

PUBLIC

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UA 165/05

Incommunicado detention/Fear of torture

15 June 2005

ETHIOPIA

**Berhanu Tsegu (m), aged 30] Human rights defenders with the
Yared Hailemariam (m), aged 31] Ethiopian Human Rights Council
Cherinet Tadesse (m), aged 31]
Tsfaye Bekele (m), teacher]
Seifu Degu (m), teacher]
Chane Kebede (m), teacher]**

The six human rights defenders named above were arrested between 8 and 14 June. All work for the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), the country's leading independent human rights organisation.

Cherinet Tadesse was arrested on 8 June at his home in the capital, Addis Ababa, while Yared Hailemariam and Berhanu Tsegu were arrested on 13 June outside the EHRCO office in Addis Ababa, as they left work. The three men have spent several years as members of EHRCO's research and investigation unit, documenting human rights abuses that are widespread in Ethiopia, including arbitrary detention, torture and extrajudicial executions.

They are held incommunicado in undisclosed locations. Federal and regional police officials in Addis Ababa have denied having them in custody and have refused to give any information about them. Amnesty International fears that they are at risk of torture because of their role in EHRCO's work in defence of human rights, and to make them reveal their contacts and sources. Berhanu Tsegu had given an interview to the US-based Voice of America radio station a few hours before he was arrested.

Schoolteachers Tsfaye Bekele, Seifu Degu and Chane Kebede were arrested on 14 June in the town of Dessie, 180km north of Addis Ababa. They are respectively chair, vice-chair and member of the committee managing EHRCO's branch office in Dessie. They are held at the 4th police station in Dessie, where an EHRCO representative has been allowed to visit them.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

According to the provisional results from the 15 May elections, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) held power with 302 of the 549 seats. The two main opposition coalitions won 187, including all seats in Addis Ababa. The remaining seats were won by independents and other opposition or EPRDF-affiliated candidates. The opposition previously had only 12 seats. The opposition parties allege that there has been widespread fraud and other irregularities in the elections. There will now be an investigation into these allegations, conducted jointly by representatives of the EPRDF, the opposition, the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia and international observers such as the European Union and the US-based Carter Center. The alleged abuses, including arrests and beatings of opposition members, were in around 300 constituencies.

After the election the government banned all public demonstrations, and has now extended this ban until 8 July, when the final election results are due to be announced.

Some 2,000 student demonstrators in Addis Ababa and other towns, over 120 opposition party officials and a few thousand other opposition supporters have been detained incommunicado and without charge since demonstrations began on 5 June (for further details see UA 154/05, AI Index: AFR 25/001/2005, 7 June 2005). 36 people have died after being shot by police on 8 June using excessive force to break up mainly peaceful demonstrations, which have ended in Addis Ababa but may be continuing in some other places.

Police have refused to tell relatives, journalists or human rights investigators where arrested people are held, or on what grounds, and none has been brought before a court within 48 hours, as required by law. The prisoners are at high risk of being tortured or ill-treated. Most are believed to have been taken to military or police camps at Sendafa, Shoa Robit and Ziwai towns, to which access is barred. Police confirmed on 15 June that large numbers are held in Ziwai army camp, 160km south of Addis Ababa.

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

- expressing deep concern at the arrests of the six human rights defenders from the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (naming them);
- urging the government, as a member of the UN Commission on Human Rights, to respect the legitimate role of human rights defenders as set out in the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- seeking assurances that the six are not being tortured or ill-treated;
- expressing particular concern that Berhanu Tadesse, Yared Hailemariam and Berhanu Tsegu are detained incommunicado in undisclosed places, and calling for them to be given immediate access to their families, legal representatives, EHRCO representatives and representatives of the international community, and particularly the International Committee of the Red Cross;
- appealing for all six to be released immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for their legitimate work in defence of human rights.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi, Office of the Prime Minister
P O Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 1 552020
+ 251 1 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 517775
+ 251 1 520874
Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et
Salutation: Dear Minister

Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu, Ministry of Federal Affairs,
P O Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr Seyoum Mesfin, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
P O Box 393, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 1 514300
Email: mfa.addis@telecom.net.et
Salutation: Dear Minister

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 27 July 2005.