

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: AFR 25/033/2006**

**19 October 2006**

**UA 282/06**      **Fear of Torture or ill-treatment**

**ETHIOPIA**      **Yalemzewd Bekele (f), lawyer and women's rights campaigner**

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Yalemzewd Bekele, a lawyer working for the European Commission in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, was arrested on the morning of 19 October by the Ethiopian authorities, while trying to cross the border to Kenya. Amnesty International is concerned that she is at high risk of torture or other ill-treatment.

It is believed that Yalemzewd Bekele was accompanied by another person at the time of her arrest. The identity and whereabouts of this person are not known. Yalemzewd Bekele appears to have been arrested in connection with the publication and distribution by the political opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) of a calendar of action for non-violent civil disobedience. On 5 October, Alemayehu Fantu, the owner of a chain of supermarkets in Addis Ababa, was also arrested in connection with the calendar. Shortly after Alemayehu Fantu was detained, the Ethiopian authorities issued an arrest warrant against Yalemzewd Bekele. There are clear indications that Alemayehu Fantu was tortured in detention at Woreda 8 police station in the Gulele district of Addis Ababa (see UA 279/06, AFR 25/032/2006, 13 October 2006). Three others arrested at the same time, reportedly in connection with the calendar, are believed to have died after being tortured in custody. Amnesty International is extremely concerned that Alemayehu Fantu may have named Yalemzewd Bekele as being involved with the CUD calendar while he was being tortured, and that she may be tortured in detention.

Yalemzewd Bekele began working for the European Commission in Addis Ababa in 2004. The projects on which she works include projects related to human rights and civil society. Yalemzewd Bekele is also a prominent civil rights lawyer who volunteered with the Ethiopian Women Lawyers' Association (EWLA), a prominent women's rights organization. She has been an active campaigner for women's rights in Ethiopia.

## **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 arrest of lawyer and women's rights campaigner Yalemzewd Bekele on 19 October;
- noting that Amnesty International believes that her arrest may be connected to the detention of Alemayehu Fantu, and the publication of the CUD's calendar of action for non-violent civil disobedience;
- urging the authorities to ensure that Yalemzewd Bekele is not tortured or ill-treated in detention;
- calling on the authorities to allow her immediate access to her relatives, lawyer and any medical treatment she may require;
- calling for her immediate release if she is not to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought to trial in timely manner 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](mailto:mfa.addis@telecom.net.et)

**COPIES TO:**

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

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

**Salutation:** Your Excellency

Delegation of the European Commission to Ethiopia

Tim Clarke, Head of Delegation

Delegation of the European Commission, P. O. Box 5570, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Fax:** + 251 11 6612877

**Email:** [DELEGATION-ETHIOPIA@CEC.EU.INT](mailto:DELEGATION-ETHIOPIA@CEC.EU.INT)

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 30 November 2006.