

PUBLIC

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Fear for

**ETHIOPIA Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam, aged 72, former Secretary General of EHRCO  
Dr Berhanu Nega, President of the Ethiopian Economic Association and EHRCO supporter**

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Two leading human rights defenders were arrested on 8 May and have been held incommunicado and without charge ever since. They appear to be prisoners of conscience, and Amnesty International fears that they may be tortured or ill-treated in custody.

On 8 May, Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam, aged 72 and former Secretary General of the Ethiopia Human Rights Council (EHRCO), and Dr Berhanu Nega, President of the non-governmental Ethiopian Economic Association and a supporter of EHRCO, were arrested by police in the capital, Addis Ababa. They were brought before a court on 9 May, but did not have access to legal representation. Bail was refused but they were not charged. They will appear before the court again on 18 May, to allow for the police to carry out investigations. Their current whereabouts are unknown and they have not had access to their lawyers or family.

The authorities have apparently accused the two men of "inciting students to violence" during a meeting hosted by EHRCO at Addis Ababa University on 8 April. The meeting was attended by a large number of students. EHRCO maintain that the meeting only discussed issues of human rights.

On the morning of 8 May, EHRCO's offices in Addis Ababa were placed under guard by armed police officers. Two uniformed officers were stationed outside the building, while two plain clothes officers were inside the offices. This made it practically impossible for the staff to carry out their work and intimidated visitors, many of whom refused to enter the premises. When the staff came to work on 9 May, the police informed them that the offices were shut. No official reason has been given for shutting the office down, nor information on when it will be re-opened.

AI is concerned that the arrests and closure of EHRCO's offices are part of an ongoing pattern of attacks on human rights defenders in Ethiopia and fears that other members of EHRCO are at risk of harassment and arrest.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Political prisoners have previously been tortured in Ethiopia, particularly in certain police stations and security centres in Addis Ababa.

The situation in Addis Ababa has been tense since peaceful demonstrations held on 17 and 18 April by students and other demonstrators were violently broken up by the police, leaving at least 31 people dead and many more injured. Hundreds of people were arrested following the riots, and over 80 members of the opposition Ethiopian Democratic Party, 30 members of the All Amhara People's Organization and at least 100 students are still held incommunicado (see UA 99/01, AFR 25/006/2001, 18 April 2001 and follow-ups).

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:**

- expressing concern at the arrest of Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam and Dr Berhanu Nega, who appear to be prisoners of conscience held solely for their peaceful and legitimate human rights activities;
- urging that they are not tortured or ill-treated in custody;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that they are charged with a recognizably criminal offence, or immediately and unconditionally released;
- calling on the authorities to allow them immediate access to lawyers, their families and necessary medical care;
- condemning the actions of the police in shutting down the office of EHRCO on 9 May, and their attempts to intimidate EHRCO staff members;
- expressing concern at the continued harassment of human rights defenders in Ethiopia, and seeking assurances that they will be allowed to carry out their peaceful legitimate work without fear of attack or arrest.

**APPEALS TO:**

His Excellency  
Meles Zenawi  
Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister  
PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Telegrams: Prime Minister Meles, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Fax: + 251 1 552020**  
**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Commissioner of Police  
Office of the Commissioner of Police  
Ministry of Justice  
PO Box 21321, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Telegrams: Commissioner of Police, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Fax: + 251 1 550278**  
**Salutation: Dear Sir**

Mr Werede-Wold Wolde  
Minister of Justice  
Ministry of Justice  
PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
**Telegrams: Minister of Justice, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**  
**Fax: + 251 1 550278**  
**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**COPIES 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 21 June 2001.