

PUBLIC

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UA 284/05 Possible prisoners of conscience/fear of torture or ill-treatment/health concern

ETHIOPIA Hailu Shawel (m), member of parliament and President of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD)

Professor Mesfin Woldemariam (m), aged 75, former Chair of Ethiopian Human

Rights

Council

Birtukan Mideksa (f) CUD Vice-President, lawyer and former judge

Dr Berhanu Negga (m), CUD member of parliament, Mayor of Addis Ababa and economist

Getachew Mengiste (m), senior member of CUD and member of parliament

Gizachew Shifferaw (m), member of CUD Executive Committee

Dr Hailu Araya (m) CUD member and former editor of Press Digest and member of parliament

Dr Yakob Hailemariam (m) CUD member of parliament and former UN special envoy

Debebe Eshetu (m), CUD public relations officer

Muluneh Eyual (m) CUD Secretary General

Daniel Bekele (m) Policy Director of ActionAid (non-governmental organization)

Hundreds of other members of the CUD

Over a dozen leading members of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), including those named above, are among hundreds of people detained after demonstrations against the contested result of the parliamentary elections. The detainees are at risk of torture or ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes those named above and many others are prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for the non-violent expression of their political beliefs.

The arrests follow demonstrations in the capital, Addis Ababa, on 1 and 2 November, in protest at the contested results of the parliamentary election which took place on 15 May. Large numbers of members and suspected members of the CUD, as well as journalists and human rights defenders, are reportedly being systematically taken from their homes by police. Among those detained is CUD President Hailu Shawel, who was reportedly beaten by the police who arrested him. Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, the 75-year-old former chair of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), was detained on 1 November. He is a renowned author and human rights defender, who had recently resigned from his EHRCO position to support the CUD's election campaign. For the past three months, he has been confined to bed due to a spinal condition, for which he requires regular medical attention and physiotherapy. Amnesty International is concerned for his health, as detainees are often treated harshly, particularly in the first few days of detention, made to sleep on a cold cement floor, not allowed to receive food or change of clothing from relatives, and denied medical treatment. It is not clear if Professor Mesfin Woldemariam has been allowed to take painkilling medication with him. Following his arrest, police reportedly searched his home and took away a number of documents.

The authorities have not confirmed where any of those detained are being held. Some reports indicate that many of them may be held at the headquarters of the Central Investigation Bureau (*Maikelawi*) in Addis Ababa. None of the detainees are reported to have appeared in court within the 48 hour limit prescribed by the law.

Riot police have reportedly used live ammunition against participants in the demonstrations, which took place in a number of districts of Addis Ababa. Over 30 people have been killed and 150 others are seriously wounded. The demonstrations reportedly began peacefully but violence erupted after police began shooting at protesters. Two police officers are reported to be among the dead.

The arrests followed a series of non-violent protest actions on the 31 October called by the CUD who are boycotting the new parliament on account of alleged election fraud by the ruling party, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Some 30 taxi drivers were arrested for honking their horns in the previous day's protest action. Their place of detention is unknown. The authorities have repeatedly claimed that the CUD is planning "a violent conspiracy", and Prime Minister Meles Zenawi had recently accused Hailu Shawel of treason. The CUD has affirmed its commitment to non-violent opposition and protest.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On 8 June 2005 soldiers shot dead some 42 people in Addis Ababa who were protesting at alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections held on 15 May. Thousands of opposition party supporters were also detained in harsh conditions and some were badly beaten. After some weeks all were released on bail after short court appearances. (see UA 261/05, AFR 25/013/2005, 30 September 2005, and follow-up).

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

- expressing concern at the current wave of arrests of hundreds of CUD members of parliament and ordinary members of the CUD;
- appealing for the immediate and unconditional release of Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, Hailu Shawel, and all those detained because of their political beliefs, whom Amnesty International considers to be prisoners of conscience falsely accused by the government of violent conspiracy;
- calling for all detainees to be treated humanely, and not tortured or ill-treated;
- expressing particular concern for the health of Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, and calling for him to be transferred to a hospital immediately and given all necessary medical care;
- urging the authorities to grant the detainees immediate access to their families, legal counsel and any medical care they may require;
- calling for the security forces to be ordered not to use lethal force against demonstrators except where lives are threatened, and for an independent inquiry into the shooting deaths and injuries.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: + 251 11 552020/ 552030 (note new telephone code)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito (new appointment)
Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: + 251 11 517775/ 520874
Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et
Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu
Ministry of Federal Affairs, PO Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Mr Seyoum Mesfin
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PO Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: + 251 11 514300
Email: mfa.addis@telecom.net.et

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 14 December 2005.