

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 25/003/2006

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UA 25/06 Incommunicado detention/ fear of torture or ill-treatment

ETHIOPIA 42 people arrested during Ethiopian Orthodox Church processions

Killed: Lealem Bogale (f), and two others

Forty-two people have been arrested during Ethiopian Orthodox Church celebrations in the capital, Addis Ababa. They are reportedly being held incommunicado and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

On 19 January, thousands of members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the principal faith in Ethiopia, were singing and processing through central Addis Ababa as part of the *Timket* (Epiphany) church festival. At one point when police halted the procession, some of those in the procession began shouting for the release of opposition party leaders who have been charged with treason and other offences. Police reportedly opened fire with live ammunition on people suspected to be demonstrating support for the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party. Two people were reportedly killed and several wounded as a result of the shooting. The following day, police reportedly opened fire on a further *Timket* procession in Addis Ababa, wounding over 20 people. One of the wounded, Lealem Bogale, was said to have died later in hospital.

Police said that 42 people were arrested during these incidents but did not disclose details of those held or the grounds for their arrests. It is not yet known where they are being held, though they are believed to be held incommunicado. They have apparently not yet been brought to court. Under Ethiopian law, detainees are required to be brought before a court within 48 hours of their arrest. It is not yet known where they are being held.

Police later stated that the deaths were the result of a stampede caused by people in the procession throwing stones, though it is not clear whether they were referring to the violence which took place on 19 or 20 January. They also claimed that 14 police were injured by stone-throwing and a bomb explosion, although it was not clarified when or where the explosion occurred.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Demonstrations against detentions of leaders of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party and against alleged election fraud by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party in the May 2005 elections have been taking place across the country in recent months. Demonstrators have been calling for the release of CUD leaders, journalists and human rights defenders, whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience, arrested in November after the CUD called for peaceful demonstrations. They were charged with treason, genocide and other offences on 21 December (see UA 284/05, AFR 25/017/2005, 2 November 2005, and follow-up).

Since 2 January, students in Addis Ababa schools have been holding rallies and boycotting classes and exams, in protest at the detention of CUD leaders and the contested election results. Police reportedly beat demonstrators, including children, and used live ammunition in some cases. Some of the protests led to damage to property and vehicles and attacks on police officers. These protests followed earlier demonstrations in schools and colleges in the Amhara Region in December 2005. Thousands of school students were arrested. Some have been released but several hundred are believed to be still held incommunicado without charge in undisclosed prisons and are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

In a similar but separate pattern of arbitrary detentions of demonstrators and shootings by armed police, thousands of Oromo students have been detained and some shot dead since November 2005. They were

protesting over the detentions of members of the Oromo ethnic group and other Oromo political issues (see UA 22/06, AFR 25/002/2006, 30 January 2006). On 1 February the Prime Minister denied Amnesty International's statements were true, while the Information Minister called the statements "misinforming and incredible". The Information Minister said that 86 students had been arrested in the Oromia Region and charged with throwing bombs, breaking school property and disrupting classes. However, Amnesty International continues to receive reports of large numbers of people still detained without charge following the Oromia Region demonstrations, and is investigating these reports further.

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

- calling for the 42 people detained during Ethiopian Orthodox Church processions on 19 and 20 January in Addis Ababa to be brought promptly to court in accordance with the provisions of Ethiopian law, charged and given prompt and fair trials in accordance with recognized international standards, or otherwise released;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that the detainees will not be tortured or ill-treated;
- calling for a full and impartial investigation into the reported police shootings during the religious processions to mark the *Timket* church festival in Addis Ababa on 19 and 20 January, to determine whether the police used excessive force contrary to international standards;
- appealing for all students still detained during demonstrations in December and January in Addis Ababa and the Amhara Region to be either charged with recognizable criminal offences and given fair and prompt trials, or else released.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

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

Fax: + 251 11 552020 / 552030

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

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

Fax: + 251 11 517775 / 520874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Federal Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu

Ministry of Federal Affairs

PO Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

President of the Supreme Court

Mr Kemal Bedri

Federal Supreme Court

P O Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 1 550278

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 March 2006.