

PUBLIC

UA 190/07 Forcible return/Fear of torture/Arbitrary detention

SUDAN Several hundred Ethiopian and Eritrean nationals

Hundreds of Ethiopian and Eritrean nationals have been arrested since the beginning of July, and are at risk of being forcibly returned to their countries of origin. Many of the Ethiopian and all the Eritrean nationals would be at risk of immediate arrest, torture and indefinite detention without charge or trial if forcibly returned.

In mid-July several hundred Ethiopian and Eritrean adults and children were arrested in the capital, Khartoum. At least 14 Ethiopian nationals, whose names are known to Amnesty International, had been arrested on 5 July in Khartoum and in the east of Sudan. Arrests are continuing.

Many of those detained are understood to be asylum-seekers or recognised refugees. Some are in Omdurman prison in Khartoum, but the whereabouts of most is not yet known, or has not been disclosed by the authorities. Some have been taken to court, charged with illegal entry and summarily sentenced to imprisonment or immediate deportation as illegal migrants. It is understood that no-one has access to them in custody.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sudan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, all of which oblige the authorities not to forcibly return any person to a country where they risk torture or other serious human rights violations.

The government has generally abided by these treaties and worked closely with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to protect the rights of both long-term refugees and new refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea. However, this policy appears to have changed recently because of the government's changed political relations with both the Ethiopian and the Eritrean governments. For many years Sudan had hosted and supported political opponents of both governments, some of them belonging to armed groups. The recent detentions of Ethiopians came immediately after the Ethiopian foreign minister visited Sudan in June 2007, indicating new friendlier relations with Ethiopia. A similar change appears to have been made in the Sudan government's political relations with Eritrea.

Many of the detainees have been living in Sudan as refugees since the late 1970s, having fled from the Dergue government that was in power in Ethiopia at the time. Some were unwilling to return when the Dergue government was overthrown in 1991, and the current government of Meles Zenawi seized power in Ethiopia and Eritrea gaining independence under the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Some of the detainees are said to be opponents of the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia or President Issayas Afewerki in Eritrea, who arrived in Sudan in the 1990s or more recently to seek asylum. Thousands of Eritreans fled to Sudan in recent years to escape political repression or military conscription.

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

- expressing deep concern that several hundred Ethiopians and Eritreans, including recognized refugees and asylum-seekers, have been detained;
- reminding the authorities of their obligations under the ICCPR, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol and the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa not to forcibly return anyone to any country where they would be at risk of torture or other serious human rights abuses;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all Ethiopians and Eritreans detained in Sudan are treated humanely, provided with adequate medical treatment, allowed to challenge the lawfulness of their detention before a judicial authority and given immediate access to the UNHCR office in Khartoum.

APPEALS TO:

Head of State

Field Marshal Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir

Office of the President, People's Palace, PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Professor Al-Zubair Bashir Taha

Ministry of Interior, PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan

Fax: +249 183 774 339 (Mark "FAO Minister of Interior")

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Ministry of Interior

Office of the Commissioner for Refugees, PO Box 1929, Khartoum 780201, Sudan

Fax: +249 183 780 622

Dr Abdel Moneim Osman Taha

Rapporteur, Advisory Council for Human Rights

Khartoum, Sudan

Email: human_rights_sudan@hotmail.com

Human Rights Committee

The People's Hall

Omdurman, Sudan

Fax: +249 187 560950

E-mail: info@sudan-parliament.org

and to diplomatic representatives of Sudan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 31 August 2007.
