

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 255/06 (AFR 25/08/2006, 26 September 2006) Detention without charge/ Incommunicado detention/ Fear for safety

ETHIOPIA	Wasihun Melese (m)] teachers and trade unionists
	Anteneh Getnet (m), aged 43]

Anteneh Getnet, a member of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA), is now reported to be detained incommunicado at the police Central Investigation Bureau (known as Maekelawi). ETA member Wasihun Melese is also held there. Both men were arrested on 23 September. They have not been given access to relatives or legal representation but were allowed to receive food from their families. Amnesty International remains concerned for their safety and fears they may be ill-treated or tortured while in custody.

They appeared at a court hearing in Addis Ababa on 25 September but no charges were filed against them. They were remanded in custody for 14 days, following a request by the Ethiopian police for additional time to investigate their case. The court accepted the police request, and the case was adjourned until 9 October.

Wasihun Melese is a teacher at Addis Ketema High School in Addis Ababa and a prominent activist in the Addis Ababa branch of the ETA. He is an elected member of the ETA's National Executive Committee. Anteneh Getnet is also a teacher and ETA activist who had been in the ETA's office when he was arrested by three plainclothes police officers on 23 September. Anteneh Getnet was previously abducted and beaten in May 2006, allegedly by members of the security forces. He is still suffering from injuries sustained when he was beaten.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These new arrests may be a response by the Ethiopian authorities to a complaint lodged by the ETA and the global union federation Education International with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Committee on Freedom of Association, citing government interference with ETA activities and intimidation of ETA members, including the arrest of numerous teachers since May 2005.

The ETA, which is affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and Education International (EI), is the oldest trade union in Ethiopia, to which half a million teachers in primary, secondary and higher educational institutions belong. The ETA has been critical of government education policies and has been subject to numerous government attempts to close it through court cases which are continuing. There have been attempts by the Ethiopian authorities to replace it with a pro-government union created with the same name.

The ETA issued statements criticizing the government in connection with the post-election crisis in mid-2005. In two incidents in June and November 2005, over 80 opposition party supporters were killed by the security forces, and seven police officers were also killed by demonstrators protesting at alleged election fraud in the May 2005 elections.

Kassahun Kebede, an ETA official arrested in November 2005 in connection with the demonstration, is now on trial alongside the leaders of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), several journalists and human rights defenders. He faces serious charges including 'outrage against the Constitution' and could be punished with the death penalty. He is a teacher and the chair of the Addis Ababa branch of the ETA. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and has called for his immediate and unconditional release (see AI report *Ethiopia: Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party*

leaders, human rights defenders and journalists, AI Index: AFR 25/013/2006, May 2006). The ETA chair, Dr Taye Woldesmiat, a former prisoner of conscience currently in the USA, is also being tried in his absence.

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

- expressing concern at the continued detention without charge or trial of Wasihun Melese and Anteneh Getnet, who have been held since 23 September, and calling for their immediate and unconditional release;
- urging the authorities to ensure Wasihun Melese and Anteneh Getnet are given immediate access to their families and legal representatives, with medical treatment if required, and are treated in accordance with regional and international standards on the treatment of prisoners.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

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

Fax: + 251 11 5517775
+ 251 11 5520874

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Education

Dr Sintayehu Woldemikael
Ministry of Education
PO Box 1367
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 5511355

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Prime Minister

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

Salutation: Your Excellency

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 November 2006.