

EXTERNAL

AI Index: AFR 25/24/97

This is a limited action. Please restrict appeals to 20 per Section.

UA 397/97

Fear of torture / Legal concern

18 December 1997

ETHIOPIA Aberra Romicho, educational materials officer
Galata, pharmacy owner
Debelle Hunde, Ethiopian Red Cross Society official and
teacher training college registrar
Hailu Benti, director, Pestalozzi children's project
Hirut Letta (f), relative of an Oromo Liberation Front leader in exile
Negasso Wakjira, pharmacy employee

The six people named above were arrested on 8 December 1997 in Jimma town, 250 kilometres southwest of Addis Ababa in Oromia region, on suspicion of links with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF has been fighting the government in the Oromia region since leaving the government coalition in 1992.

The six are held incommunicado in Jimma and have not been taken to court or charged, although the constitution and legislation require this within 48 hours of arrest. Amnesty International fears for their safety in view of numerous previous reports of torture or ill-treatment of prisoners accused of OLF links.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

These arrests are part of a crackdown in the past few weeks in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region against prominent Oromos suspected of being OLF supporters. The government has accused Oromo community organizations, including the new Human Rights League, of being covers for OLF activities and of being involved with certain urban bombings earlier this year which police now attribute to the OLF. Amnesty International has called for the release of the Human Rights League leaders, whom it considers are prisoners of conscience (see EXTRA 153/97, AFR 25/19/97, 6 November 1997 and updates, and News Service 204/97, 27 November 1997, AFR 25/21/97), and for all others to be charged and given fair trials if the courts determine there is evidence to prosecute them for recognized criminal offences.

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

- calling for immediate measures to protect the six detainees (naming some or all) held incommunicado in Jimma from torture or ill-treatment;
- calling for them to be allowed immediate and regular access to their families, legal representatives and medical doctors if needed;
- urging that they be brought to a court without further delay, as required by law, and either charged and given a fair trial within a reasonable period or released.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Prime Minister's Office
P O Box 1031

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: +2511 552030

Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Your Excellency

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 1370
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: +2511 550278

Telegrams: Justice Minister, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

- His Excellency President Negasso Gidada, Office of the President, P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 552030**
- Mr Kemal Bedri, Chief Justice, Supreme Court, P O Box 6166, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, **Fax: +2511 550278**
- Mr Kuma Demeksa, President of Oromia, Oromia Regional State Council, P O Box 62297, 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 5 February 1998.