

URGENT ACTION

GOVERNMENT CRITICS ARRESTED, RISK OF TORTURE

Four opposition politicians and two journalists have been arrested in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on accusations of participating in terrorism-related activities. They are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes they have been arrested for legitimately exercising their right to freedom of expression as journalists and politicians.

Journalist **Eskinder Nega**, and opposition politicians **Andualem Arage**, **Nathanial Mekonnen** and **Asaminew Berhanu**, of the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party, and **Zemene Molla**, general secretary of the Ethiopian National Democratic party, were arrested on 14 September. Journalist Sileshi Hagos was arrested on 9 September. They are all being detained on accusations of involvement with the Ginbot 7 group, a banned political party. All those arrested are vocal critics of the government and had recently undertaken public or written activities calling for reform. They are being held at the Maikelawi Federal Police Central Investigation centre and are at immediate risk of torture and other ill-treatment.

All six appeared before a court on 15 September and were remanded in custody for 28 days. When Eskinder Nega was brought before the court, family members and journalists were blocked from entering the courtroom, giving rise to significant concern that he has already been ill-treated in detention.

Detainees in Maikelawi are generally denied access to their families and lawyers during pre-trial detention. A government spokesperson could not confirm that the detainees had access to lawyers and family members.

Since March at least 100 opposition politicians and six journalists have been arrested in Ethiopia. All have been accused of terrorism-related offences. Amnesty International is deeply concerned that these arrests indicate a pattern of arresting and detaining those who are critical of the government.

Please write immediately in English or your own language:

- Call on the Ethiopian authorities to ensure that the six detainees are not subjected to torture and other-ill treatment.
- Urge the Ethiopian authorities to grant them immediate access to lawyers and to their families;
- Urging that Eskinder Nega, Andualem Arage, Nathanial Mekonnen, Asaminew Berhanu, Zemene Molla and Sileshi Hagos should be immediately released unless there is a credible basis for charging them promptly and trying them in accordance with international standards of fair trial;
- Urge the Ethiopian authorities to stop the practise of arresting those who hold different political opinions

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 OCTOBER 2011 TO:

Prime Minister

Meles Zenawi
P.O. Box 1031
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Fax: +251 155 20 30
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Minister of Justice

Berhanu Hailu
P.O. Box 1370
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Fax: + 251 115 517 775
Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Police Commissioner

Gebeyehu Workineh
P.O. Box 5718
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Fax: +251 551 12 13

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Zemene Molla recently applied for permission to hold a demonstration in Addis Ababa. Eskinder Nega wrote an article last week marking Ethiopian New Year which stated 'maybe 2004 could be the year when freedom of expression and association will be respected... maybe 2004 could be the year when Ethiopians will no more be incarcerated for their political convictions.' The UDJ's New Year message called for 'peaceful struggle...that brings an all-round freedom to the Ethiopian people.' Sileshi Hagos is a contributor to the Addis Ababa-based radio station 96.3 FM, He is also the boyfriend of journalist Reyot Alemu, who was arrested in June and was charged under the Anti-Terrorism legislation in early September. Hagos reported that the authorities confiscated his laptop and interrogated him soon after Alemu's arrest.

Opposition politicians in Ethiopia have been subjected to frequent harassment and arrest. Journalists' right to freedom of expression has also often been disregarded.

In early September well-known actor and opposition member Debebe Eshetu was also arrested. In the same week five journalists, three Ethiopians and two Swedish nationals, were charged under the Anti-Terrorism legislation. Zerihun Gebre-Egzabiher, President of the Ethiopian National Democratic party was charged in the same case as three of the journalists. Another journalist, Argaw Ashine, fled the country after he was mentioned in a Wikileaks cable and summoned by officials from the Government Communication Affairs Office and by the Federal Police for interrogation over his sources.

In late August and early September nine opposition party members were arrested, along with 20 other people, on terrorism accusations. These included Bekele Gerba, a teacher at Addis Ababa University and deputy chairman of the Oromo Federal Democratic Movement, and Olbana Lelisa, an official with the Oromo People's Congress party. Both men had met with Amnesty International delegates just days before their arrests.

In March this year at least 89 members of the two Oromo political parties, were arrested in wide sweeps. Many of them were former members of parliament, and had campaigned in the 2010 elections.

All of the opposition politicians and journalists arrested this year have been accused of terrorism-related offences. All those politicians arrested who are ethnic Oromo have been accused of belonging to the Oromo Liberation Front armed group, a charged frequently used against the Oromo opposition. Those arrested who are of other ethnicities are either accused of belonging to the banned Ginbot 7 group, or of involvement in independent terrorist plots.

Amnesty International is very concerned that these arrests signify an on-going trend of Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Proclamation law being used to limit legitimate freedom of expression in the country. The provisions of Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism legislation, introduced in 2009, define terrorist activities so broadly as to raise significant concerns that they can be used to criminalise freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

In 2010 Ethiopia agreed to the recommendation from the UN Human Rights Council's periodic review that it would "adopt all necessary measures to provide for free and independent media which reflect a plurality of opinions."

Name: Eskinder Nega, Andualem Arage, Nathaniel Mekonnen, Asaminew Berhanu, Zemene Molla and Sileshi Hagos.

Gender m/f: All male

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