

**PUBLIC**

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**Fear of torture / Prisoners of conscience**

**07 June 2005**

**ETHIOPIA**

**Student demonstrators at Addis Ababa University (AAU) and elsewhere**

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Large numbers of demonstrating students have been detained in two days of protests following the announcement of provisional results from the parliamentary elections of 15 May by the National Election Board of Ethiopia (NEBE). Amnesty International fears that, as after university demonstrations in 2001, the students may be held incommunicado, beaten, forced to do harsh exercises, given very little food and denied medical treatment. They are also at risk of being kept in custody on criminal charges for long periods of time.

On 6 June, several hundred peaceful student demonstrators were beaten with batons and rifle butts by the police on the two main Addis Ababa University (AAU) campuses. The students had been shouting and chanting protests against the announcement of the provisional results of the 15 May parliamentary elections, which indicated a majority for Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, who were peacefully exercising their opinions.

The students were supporting opposition demands for an investigation into alleged voting irregularities, including reported arrests and beatings of opposition candidates, in about 300 of the 547 constituencies. The students defied the Prime Minister's ban on demonstrations for a month after the elections. The detained students are reportedly being held in police camps such as Sendafa police training college, 40 kms north of Addis Ababa.

Several hundred other demonstrating students at Kotebe Teachers College, the AAU's Commercial College and Technical College in Addis Ababa were beaten and arrested on 6 and 7 June. Some threw stones at police and burned government vehicles. At Kotebe, police reportedly opened fire on people blocking police vehicles carrying detained students, killing one female student, Shebray Delelagne, and wounding six others. The death was called an "accident" by officials who gave no further details. Similar student protests and arrests are still taking place, for example at Debu University in Awassa in the Southern Region, 300 kms south of the capital; Jimma University, 300 kms south in the Oromia Region; and Gondar University in the north. The total number of detained students is estimated by unofficial sources to be up to 2,000 or more.

Several opposition party members are also reported to have been beaten and arrested in Addis Ababa but most were quickly released. These included members of the UEDP-Medhin party, which belongs to the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD). Lidetu Ayalew, the CUD public relations officer, was placed under close police surveillance. The Information Minister and the police accused the CUD of instigating the student protests and inciting violence. The CUD denies this and maintains it is a peaceful opposition party.

On 2 June, police detained six journalists from private newspapers for several hours, reportedly for publishing opposition party statements, but released them without charge after several hours' questioning.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The NEBE announced provisional election results, with 302 seats for the EPRDF; 187 seats for the two opposition coalitions, the CUD (which won all seats in the capital, Addis Ababa) and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF); and 25 seats for independent candidates. The opposition and independent parties previously had only 12 seats. The NEBE has postponed the final result announcement to 8 July, while investigations into electoral complaints take place. A joint investigation committee has been set up by the NEBE, including opposition representatives and election observers from the European Union and US Carter Center. So far, the NEBE has ordered re-runs in 16 polling stations in the Oromia and Southern regions.

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

- expressing concern for the safety of several hundred Addis Ababa University students who were arrested on 6 June 2005 for peacefully demonstrating about the provisional election results;
- calling for them not to be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, contrary to Ethiopia's constitution and laws and its international and regional human rights treaty obligations;
- appealing for the immediate and unconditional release of the Addis Ababa University students as prisoners of conscience exercising their right to peacefully express their opinions;
- calling for the release of all other students detained on account of similar protests, and for any demonstrators suspected of criminal violence to be taken to court and charged within the 48 hours prescribed by the law and given a fair and early trial, or otherwise released.

**APPEALS TO:**

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Office of the Prime Minister

P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Fax: + 251 1 552020 / 552030 (please keep trying)**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Minister of Justice

Mr Harka Haroye

Ministry of Justice

P.O. Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Fax: + 251 1 51 77 75 / 520874**

**Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Commissioner of Police

Ministry of Federal Affairs,

P O Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Salutation: Dear Commissioner**

**COPIES TO:**

Mr Kemal Bedri

Chair, National Election Board of Ethiopia

P.O. Box 40812, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Fax: + 251 1 55 0278**

**Email: nebe@telecom.net.et**

**Salutation: Dear Chair of the National Election Board**

and to diplomatic representatives of ETHIOPIA accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 19 July 2005.