



PUBLIC

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Health concern

30 April

ETHIOPIAAsrat Woldeyes, aged around 69, medical doctor

Dr Asrat Woldeyes, one of Ethiopia's most prominent medical doctors, in prison since 1994, is gravely ill. There are fears that he is not receiving adequate medical care and treatment.

In January 1998 Dr Asrat fell seriously ill and lost vision in his right eye. After three weeks he was admitted to Black Lion (Tikur Anbessa) Hospital and diagnosed with diabetes and suffering from high blood pressure. He may also have had a stroke. After hospital admission, his blood sugar levels and blood pressure stabilized but his right-eye vision has not returned.

In April, Dr Asrat suffered severe headaches, difficulties in speech and body movement, swollen limbs, and deteriorating left-eye vision. A brain haemorrhage was reportedly diagnosed, which could be possibly life-threatening. However, security restrictions are apparently preventing him from being examined outside his hospital room and from getting consistent treatment from appropriate specialists. He is not being allowed full information concerning his treatment, any opportunity to collaborate in it or to be treated by doctors of his own choice.

Dr Asrat is confined to a small hospital room with armed guards outside who supervise his meals, which are sent from home, visits and medical consultations. He was initially denied family visits, but was allowed visits from a US embassy official, a British journalist and a delegation of British Members of the European Parliament in March. In April he was allowed brief supervised visits from his family and lawyer.

Harsh prison conditions and the stress of a total of over 170 court appearances in four years may have contributed to this health crisis. His symptoms may also be connected to previous heart disease - he had a triple bypass heart operation in 1980 in the USA when a pacemaker was fitted.

Dr Asrat is the leader of an officially registered opposition party, the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO). In 1994 he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment after being convicted of armed conspiracy against the government, which he denied. Amnesty International believes he did not receive a fair trial. He was given another six months' prison term in October 1994 for writing a letter to a court saying he did not get a fair trial.

In December 1994 he was given a further three-year prison term on a new charge of inciting armed rebellion at an AAPO rally in Debre Berhan in 1992. He lost his appeal. Amnesty International considers that again he did not receive a fair trial and did not advocate violence. Dr Asrat has spent three-and-a-half years in the Central Prison (Karchele) in Addis Ababa, where he was denied books and writing materials and other prisoners were punished if they spoke to him. He was allowed brief supervised family visits.

He is currently near the end of a fourth trial, which began in 1995. He is among 32 people charged with armed conspiracy and rebellion in connection with armed rebel activities in northern Shoa region. He and the defendants deny the charges, which could carry the death penalty. The judges have failed to investigate several defendants' allegations of torture and retractions of confessions. Amnesty International is investigating whether Dr Asrat is receiving a fair trial, and whether he is actually a prisoner of conscience imprisoned on account of his non-violent opinions, as seems increasingly likely.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Professor Asrat Woldeyes trained in medicine in Addis Ababa and at Edinburgh University, Scotland. He has been a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in England and Scotland, a member of the British Medical Association, the International College of Surgeons, and the East African Surgical Association. He was Emperor Haile Selassie's personal physician and the first Ethiopian Professor of Surgery at Addis Ababa University.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing serious concern about Dr Asrat Woldeyes' health and medical treatment;
- appealing for Dr Asrat Woldeyes to be given all necessary and recommended medical care, investigations and treatment by doctors of his own choice and for them to be allowed to treat him without hindrance and in confidentiality, and to keep him and his family fully informed about his treatment;
- calling for him to be allowed medical care in a stress-free and therapeutic environment, with unrestricted access to his family and consideration for his age;
- demanding assurances that he will not be returned to prison as long as his health is at risk.

APPEALS TO: (Please note: fax tones can be difficult to obtain)

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office, P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 552030

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Kinfu Gebre-Medhin, General Manager, Public Security

Office of the Prime Minister, P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Mr Kinfu, Prime Minister's Office, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 552030

Salutation: Dear Sir

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde, Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice

P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 2511 550278 / 550722

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

His Excellency President Negaso Gidada, Office of the President, P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Faxes: + 2511 552030**

Dr Adem Ibrahim, Minister of Health, Ministry of Health, P O Box 1234, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Telegrams: Health Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

The Chief Administrator, Black Lion Hospital, PO Box 5647, 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 11 June 1998.