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## **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

### **Ethiopia: First death sentence in Dergue trials**

Amnesty International is dismayed by the death sentence *in absentia* handed down to Getachew Terba, a former district governor and army lieutenant, by an Addis Ababa court on 9 November.

Getachew Terba was convicted for ordering the detention, torture and execution of five alleged government opponents during the Red Terror campaign of 1977-78. He is the first person to be condemned to death among the more than 5,000 people charged with genocide and crimes against humanity during the brutal regime of Mengistu Haile-Mariam and the Dergue between 1974 and 1991.

Amnesty International fears that this is the first of what may be a large number of death sentences imposed by the courts in this series of trials over the coming months.

Getachew Terba's whereabouts are not known but, according to press reports, the court ordered the government to find him and bring him to the court for the sentence to be carried out.

The human rights organization has repeatedly called on the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to rule out the use of the death penalty in these trials, even for the most serious crimes, because the death penalty violates the right to life and is a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Additionally, trials conducted in the absence of the defendant and where the defence case has not been presented, are inherently unfair and prejudicial.

Amnesty International has urged the government to show its respect for the right to life, during the process of bringing former government officials to justice for the large-scale human rights violations that were committed. Unfortunately, the Ethiopian government seems determined to retain and use the death penalty, in particular against senior officials responsible for carrying out serious human rights violations.

#### **Background**

A total of over 5,000 men and women, including nearly 3,000 people who fled Ethiopia, will be tried *in absentia* -- including ex-President Mengistu Haile-Mariam, sheltered by President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe -- face mandatory death sentences if convicted. The five year-long trial of 46 members of the former Dergue government is nowhere near completion, and only a handful of the trials for more than 2,000 other former officials currently in detention have finished.

To date, there has only been one court-imposed execution in Ethiopia since 1991. Those condemned to death have the right to appeal to a higher court and to petition for presidential clemency.

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