

EXTERNAL (for general distribution)

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Further information on UA 353/94 (AFR 25/21/94, 23 September 1994) - Fear of Ill-treatment / Legal Concern

ETHIOPIA Yodit (Judith) Imru (f), former ambassador
Hirut (Ruth) Imru (f)
Mammie Imru (f)
(three sisters of former Prime Minister Ras Michael Imru, aged in their 60s)
Amarech Mengistu, UN employee (Economic Commission for Africa) - and three other UN employees
Almas Haile-Mariam (f), official of the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO) and other AAPO party officials, office staff and members
Beletshachew Girma (f), wife of former AAPO official
Telela Kebede (f), well-known singer
Fitawari Mammo Beshie, c 60 years old
Fitawari Gebre-Hiwot Wolde-Hawariat - not arrested
Abate Agide, former ambassador
Fresew Feleke, opposition National Democratic Union official
- and some hundreds of others
(Ras and Fitawari are traditional Ethiopian titles)

The above, who were among about 500 men, women and children arrested on 20 September 1994 at the Central High Court in Addis Ababa, were all taken to court in early October and have now been released on bail.

After up to nearly a month in custody, about 250 people have been freed unconditionally, while 257 others have been charged with holding an illegal demonstration and contempt of court. The latter were all granted bail and about 80 have been released after raising bail of 2,000 to 10,000 birr (c.US\$ 330 to 1,650 equivalent), which the others have not yet been able to raise. No date has been set for the trials, in which defendants could be jailed for up to six months and/or fined, if convicted.

The police claim the defendants were engaged in a demonstration at the court for which the required official permission had not been sought or obtained. The defendants deny that it was an organized demonstration, saying that they had gathered to attend the court hearing of new charges against Professor Asrat Woldeyes, the imprisoned chairman of the opposition political party, the All-Amhara People's Organization (AAPO). According to eye-witnesses, those unable to find seating in the courtroom remained outside peacefully, clearly in support of Professor Asrat Woldeyes, and there were shouts of "Free Asrat!". After a while the police started to arrest and beat people, forcing them into trucks to take them to an unknown destination. There were some scuffles and stone-throwing, the circumstances of which are unclear.

They are also charged with contempt of court on account of criticising a court's two-year prison sentence on Professor Asrat Woldeyes on 27 June 1994. Amnesty International had expressed concern as to whether he received a fair trial (News Service 142/94, NWS 11/142/94, 1 July 1994).

After arrest, the detainees - who included several children, dozens of women and many elderly women and men - were taken to Kolfe Police Training Centre in Addis Ababa. They were held outside in the rain for some hours without food,

then put in classrooms for the night and given some bread and blankets, although not enough blankets for them all. The next day they were transferred to Sendafa Police College near Addis Ababa, and put into crowded rooms with no further bedding. They were guarded by soldiers, who forcibly shaved their hair without soap or water and made them do army-type physical exercises, beating those who failed. They were given very little food and held incommunicado for about two weeks. Then their relatives were allowed to visit them and take food, medicines and changes of clothing, as is customary in Ethiopian prisons. They were eventually returned to Kolfe police centre and taken to court in Addis Ababa.

Amnesty International considers that all or virtually all of them were or are (in the case of those still held) prisoners of conscience, imprisoned on account of their peaceful opinions. The organization is concerned that they were detained illegally, contrary to the legal requirement that they should have been brought to court within 48 hours or released, and that they were ill-treated. It fears they could still be imprisoned again as prisoners of conscience if trials go ahead and they are convicted.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express and airmail letters

- noting the provisional release on bail of the above prisoners of conscience and many others, but expressing concern that they are still facing imprisonment on account of their peaceful opinions;
- calling for an official investigation into, and public statement about, their ill-treatment and illegal detention;
- urging that charges relating to the peaceful expression of their opinions be immediately withdrawn against these prisoners and others who have been so far unable to raise the substantial bail set by the court.

APPEALS TO:

1) His Excellency President Meles Zenawi

Office of the President

P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: President Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telexes: 21050 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Faxes: + 251 1 514300 or 511244 or 514042 (c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Your Excellency

2) Mr Mahteme Solomon

Minister of Justice, Ministry of Justice,

P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Minister of Justice, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 251 1 550 722

Salutation: Dear Minister

3) Mr Hassan Shiffa, Coordinator of Police and Prison Administration,
Ministry of Internal Affairs, P O Box 5721, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Telegrams: Mr Hassan Shiffa, Internal Affairs, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Faxes: + 251 1 552020 (via State Council)

Salutation: Dear Sir

COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:

Mr Kemal Bedri
President of the Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice,
P O Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (fax = Minister of Justice)

Ethiopian Human Rights Council,
P O Box 2432, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

and to diplomatic representative of Ethiopia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat,
or your section office, if sending appeals after 28 November 1994.
