

PUBLIC

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28 October 2005

Further Information on UA 261/05 (AFR 25/013/2005, 30 September 2005) Possible prisoners of conscience/fear of torture or ill-treatment

ETHIOPIA **Birkayehu Mekecha (m), official in the head office of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD)**
Dache Molla (m), CUD representative in Kolla Dibba district in North Gondar
Emkulu Yiheyis (m), CUD youth official in Debre Sina town in Amhara Region
Endrias Ero (m), CUD representative in Gamo Goffa zone
Hailemichael Zijita (m), CUD parliamentary candidate in Gamo Goffa zone
Solomon Tenaye (m), CUD secretary in Minjar district in Amhara Region
Tefera Mengeste (m), CUD official in Eastern Hararghe district
Tesfaye Tarekegne (m), CUD district secretary in South Gondar
Wendwossen Shiferraw (m), CUD election observer in Debre Sina town
Yohannes Abate (m), CUD zone chair in western Gojjam

Hundreds of other members of opposition parties

All the opposition party officials and members named above were released in early October. However, the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), claims that over 800 of its members are still detained in different regions, and says that it will call for peaceful strikes and demonstrations if they are not released quickly. The United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF) opposition coalition has said some of its members in the Oromia and southern regions are still detained. The opposition party members detained may be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely for the non-violent expression of their political opinions.

Hundreds of members and supporters of the CUD and the UEDF had been detained in order to stop them attending nationwide demonstrations which had been planned for 2 October, though the demonstrations were then cancelled. The government accused the parties of planning violence leading up to the demonstrations, though the CUD and the UEDF denied this. Arrests of government opponents on allegations of planning violence are reportedly continuing in some areas. Among those arrested was CUD headquarters official Debebe Eshetu, who was detained on 15 October and held for four days, supposedly in relation to a non-political matter, before being released on bail. Daniel Bekele, a local election monitoring official and a staff member of the non-governmental organization Action Aid, was badly beaten by unidentified armed men on 16 October, apparently on account of his criticisms of the election process.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The demonstrations planned for 2 October were in protest at alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections held on 15 May. When Ethiopia's new parliament convened on 10 October, it was boycotted by virtually all the newly-elected 109 CUD members of parliament. The parliament re-elected Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) leader, as Prime Minister for a third five-year term. He has announced his new cabinet of ministers.

The parliament stripped the boycotting MPs of their parliamentary immunity. This could place them at risk of arbitrary detention and unsubstantiated criminal charges, as the government and ruling party continue to claim that the CUD is planning violence. The Prime Minister publicly accused the CUD chairperson, Hailu Shawel, of treason, although he has not so far been arrested. The CUD continues to assert its commitment

to non-violent opposition and protest. Several journalists who were arrested in connection with reporting on the elections were provisionally released but may face trial at some time in the future.

Many thanks to all those who sent appeals. Amnesty International will continue to monitor the situation closely and take further action as needed. If possible, please send a final round of appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern about reports of the continued detention of opposition party officials and members, and calling for them to be either charged with a recognizably criminal offence or released;
- calling for them to be treated humanely, and given immediate access to their families, legal counsel and medical care;
- appealing for the immediate and unconditional release of those detainees who are prisoners of conscience, held solely for exercising their right to peacefully express their opinions.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 11 552020/ 552030 (note new telephone code)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito (new appointment)

Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 11 517775/ 520874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu

Ministry of Federal Affairs, PO Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr Seyoum Mesfin

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PO Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 11 514300

Email: mfa.addis@telecom.net.et

Minister of Information (new appointment)

Mr Berhan Hailu

Ministry of Information, PO Box 1364, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 1 527 969

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 10 December 2005.