

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 299/07 (AFR 25/037/2007, 9 November 2007) Prisoners of conscience

ETHIOPIA **Daniel Bekele (m), policy manager of the Ethiopian office of ActionAid (international development NGO), lawyer**
Netsanet Demissie (m), director of NGO Organization for Social Justice in Ethiopia, lawyer

The Federal High Court in Addis Ababa has yet again postponed delivering a verdict against prisoners of conscience Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie, who face possible life sentences on political charges. The verdict was due to be given on 22 November, then 30 November and is now due to be given on 24 December whilst one of three presiding judges is replaced after falling ill. Both men have already been held in prison for more than two years, as bail has continually been refused.

Daniel Bekele is the policy manager of ActionAid in Ethiopia. Netsanet Demissie is the founder and director of the Organization for Social Justice in Ethiopia, which works closely with ActionAid on poverty issues, including the Global Campaign Against Poverty. Both are prominent human rights lawyers who were arrested in November 2005 during mass round-ups amid demonstrations at alleged electoral fraud following the May 2005 elections. One hundred and eighty-seven people were shot dead by government security forces during the demonstrations.

All other defendants on trial with the men, including leaders of the opposition party Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), were freed in July through a negotiated pardon after they were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment or long prison terms. Only Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie remain before the court, as they had presented a defence -- unlike the others -- and declined to plead guilty and apply for a political pardon. If convicted, it could be some weeks before they are sentenced as both the prosecution and defence need to make further submissions.

Amnesty International has serious concerns about whether the trial was conducted in accordance with international standards of fair trial. The organisation's trial observers were barred from the country in July 2007.

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

- reiterating concern that Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie are facing possible life imprisonment solely for their peaceful actions as human rights defenders;
- stating that they are prisoners of conscience and calling again on the Ethiopian authorities to release them immediately and unconditionally.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister
His Excellency Meles Zenawi,
Office of the Prime Minister,
PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 1552020
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice
Mr Assefa Kesito, Ministry of Justice,

PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 5517775
Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
Ambassador Dr Kassa Gebreheywot, Chief Commissioner,
Ethiopian Human Rights Commission,
PO Box 1165, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 618 0041
Email: hrc@ethionet.et

and to diplomatic representatives of Ethiopia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check for an update from the International Secretariat, or your section office, if wishing to send appeals after 23 January 2008.