

UA 177/98

Fear of ill-treatment / Arbitrary detention 16 June 1998**ETHIOPIA** Many Eritrean business persons, including:

Genre-Tensai Tedla, 87, owner of a pastry business

Mahari Genre-Tensai, son of the above

Genre-Hiwot Tesfa-Mariam

Genre-Yesus Shirum, building contractor

Solomon Genre-Yohannes

Tedros Habte-Yohannes

- and also:

20 civilian staff of the Eritrean embassy, including:

Berri Mebratu, the ambassador's secretary (f)

Rosina Fessahaye, receptionist (f)

Adiam Gubsa, cashier

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On 12 June the Ethiopian government announced that Eritrean residents in Addis Ababa suspected of being a "security threat" were to be arrested and either deported to Eritrea or brought to justice. The authorities said they were suspected of spying for Eritrea or raising funds for the Eritrean armed forces in the current border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, whose governments were formerly close allies.

Hundreds of men and women of Eritrean origin, including many who had retained Ethiopian citizenship when Eritrea became an independent state in 1991, are reported to have been detained in Addis Ababa, and possibly in other towns too. They are held incommunicado and their whereabouts in custody are mostly not known. They include many members of the large Eritrean business community. Also detained are 20 civilian Eritrean staff of the Eritrean embassy in Addis Ababa (now virtually closed down after most of the diplomatic staff were expelled), some of whom were Ethiopian residents or citizens.

Amnesty International is concerned that the detainees may be ill-treated and that they may have been arbitrarily detained solely on account of their Eritrean origin.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

A border conflict between the Eritrean and Ethiopian armed forces in May 1998 led to bombings of urban areas by both sides in which civilians were killed. International mediation efforts for a cease-fire are continuing and the air raids have now stopped. Amnesty International has appealed to both sides to respect the Geneva Conventions.

There are over 100,000 people of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia. Under the former Dergue regime (1974-1991) they were constantly suspected of supporting the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in its independence struggle and they suffered numerous human rights violations. After the EPLF gained independence in 1991 they held a privileged position on account of the close ties between the two new governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea. This changed again in May 1998 when a border war broke out between the two states. Eritrea expelled hundreds of Ethiopian citizens, apparently on account of their origin, although detentions have not been reported so far. The arrests and deportation actions by the Ethiopian government may be reprisals for the deportations of Ethiopians from Eritrea despite an Ethiopian government statement that Eritreans can live freely in the country.

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

- expressing concern at the wave of arrests of Eritreans in Addis Ababa, who may have been detained solely on account of their Eritrean origin rather than for any evidence of having committed an offence against Ethiopia's national security;
- appealing for respect for their basic rights and humane treatment in detention, including immediate access to relatives and lawyers;
- calling for them to be immediately and unconditionally released unless they are charged with a recognizable criminal offence.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Prime Minister, Prime Minister's Office, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Faxes: + 2511 552030**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde

Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

**Faxes: + 2511 550278**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES TO:**

His Excellency President Negasso Gidada, Office of the President, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Faxes: + 2511 552030**

Mr Kemal Bedri, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, PO Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Faxes: + 2511 550278**

Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Faxes: + 2511 514300**

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 28 July 1998.