

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 282/06 (AFR 25/003/2006, 19 October 2006) - Fear of Torture or Ill-Treatment

ETHIOPIA

Yalemzewd Bekele (f), lawyer and women's rights campaigner

Yalemzewd Bekele was released on the evening of 27 October, along with male university student Fasil Assefa who had been arrested with her on 19 October in Moyale in southern Ethiopia, close to the border with Kenya. Amnesty International believes Yalemzewd Bekele was a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for her non-violent opinions.

Yalemzewd Bekele had been held incommunicado since 19 October and was taken to court in Moyale on 22 October. She was remanded in custody for five days, allegedly pending investigation. Yalemzewd Bekele and Fasil Assefa were transferred to the police Central Investigation Bureau (known as Maikelawi) in Addis Ababa, where Yalemzewd Bekele began a hunger strike in protest against her detention. On the afternoon of 27 October, both detainees were transferred to Woreda 8 police station in the Gulele district of Addis Ababa. They were both unconditionally released some hours later. According to reports, they were not ill-treated.

Yalemzewd Bekele, a lawyer working for the European Commission in Addis Ababa, was arrested on 19 October at a border post while trying to cross into Kenya. Amnesty International believes that she was arrested in connection with the publication and distribution the previous month by the political opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) of a calendar of action for non-violent civil disobedience. It is not clear whether or not the police had a court warrant for her arrest. Previously on 5 October, Alemayehu Fantu, the owner of a chain of supermarkets in Addis Ababa, had been arrested in connection with the calendar. There were clear indications that Alemayehu Fantu was tortured while in detention at Woreda 8 police station in Addis Ababa, where several arrested CUD members had recently been taken for interrogation (see UA 279/06, AFR 25/032/2006, 13 October 2006). Yalemzewd Bekele was arrested allegedly on the basis of a statement made by Alemayehu Fantu under torture.

Two European Commission officials who accompanied Yalemzewd Bekele to Moyale were arrested by police while returning to Addis Ababa, and were deported from the country. The European Union described the expulsions as "totally unacceptable".

Thank you to all who sent appeals on behalf of Yalemzewd Bekele, which Amnesty International believes contributed greatly to her release. No further action is requested.