

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 25/001/2008

9 January 2008

Further Information on UA 299/07 (AFR 25/027/2007, 09 November 2007) – Prisoner 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**

On 24 December, human rights defenders Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie were convicted of "provoking and preparing outrages against the Ethiopian Constitution". Amnesty International considers they were convicted solely for their peaceful civil society activism. The prosecuting attorney demanded the maximum punishment of 10-year prison sentences be handed to them and also for the deprivation of their political rights after their eventual release.

At their sentencing at the Ethiopian Federal High Court on 26 December, they both received sentences of two and a half years' imprisonment. As they had already been imprisoned for 25 months they could be freed shortly, in accordance with the usual one-third remission of sentence for good behaviour. The Parole Board however, has not yet met to consider their sentence remission and as a result the possibility of their release is being delayed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie were arrested during major political unrest following the national elections of May 2005. There were demonstrations in Addis Ababa in June and November 2005 protesting at alleged election fraud. The demonstrations were violently dispersed and security forces shot dead 187 people. Six police officers were killed.

In the aftermath of the demonstrations, tens of thousands of opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) party members were detained without charge or trial, some for several months. In December 2005, 131 CUD leaders and officials, journalists and human rights defenders were put on trial (several in their absence) for political offences punishable by death or life imprisonment. Twenty-eight were freed in April 2007 when the judges ruled that they had no case to answer. In July 2007, a further 38 who had refused to present a defence, were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment or long prison terms. These 38 were pardoned and released on 20 July with the agreement of the Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, after they signed a letter apologizing for "mistakes" in regard to the demonstrations. A similar pattern of convictions, guilty pleas and pardons followed for the others who had been arrested. Both Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie pleaded not guilty and both presented their own defence in court. They are the last still remaining in prison.

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

- expressing concern that Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie were found guilty solely for their peaceful actions as human rights defenders;
- stating that Amnesty International believes them to be prisoners of conscience;
- calling on the Ethiopian authorities to release them immediately.

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

+251 11 5520874

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: hrcom@ethionet.et

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 20 February.