# PATRIARCH ABUNE ANTONIOS ERITREA

**AMNESTY**INTERNATIONAL



2008 AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL WRITE FOR RIGHTS

# PLEASE HELP PATRIARCH ABUNE ANTONIOS

Patriarch Abune Antonios has been under house arrest since January 2006.

Abune Antonios is Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church. He has been under house arrest since January 2006. Amnesty International considers Abune Antonios to be a prisoner of conscience, and there are grave concerns for his health as he is 80 years old, has diabetes and is not receiving medication.

Patriarch Abune Antonios has continually resisted government interference in religious affairs. In 2004 he protested over the secret imprisonment of three Orthodox priests. In January 2005, the church authorities removed his executive powers. He is allowed to officiate at church services but has no administrative role in church affairs. On 13 January 2006, he was formally removed from office and placed under house arrest. On 20 January 2007, two priests accompanied by three

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government security agents entered his home and confiscated his personal pontifical insignia, a symbolic token of his position as bishop.

On 27 May 2007, the government appointed a new Patriarch, and at 5am the following day Abune Antonios was forcibly removed from his residence. Amnesty International has since learnt that he is still under house arrest at an undisclosed location in the capital Asmara.

Minority faith groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and over 35 evangelical Christian churches are banned in Eritrea. An estimated 2,000 members of minority evangelical churches which have been outlawed since 2002 are in detention in harsh conditions. Amnesty International has received reports that some detainees have been repeatedly beaten up and tied in painful positions in order to force them to renounce their faith.

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# **ACT NOW**

## 1. WRITE TO THE ERITREAN AUTHORITIES

- Call for Patriarch Abune Antonios to be released immediately and unconditionally, as he is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion, both of which are guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution.
- Call on the authorities to immediately allow Patriarch Abune Antonios the medical attention he requires for his diabetes.
- Ask the authorities to ensure that Patriarch Abune Antonios is given immediate access to his family, colleagues and to a lawyer.

President Issayas Afewerki Office of the President PO Box 257 Asmara Eritrea Salutation: Your Excellency

## 2. SEND A PERSONAL LETTER OF SUPPORT TO THE PATRIARCH

"We are thinking of you."

Patriarch Abune Antonios C/o Ms Fawzia Hashim Minister of Justice PO Box 241 Asmara Eritrea



