition.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Seventy-six CUD leaders, journalists and civil society activists are currently on trial for capital charges including treason and armed conspiracy arising from the 2005 elections, which led to demonstrations in June and November 2005 which turned violent. Soldiers and police killed 193 demonstrators and six police officers were killed by mobs. On 23 March the trial judges are due to rule on whether the accused have a case to answer, following the completion of the prosecution case. Most of the accused refused to defend themselves as they did not consider they would receive a fair trial. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners

of conscience who have not used or advocated violence (see UA 284/05, AFR 25/017/2005, 02 November 2005, and follow-ups).

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

- expressing concern at the detention without charge of some 60 CUD officials and suspected supporters;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that all detainees will be treated humanely in detention;
- urging the authorities to allow the detainees immediate access to their relatives, legal representatives and any medical treatment they may require;
- calling for an immediate and impartial investigation into allegations that detainees have been tortured, including some whose "confessions" were broadcast on state television, with the results made public and those responsible for any torture brought to justice;
- calling on the authorities to act immediately to either charge the group of detainees with a recognizable criminal offence and bring them promptly to trial according to international fair trial standards, or else to release them unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito, Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 5517775

+251 11 5520874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu, Ministry of Federal Affairs, PO Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi, Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 1552020

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 17 April 2007.*****