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PUBLIC STATEMENT

ETHIOPIA

Amnesty International criticizes government's resumption of executions

Amnesty International today criticized the Ethiopian government's resumption of executions after seven years of an apparent de facto suspension. The organization appealed to President Negasso Gidada to halt any further planned executions and to exercise his constitutional prerogative of mercy in all cases of those sentenced to death.

Tuesday's execution in Addis Ababa's Central Prison of Jamil Yasin Mohamed, a prominent businessman, was the first carried out by Meles Zenawi's government since the overthrow of the Dergue in 1991. Jamil Yasin Mohamed had been convicted of killing Major General Hayelom Araya in Addis Ababa in April 1996. The Supreme Court had rejected his appeal, and his recent petition for clemency to President Negasso Gidada had evidently failed.

The timing of the execution links it to the current border fighting between Ethiopia and Eritrea, who were previously closed allies. Jamil Yasin Mohamed's execution is seen by many as a political riposte to the Eritrean government, with whom Jamil Yasin Mohamed had some connections although he was an Ethiopian citizen.

Amnesty International fears it could be followed by further executions of scores of people condemned to death in the past few years. It will also be seen as a signal in the context of the current trial of the Dergue and future trials of more than 2000 former officials charged with genocide, that the government will order executions where death sentences are imposed.

The Ethiopian government supports Rwanda's recent executions of those convicted of genocide, which went ahead despite appeals from the United Nations and others including Amnesty International.

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty in all cases, even for the worst offences including genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, as the death penalty violates the right to life and is cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

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