

**PUBLIC**

**AI Index: AFR 64/008/2007**

**5 September 2007**

**UA 234/07      Prisoners of Conscience/Fear of Torture or ill-treatment/Incommunicado detention**

**ERITREA      Leul Gebreab (m), aged 35, pastor of the Apostolic Church  
and 10 other church members arrested in Asmara**

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A Protestant pastor, Leul Gebreab, and 10 churchgoers from another church, are being held incommunicado. They are at risk of torture or other ill-treatment. Amnesty International believes that they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their religious beliefs.

Leul Gebreab, a pastor of the evangelical Apostolic Church, was arrested in the Eritrean capital Asmara on 12 August. There has been no news of his whereabouts.

In a separate incident on 19 August, 10 men and women who are members of the Full Gospel Church, a long-established evangelical church in Asmara, were arrested while worshipping privately in a home in the city, following the closure of their church by the authorities. They are believed to be detained incommunicado without charge or trial in the Karchele security prison, together with dozens of other pastors and members of banned evangelical churches.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In 2002, the government of Eritrea ordered all unregistered religions to close their places of worship until they were registered. Only Islam and the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran Christian churches have been officially recognized since May 2002. Members of evangelical churches have been subjected to arrest, torture and coercion by the security forces to try and force them to deny their faith. Reports indicate that there are more than 2,000 evangelical church members currently being detained incommunicado, without charge or access to legal redress. Many of them are held in remote army camps.

Some were detained in 2007 – for example Pastor Michael Abraha, a diabetic who had been arrested several times previously, and 20 other members of the Kale Hiwot church arrested in Decemhare town in May and June and held in Adi Abito army prison near Asmara. The majority, however, have been held for over two years. Prison conditions are harsh, with little or no medical treatment. Three detainees are reported to have died in custody during 2007.

Religious persecution, still denied by the government, has also affected the Eritrean Orthodox Church, whose Patriarch has been deposed and is detained incommunicado on account of his criticisms of government interference in church matters (see UA 121/07, AFR 64/005/2007, 23 May 2007, and follow-up). The Roman Catholic Church in Eritrea is currently appealing against an order to hand over all its social welfare organizations – schools, medical clinics, orphanages and women's training centres – to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour, and it has made repeated requests for exemption for priests from military service, which is compulsory and indefinite.

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

- calling for the government to clarify reports of the arrest and secret detention of Pastor Leul Gebreab of the Apostolic Church, and expressing concern at the arrests of 10 members of the Full Gospel church in Asmara in August and 21 Kale Hiwot church members in Decemhare in May and June;
- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of these prisoners of conscience, who are detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion, which is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution;

- urging the authorities to ensure that none of those detained are tortured or ill-treated, and for the detainees to be given immediate access to their families, lawyers and any medical attention they may require, mentioning particularly medical concern for Pastor Michael Abraha, a diabetic;

- renewing appeals for the release of some 2,000 pastors and members of evangelical churches who are still detained as prisoners of conscience without charge or trial, contrary to human rights provisions in the Eritrean Constitution and laws, which require that detainees are brought before a court within 48 hours of their arrest.

**APPEALS TO:**

**President**

His Excellency President Issayas Afewerki

Office of the President

P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea

**Fax: + 2911 123 788 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)**

**Salutation: Your Excellency**

Ms Fawzia Hashim

Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice

P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea

**Fax: +2911 126 422**

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

Commissioner of Police

Ministry of Internal Affairs

P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea

**Salutation: Dear Commissioner**

**COPIES TO:**

Mr Semere Beyene

Director, Department of Religious Affairs

Ministry of Local Government

P O Box 225, Asmara, Eritrea

**Fax: +2911 120 014**

**Salutation: Dear Sir**

and to diplomatic representatives of Eritrea accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 17 October 2007.