

PUBLIC

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UA 214/06 Fear of Torture / Ill-treatment/ harsh prison conditions/ prisoner of conscience

ETHIOPIA Eskinder Negga (m), aged 28, journalist

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Journalist Eskinder Negga, one of the 76 journalists, human rights defenders and opposition political supporters currently on trial in the capital, Addis Ababa, has reportedly been moved to a prison where he may be at risk of torture or ill-treatment and where conditions are very harsh. Amnesty International considers him to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression.

According to reports, Eskinder Negga has been moved from his cell in Addis Ababa's Kaliti prison to a part of Karchele prison known as 'Alem Bekagn' (which means 'end of the world'). These cells, called 'dark rooms', have been used for prisoners facing execution, but are also known to be used as punishment cells. The detention conditions are reportedly very poor, with very limited access to sanitation and no visits from relatives. The cells are extremely dark and small, and during the current rainy season, conditions are cold and damp.

The reason for separating Eskinder Negga from the other defendants in the trial is unclear. The issue of his transfer was raised by other detainees during the last court hearing for the 76 currently on trial, on 6 August, but the judge did not offer any explanation as to why Eskinder Negga was moved. The court has now gone into summer recess until 4 October, leaving little hope that Eskinder Negga will be able to appeal against his transfer or that other detainees will be able to raise concerns about his conditions of detention.

Eskinder Negga is the editor of the newspaper *Satenaw*. He was arrested along with other journalists and opposition members on 28 November 2005, following demonstrations against alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections of 15 May 2005. He was charged with treason, "outrages against the Constitution" and "incitement to armed conspiracy", which could carry the death penalty. Eskinder Negga's partner, Serkalem Fasil, was also arrested and detained at Kaliti prison. She was pregnant at the time of her arrest and gave birth to a baby boy in late June. She and her son are still held in Kaliti prison. They have not been permitted to see Eskinder Negga.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Several thousand suspected government opponents from the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and other opposition parties were detained following demonstrations in June and November 2005 in Addis Ababa and other towns. They were protesting against alleged fraud in the parliamentary elections of 15 May 2005. During the demonstrations, the security forces shot dead at least 86 people and allegedly many more, wounded over 200 others, and seven police were killed by mobs. The detained CUD leaders, including several who were elected to parliament and the Addis Ababa City Council had refused to take up their positions. In December 2005, they were charged with instigating the violence. All defendants except three civil society activists refused to defend themselves, on the grounds that they did not expect to receive fair trial. A parliamentary inquiry is currently investigating the killings at the demonstration.

Eskinder Negga, along with 14 other journalists, four human rights defenders and numerous CUD members are among 76 people currently on trial. Twenty five exiles are being tried in absentia. The charges against the journalists are reportedly based on published articles but are also linked to the charges against the CUD leaders. The journalists were not CUD members, as far as is known, but had published interviews with opposition leaders and had criticized the government and EPRDF during the election process. Some of these published articles reportedly form the main prosecution evidence against them.

Amnesty International considers the 14 journalists to be prisoners of conscience, imprisoned on account of their opinions and exercising their legitimate professional activities as journalists. Most of the detained journalists had been previously arrested several times before under the Press Law (1992) in the government's long-running repression of press freedom and many had been prisoners of conscience (See Amnesty International's report on the trial, "Ethiopia – Prisoners of conscience on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists", May 2006, AI Index: AFR 25/013/2006.)

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

- expressing concern at Eskinder Negga's transfer to the Alem Bekagn area of Karchele prison, where conditions are poor and unsanitary;
- calling on the authorities to respect regional and international standards for the treatment of prisoners, such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners;
- calling on the authorities to guarantee that Eskinder Negga will not be tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- calling on the authorities to state the reasons for his transfer to Karchele prison;
- demanding that Eskinder Negga be allowed visits from his relatives, and to see his partner, Serkalem Fasil, and their baby.

**APPEALS TO:**

Minister of Justice

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

**Fax:** + 251 11 552 0874

**Email:** [ministry-justice@telecom.net.et](mailto:ministry-justice@telecom.net.et)

**Salutation:** Dear Minister

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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

**Fax:** + 251 11 551 43 00

**Email:** [mfa.addis@telecom.net.et](mailto:mfa.addis@telecom.net.et)

**Salutation:** Dear Minister

**COPIES TO:**

Minister of Health

Dr Tewodros Adhanom,  
Ministry of Health,  
PO Box 1234, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Fax:** + 251 11 551 93 66

Federal Administration of Prisons

Prison Service Headquarters,  
PO Box 2234, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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 18 September 2006.