

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 195/06 (AFR 25/020/2006, 14 July 2006) Medical Concern/ prisoner of conscience

ETHIOPIA Dr Berhanu Negga (m), aged 50, opposition party leader, professor of economics

Amnesty International welcomed the ruling on 19 July by a High Court judge that Dr Berhanu Negga be transferred to a less crowded, cleaner and better ventilated cell in Addis Ababa's Kaliti prison, in compliance with the recommendations issued by doctors at the hospital where he was treated in June. However, reports suggest that the judge's orders were not carried out and that Dr Berhanu Negga remains in his original cell. Concern remains that Dr Berhanu Negga's health will further deteriorate if he is not moved to a better cell and allowed to receive adequate medical treatment.

Dr Berhanu Negga suffers from high blood pressure as well as cardiomyopathy, a heart disease which causes the heart muscles to become weaker, making it unable to pump as well as it should. He was hospitalized on 9 June after experiencing severe shortness of breath. However, he was sent back to prison after 20 days, against the advice of doctors and without having been examined by a specialist as had been recommended. Doctors' recommendations that he should be transferred to a less crowded and cleaner cell with better ventilation were also reportedly disregarded by prison authorities.

In Kaliti prison, Dr Berhanu Negga is held in a large zinc-walled cell, which holds 270 political and criminal prisoners, including other opposition party leaders. It is currently rainy season in Ethiopia and the cell's roof leaks, making the cell cold and damp. Sanitary facilities are poor. There are rats, cockroaches and fleas in the cell. Some of the other prisoners on trial alongside Dr. Berhanu Negga are held in slightly better and less crowded cells in the prison. Prisoners are generally provided with medical treatment as needed, either in prison or in hospital, but there have sometimes been delays and other deficiencies.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Several thousand suspected government opponents from the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and other opposition parties were detained following demonstrations in June and November 2005 in Addis Ababa and other towns. They were protesting against alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections of 15 May 2005. During the demonstrations, the security forces shot dead at least 86 people and allegedly many more, and wounded over 200 others. Seven police officers were killed by mobs. The detained CUD leaders, including several who were elected to parliament and the Addis Ababa City Council (such as Dr Berhanu Negga who was chosen as Mayor of Addis Ababa), had refused to take up their positions. In December 2005, they were charged with instigating the violence. All defendants except three civil society activists refused to defend themselves, on the grounds that they did not expect to receive fair trial. A parliamentary inquiry is currently investigating the killings at the demonstration.

Dr Berhanu Negga and other CUD leaders, as well as four human rights defenders and 14 journalists, whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience, are among 76 people currently on trial. Twenty five exiles are being tried in absentia. They are charged with a range of serious political offences, including treason, most of which can carry the death penalty. The prosecution has completed presentation of video and audio evidence, mostly of opposition party meetings, and is currently calling its witnesses. The trial is expected to last several months. It is being held in open court with a European Union-designated trial observer. (See Amnesty International's report on the trial, "Ethiopia – Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists", AI Index: AFR 25/013/2006, May 2006.)

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

- welcoming the High Court's ruling that Dr Berhanu Negga should be moved to a less crowded, cleaner and better ventilated cell in Kaliti prison;
- expressing concern that the court order has not been carried out, and that Dr Berhanu Negga continues to be held in poor and unsanitary conditions;
- urging the government to follow through on the doctors' recommendations and the High Court's ruling by carrying out the Court's order immediately;
- urging the authorities to take immediate action to provide adequate medical treatment for Dr Berhanu Negga, in accordance with regional and international standards for the treatment of prisoners.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

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

Fax: + 251 11 552 0874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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

Fax: + 251 11 551 43 00

Email: mfa.addis@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Minister of Health

Dr Tewodros Adhanom,
Ministry of Health,
PO Box 1234, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 551 93 66

Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Administration of Prisons

Prison Service Headquarters,
PO Box 2234, 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 15 September 2006.

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