

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 64/014/2005

1 November 2005

Further Information on UA 270/05 (AFR 64/012/2005, 13 October 2005) Fear of torture/prisoners of conscience

ERITREA Ukbay (m)]
 Abraham Weldu (m)] Kale Hiwot Church members
 Gebremichael Yohaness (m)]
 Pastor Simon (m)]
 Teklemariam (m)]

Akberet Nigussie (f), Rema Church office administrator
Dozens of other members of evangelical churches

Released: Yergalem Afewerki (f)
 Eden (f)
 Elsa Tekle (f)
 Freweyni Gebreab (f)
 Hamelmal (f)
 Sirak Gebremichael (m)
 Berhane Tesfay (m)

Yergalem Afewerki, Eden, Elsa Tekle, Freweyni Gebreab, Hamelmal, Sirak Gebremichael and Berhane Tesfay, all members of the Kale Hiwot Church in the capital Asmara, have reportedly been released without charge. However the six others named above, and dozens of others whose names are not yet known, are still reportedly detained without charge in the 5th police station in Asmara.

Over 200 members of evangelical churches in Eritrea were detained in a mass crackdown by the authorities at the end of September and the beginning of October. Those still detained are at risk of torture. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, held solely because of their religious beliefs.

At least three of those in detention are staff of the Kale Hiwot Church's Development Project. Prior to the forced closure of their offices on 3 October, the Project had been running schools, nursery schools and emergency feeding projects. Two-thirds of Eritrea's population are currently dependent on emergency food provision from the UN World Food Program and other humanitarian agencies.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since 2002, only the Orthodox, Catholic and Lutheran Christian churches have been allowed to operate in Eritrea. Members of minority Christian evangelical churches face fierce persecution, even though freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution.

Over 1,000 members of minority churches in Eritrea, including up to 18 pastors, are currently detained. There have been frequent reports of the security forces torturing detained evangelical church members, who have continued worshipping despite the ban, in an attempt to force them to abandon their faith. The detainees are held incommunicado in harsh conditions without charge or trial. They are imprisoned in secret detention centres and army camps in different parts of the country, including the main military training centre at Sawa. Some are held in metal shipping containers and underground prisons. Several detainees have become seriously ill through denial of medical treatment.

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

- welcoming the release of several members of the Kale Hiwot Church in Asmara;
- calling for all other members of evangelical churches, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion, which is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution, to be released immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience;
- asking the authorities to ensure that they are not tortured or ill-treated in custody, and are given immediate access to their families, lawyers and any medical attention they may require;
- expressing concern that they have been arbitrarily detained without charge or trial, contrary to human rights provisions in the Eritrean Constitution and laws, which require that people 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 126422 (Please keep trying)

Salutation: Your Excellency

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea

Mr Semere Beyene
Director, Department of Religious Affairs
Ministry of Local Government
P O Box 225, Asmara, Eritrea

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 13 December 2005.