

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 279/06 (AFR 25/032/2006, 13 October) Torture / Incommunicado detention

ETHIOPIA

Alemayehu Fantu (m), businessman, aged about 50

Alemayehu Fantu was released on bail on 26 October 2006, without having been formally charged with any criminal offence. Amnesty International believes he was a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for his non-violent opinions.

Amnesty International remains concerned that Alemayehu Fantu was tortured while in detention, and that statements he made under torture may in the future be used in court against him, or against others. Judges in Ethiopia rarely investigate torture allegations. In the past, they have permitted statements, which were allegedly made as a result of torture, to be used as evidence.

Alemayehu Fantu, the owner of a chain of supermarkets, was arrested by police on 5 October and taken to Woreda 8 Police Station in the Gulele district of Addis Ababa, where he was held incommunicado. He was brought before a court on 6 October and remanded in custody without any charge brought against him. When he appeared in court again on 12 October, witnesses reported that he could barely walk. There were signs that he had been tortured, such as bruises and marks on his feet. Sources indicate he may have received electric shocks.

Amnesty International believes Alemayehu Fantu was detained in connection with the clandestine publication by the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) of a calendar of action for non-violent civil disobedience. 107 other people were arrested by the Ethiopian police and held in the same police station, probably also in connection with the calendar of action. All but two of them were also released. Among them was Yalemzewd Bekele, a lawyer working for the European Commission, who has now been released on bail (see UA 282/06, AFR 25/033/2006, 19 October 2006, and follow-up). Two male students, university student Solomon Alemu and high school student Yonas Wondeafrash, remain in custody.

Thank you to all who sent appeals on behalf of Alemayehu Fantu, which Amnesty International believes contributed greatly to his release. Amnesty International will continue to monitor his situation and that of the two students who remain in prison. No further action is requested at present.