

2006

19 January

Further Information on UA 284/05 (AFR 25/017/2005, 02 November 2005) and follow-ups (AFR 25/018/2005, 10 November 2005; AFR 25/020/2005, 06 December 2005) - Prisoners of conscience/fear of torture or ill-treatment/health concern

ETHIOPIA **Hailu Shawel (m), member of parliament, President of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party, civil engineer**
Professor Mesfin Woldemariam (m), aged 75, founder and former Chair of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council
Birtukan Mideksa (f), CUD Vice President, lawyer, former judge
Dr Berhanu Negga (m), CUD member of parliament, Mayor of Addis Ababa, economist
Getachew Mengiste (m), CUD member of parliament, former army officer
Gizachew Shifferaw (m), CUD member of parliament, university professor
Dr Hailu Araya (m), CUD member of parliament, former press editor, academic
Dr Yacob Hailemariam (m), CUD member of parliament, lawyer, a former UN Special Envoy and a Prosecutor in the Rwanda genocide tribunal, former academic
Debebe Eshetu (m), CUD public relations officer, artist
Muluneh Eyual (m), CUD secretary general, economist
Daniel Bekele (m), policy director of the Ethiopian office of ActionAid (international non-governmental development organization), lawyer
Thousands of other detainees

New names: **Netsanet Demissie (m), president of NGO Organization for Social Justice in Ethiopia**
Dr Befekadu Degefe (m), CUD member of parliament, economist

All those named above are now known to have been charged on 21 December by the High Court in Addis Ababa with a range of criminal offences, most of which can carry the death penalty.

In total, 131 individuals and organizations were charged. The individual defendants, of whom about 88 are in custody, include 40 opposition party leaders or supporters detained since early November 2005; 10 newly-elected members of parliament; three prominent human rights defenders (Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie); 15 independent journalists; 30 people of Ethiopian origin who have been long resident abroad, including five journalists with the Voice of America radio station; and many members of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). Five independent news organizations have also been charged, and all four political parties belonging to the CUD coalition. Arrests are continuing and more people may be charged.

The 131 defendants were split into groups facing different charges. The charges include "outrages against the Constitution"; obstructing the National Election Board; inciting and organizing armed uprising; endangering the integrity of the state; and high treason. Most are also charged with "genocide", on the basis of allegations of the beating of an ethnic Tigrayan, arson against the property of two Tigrayans, causing fear and mental harm to members of an ethnic group, and harming members of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) by excluding them from social events and funerals.

Amnesty International considers all those named above to be prisoners of conscience. Many others of the accused may also be prisoners of conscience. Several had begun a hunger strike in late November, in protest at being detained without charge. This ended in mid-December. On 18 January CUD leaders said they would not attempt to mount a defence during their trial, as the proceedings were unfair. All the defendants are currently held in Kaliti prison in Addis Ababa, with access to their families and legal representatives severely restricted, and not possible in private.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Several thousand suspected government opponents from the CUD and other opposition parties are reportedly still detained without charge as a result of demonstrations that have been underway since November 2005 in Addis Ababa and other towns against alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections of 15 May 2005. The ruling EPRDF gained two-thirds of the seats. Police shot dead 42 demonstrators and wounded 200 others during the protests in early November. Schoolchildren, college students and teachers are among thousands of demonstrators detained in the past few weeks, particularly in Addis Ababa and the Amhara and Oromia regions. The protests led to violence on both sides, with many people reportedly severely beaten by soldiers and police and some killed. There have been reports of detainees held incommunicado in rural prisons and army camps being tortured, with several

deaths.

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

- expressing concern that peaceful opponents of the government, as well as human rights defenders, are facing charges which can carry the death penalty;
- appealing to the authorities to release all those named above immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of their opinions;
- calling for all of them to be allowed regular private access to their families and legal representatives while they remain in custody.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

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

Fax: + 251 11 552020
+ 251 11 552030

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

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

Fax: + 251 11 517775
+ 251 11 520874

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:

Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PO Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 11 514300

Email: mfa.addis@telecom.net.et

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 2 March 2006.*****