

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 64/004/2002

25 June 2002

Further information on UA 107/02 (AFR 64/002/2002, 8 April 2002) - Fear for safety

ERITREAYosuf Mohamed Ali (m), chief editor, *Tsigenay*
Amanuel Asrat (m), chief editor, *Zemen* ("Time")
Seyoum Tsehaye (m), freelance editor/photographer,
former director of Eritrean state television
Temesgen Gebreyesus (m), reporter, *Keste Debena* ("Rainbow")
Matthewos Habteab (m), editor, *Megaleh* ("Echo")
Dawit Habtemichael (m), assistant chief editor, *Megaleh*
Medhanie Haile (m), assistant chief editor, *Keste Debena*
Dawit Isaac (m), reporter, *Setit* (Swedish citizen)
Fessahaye Yohannes ("Joshua") (m), reporter, *Setit*
Said Abdulkadir (m), chief editor, *Admas*

The Eritrean authorities have not responded to urgent appeals about the condition or whereabouts of the ten journalists named above. They were taken by security officials on 3 April to undisclosed places of detention, following three days of hunger strike at the First Police Station in the capital Asmara.

It is not known whether they are still on hunger strike, or whether they abandoned their hunger strike voluntarily, through duress or force-feeding. Dawit Isaac was unofficially said to have been taken to hospital on 3 April but nothing more has been heard of him.

The men worked for or owned eight independent newspapers, which were published weekly in the Tigrinya language. They were detained in September 2001 after their newspapers were shut down, because they published articles which were critical of the government. They are prisoners of conscience, imprisoned solely because of their legitimate work as journalists.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Eight independent newspapers have been allowed to operate alongside the state media since 1997, under tight restrictions imposed by the Press Law. On 18 September 2001, the government closed the entire independent press. The men named above were arrested some days later when they protested at the closures. Eleven prominent members of the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) party, including three former Foreign Ministers were arrested on 18 September 2001. They had published an open letter to President Issayas Afewerki in May 2001, calling for democratic reform and human rights improvements. Their whereabouts and conditions have not been disclosed. They have not been taken to court or charged, although in February, President Issayas Afewerki accused them of treason in the National Assembly.

Since September, five other journalists from the government press as well as the independent press have been detained incommunicado and in secret. Over 20 other journalists have fled the country, making Eritrea one of the leading countries in the world in violating international standards of the freedom of the press.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing deep concern for the safety of the ten journalists named above, who are being held incommunicado at undisclosed places of detention;

- asking urgently for an explanation of what happened to their hunger strike and details of their current health and conditions;
- calling on the authorities to allow them access to their families, legal representatives and doctors of their choice, and also to representatives of an international human rights or humanitarian organization (such as the International Committee of the Red Cross);
- appealing for them to be released immediately and unconditionally, as prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Issayas Afewerki
President of Eritrea
Office of the President
P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: + 291 1 125123
Salutation:Dear President

Brigadier-General Mussa Raba
Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: + 291 1 122135
Salutation:Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Mr Naizghi Kiflu
Minister of Information and Culture
Ministry of Information and Culture
P O Box 242, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: + 291 1 124647

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: + 291 1 126422

and to diplomatic representatives of Eritrea accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 6 August 2002.