

PUBLIC

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UA 279/06 Torture/ Incommunicado detention

ETHIOPIA Alemayehu Fantu (m), businessman, aged about 50

Alemayehu Fantu, the owner of a chain of supermarkets, was arrested by the Ethiopian police on 5 October and taken to Woreda 8 Police Station in the Gulele district of Addis Ababa. He is being held incommunicado without charge, and reports indicate that he has been tortured.

Alemayehu Fantu was brought before a court on 6 October, and was remanded in custody without charges being brought against him. When he appeared in court again on 12 October, witnesses reported that he could barely walk. There were clear signs that he had been tortured, such as bruises and marks on his feet. Sources indicated he may have received electric shocks. Amnesty International is extremely concerned that Alemayehu Fantu is at risk of further torture in detention. Alemayehu Fantu's family has been allowed to send him food but not to see him. He has received no visits and has not had access to legal advice.

It is thought that Alemayehu Fantu is being detained in connection with the publication by the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) of a calendar of action for non-violent civil disobedience. Three other people were arrested by the Ethiopian police around the same time as Alemayehu, also in connection with the calendar. They are reported to have died after being tortured in custody.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The CUD published their calendar of action for civil disobedience on 11 September, to coincide with the Ethiopian New Year. The Ethiopian government reportedly set up a special task force to investigate the publication and distribution of the calendar. This investigation led to the arrest of Alemayehu Fantu and at least three others, who are reported to have died in custody. All those arrested were taken to the recently re-opened Woreda 8 police station, which is also used to hold new CUD detainees. There have also been other reports of police beating people caught distributing or possessing the calendar.

In November 2005, the Ethiopian forces arrested several thousand suspected government opponents from the CUD and other opposition parties 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 wounded over 200 others. Seven policemen were killed by mobs.

The distribution of the calendar for civil disobedience follows the publication of a book by Dr Berhanu Negga, one of the leaders of the CUD arrested in November 2005, who is on trial along with 75 others in Addis Ababa (see UA 284/05, AFR 25/017/2005, 2 November 2005, and follow-ups). The book was written by Dr Berhanu Negga in Kaliti prison, and was smuggled out of the prison in August 2006. The book has been widely circulated on the web and in print since then.

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

- expressing concern at the incommunicado detention without charge of Alemayehu Fantu;
- expressing concern at reports indicating that he has been tortured in detention, and at reports that three others have died in custody after being tortured;
- calling for an independent investigation into these reports, and for those found to be responsible to be brought to justice in a prompt and fair trial;

- urging the authorities to ensure that Alemayehu Fantu has immediate access to his relatives and all necessary medical care;
- calling on the authorities to release Alemayehu Fantu immediately if he is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial in accordance with international standards of fairness, and without recourse to the death penalty.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito

Ministry of Justice, PO Box 1370, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 11 5517775

+ 251 11 5520874

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs

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

Fax: + 251 11 5514300

Email: mfa.addis@telecom.net.et

COPIES TO:

President

Girma Wolde-Giorgis,

Office of the President, PO Box 1031/ PO Box 23698, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 11 5518656

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Your Excellency

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 24 November 2006.