

PUBLIC

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29 November 2007

UA 319/07 **Fear of torture/incommunicado detention/forcible return**

ERITREA **Miskir Semerab Goitom (f), aged 21**

The United Kingdom (UK) authorities forcibly returned Miskir Semerab Goitom to Eritrea on 21 October. She was sent via Saudi Arabia to the airport in the capital, Asmara. She was ordered to report to airport security the following day where she was detained. Miskir Semerab Goitom has not been seen since. She is reportedly held in Adi Abeto military prison, near Asmara and Amnesty International believes that she is at risk of torture

Miskir Semerab Goitom had arrived in the UK via Sudan on 24 January 2007 and claimed asylum, which was refused. The UK immigration authorities (the Home Office) had attempted to return her to Eritrea earlier this year.

Amnesty International fears Miskir Semerab Goitom may be tortured as punishment for evading military service and for seeking asylum, which the authorities regard as betraying the country. She could be detained incommunicado indefinitely without charge or trial, and without any access to the courts. Conditions in military detention are harsh and detainees are frequently tortured.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued guidelines to all governments in 2004, which are still in force, opposing the return of rejected Eritrean asylum-seekers on the grounds of the Eritrean authorities' record of serious human rights violations.

Thousands of people are detained incommunicado in Eritrea, in secret and indefinitely, without charge or trial. They have been arrested for suspected opposition to the government, practising their religious faith as members of banned evangelical or other churches, evading military conscription or trying to flee the country. Rejected asylum-seekers forcibly returned from Malta in 2002 and Libya in 2003 are still detained in secret. Hundreds of Eritreans who are currently detained in Libya and Sudan are at risk of deportation (see UA 190/07, AFR 54/038/2007, 20 July 2007, and UA 235/07, MDE 19/014/2007, 4 September 2007).

Military service is compulsory for all men and women aged 18 to 40. There is no limit on length of service, although women are usually released before they reach 30 years of age. There is no exemption for conscientious objectors. The usual punishment for evading military service is torture by being tied for long periods in a painful position known as "the helicopter".

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

- expressing concern that Miskir Semerab Goitom was detained at Asmara airport on 23 October, two days after she was forcibly returned from the United Kingdom, and asking why she has been detained without charge;
- calling on the authorities to disclose where she is held, and to give her immediate access to her family, legal representation and any medical treatment she may require;
- expressing concern that she is at risk of torture, and calling on the authorities to order an independent investigation into her physical safety and legal status, and publish the results.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency President Issayas Afewerki
Office of the President
P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea

Fax: +2911 123 788 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea

Fax: +2911 126 422

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

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 10 January 2008.