

PUBLIC

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UA 72/06 Torture/ possible prisoners of conscience/ fear of unfair trial

ETHIOPIA Kifle Tigeneh (m), aged 67, elected member of parliament for Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), businessperson
Solomon Aregawi (m), aged 20, journalist
Admassu Abebe (m), aged 50
Getachew Kebede (m), aged 58, elected member of Addis Ababa City Council for CUD, army captain
Kifle Mekonnen (m), aged 60, elected member of Addis Ababa City Council for CUD
Solomon Demissie (m), 70, elected member of Addis Ababa City Council for CUD
Molla Alemayehu (m), aged 56
Mulunesh Mammo (f), aged 39
Natnael Mekonnen (m), aged 28
Wassihun Alemu (m), aged 60
and 23 others

Those named above are among 33 members or alleged members of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) opposition political party who have been charged with offences including "outrages against the Constitution" and "genocide". The defendants could face an unfair trial, and if they are found guilty, they could face the death penalty. Eight of those named above claim that they have been tortured in detention.

The 33 were detained following demonstrations organized by the CUD in November 2005 against alleged election fraud. They were charged before the Federal High Court in the capital, Addis Ababa, on 20 March. No date has been set for their trial. Amnesty International is concerned that they may not receive a fair trial by an independent court according to recognized international standards.

Getachew Kebede, Kifle Mekonnen and Solomon Demissie (all three of whom are Addis Ababa City Council members-elect, representing the CUD), Admassu Abebe, Molla Alemayehu, Mulunesh Mammo, Natnael Mekonnen and Wassihun Alemu, all complained in court that they had been tortured while detained by police in the Central Investigation Bureau in Addis Ababa, and denied medical treatment for injuries sustained during torture. Wassihun Alemu claimed that he had suffered hearing damage and a broken hand through torture. He also claimed that he had been denied food for several days, despite needing to eat regularly as he suffers from diabetes. Getachew Kebede said he had been forced to sign a statement even though he could not read it because he was bleeding so heavily after being beaten. Another defendant said he had been given electric shocks. Some named the police officers who had allegedly tortured them.

Following the claims of torture made at the Federal High Court hearing, the presiding judge ordered that the detainees should receive medical treatment. Amnesty International does not yet know if medical treatment including hospital admission has been provided, or what steps the judge is taking to investigate the torture allegations, as required by international law. The organization fears that the detainees who alleged that they were tortured could face reprisals from the authorities, such as intimidation, threats, or further torture.

Amnesty International believes that Kifle Tigeneh, a member of parliament-elect for the CUD, is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the expression of his political beliefs. Journalist Solomon Aregawi of Hadar newspaper, and others detained in this case, may also be prisoners of conscience.

Most of the defendants are now held at Kaliti prison in Addis Ababa. Some are detained at the Central Prison in the capital, which is partly closed for demolition and where conditions for detainees are poor.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Several thousand suspected government opponents from the CUD and other opposition parties were detained following demonstrations in November 2005 in Addis Ababa and other towns against alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections of 15 May 2005. During the demonstrations, police shot dead at least 42 people and wounded over 200 others, and seven police were killed by mobs. Some 80 CUD leaders including MPs-elect, journalists and human rights defenders, face similar charges including treason in a separate trial which is due to start on 2 May 2006 (see UA 284/05, AFR 25/017/2005, 2 November 2005, and follow-ups).

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

- expressing concern that the 33 detainees charged before the Federal High Court on 20 March may face an unfair trial, which may not conform to international standards for independence and impartiality;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that the detainees do not face the death penalty, which is a violation of the right to life;
- calling for an independent investigation into the allegations made by eight defendants in court that they were tortured in police custody in the Central Investigation Bureau, with any police officers responsible for torture will be brought to justice;
- calling for assurances that any statements made as a result of torture will not be admissible in the trial, and that those who alleged that they were tortured will be guaranteed protection from reprisals;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Kifle Tigeneh and any others in the case who are prisoners of conscience who have not used or advocated violence;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that the Federal High Court judge's order that detainees should be given access to medical treatment is implemented immediately, with hospital admission as needed;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all the detainees are treated humanely and given access to their families and legal representatives.

APPEALS TO:

Prime Minister

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

Fax: + 251 1 552020

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito, Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 1 520874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Federal Commissioner of Police

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

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

Minister of Foreign Affairs,

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

Fax: + 251 1 514300

Email: mfa.addis@telecom.net.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 11 May 2006.