

PUBLIC

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Further Information on UA 4/07 (AFR 25/001/2007, 4 January 2007) Fear of torture or ill-treatment/"disappearance"/prisoners of conscience

ETHIOPIA **Meqcha Mengistu (m) aged 38] teachers and officials of the**
 Anteneh Getnet (m) aged 42] Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA)
 Tilahun Ayalew (m) aged 49]

New name: Woldie Dana (m), teacher, ETA member

The four Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA) members named above, who were arrested in December 2006, are now known to have been released in March, but three have since been rearrested. The fourth ETA official, Tilahun Ayalew, is in hiding. Amnesty International believes that the three teachers who are being detained are prisoners of conscience detained for participating in legal ETA trade union activities. They are at risk of torture or ill-treatment.

They have reportedly been accused of being members of an armed opposition group, the Ethiopian People's Patriotic Front (EPPF). This is the same charge levelled against them when they were arrested in December, but the court that ordered their release in March said it had found no evidence to support the charge.

Anteneh Getnet and Meqcha Mengistu were both arrested at their homes on 30 May. A third ETA member, primary school teacher Woldie Dana, was arrested at his home on 4 June. Woldie Dana was also detained in December 2006 and released on March 22 on the orders of the court.

The three men are being held at Kaliti Prison in the capital, Addis Ababa.

Tilahun Ayalew went into hiding on 28 May on hearing that government security agents were coming to arrest him. The agents arrested his wife instead, but released her the following day. Tilahun Ayalew, was also arrested in December 2006 and released on 22 March. When he was arrested in December, without a warrant, he was taken to a forest, tortured for four days and then beaten until he passed out. He was transferred to the Addis Ababa Police Commission on 26 December. An Addis Ababa court ordered his release on 28 December. However, the police rearrested him and he remained in detention until he was released on 22 March. As a result of the torture he now has difficulty walking.

Anteneh Getnet and Meqcha Mengistu have also reportedly stated that they were tortured when they were detained from December to March. They claim that they were coerced into signing false confessions that they had links with the EPPF. The court rejected these "confessions", but did not investigate their allegations of torture.

Meqcha Mengistu is a father of four, a secondary school teacher and local ETA chairperson in the East Gojjam area. He is also a member of the ETA Committee responsible for the implementation of an HIV/AIDS education programme (EFAIDS). He was arrested on 17 December and was beaten severely many times in an attempt to make him admit to EPPF membership.

Anteneh Getnet was elected to the ETA Addis Ababa Regional Council in August 2006. He was arrested in December 2006 and after his release in March he is reported to have said that he had regularly been tortured by being suspended by his feet and hands, face downwards, with his chest touching the floor, and

left in this position overnight. This has left him with severe problems with his arms, legs and back. He was told that he would not be released if he did not admit to being an EPPF member.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The ETA is the largest trade union in Ethiopia, with half a million members. It is affiliated to the worldwide trade union umbrella organisation the International Trade Union Confederation, and to the global federation of teachers' trade unions, Education International. The ETA has been critical of government education policies, including regional language teaching policies and teachers' conditions of service. The authorities have attempted to replace the ETA by setting up a rival pro-government union with the same name. Hundreds of teachers and ETA members across the country have been detained or arbitrarily dismissed since the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, reportedly because they failed to support the party, but all were eventually released.

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

- expressing concern that Tilahun Ayalew, Anteneh Getnet and Woldie Dana have been arrested again on charges that a court threw out when it ordered their release in March 2007;
- calling on the authorities to investigate reports that both Tilahun Ayalew and Anteneh Getnet were tortured in custody between December 2006 and March 2007;
- calling on the authorities to ensure that the three men are not tortured or ill-treated in custody;
- urging the authorities to allow the men immediate access to their relatives, legal representation and any medical treatment they may require;
- calling on the authorities to release Tilahun Ayalew, Anteneh Getnet and Woldie Dana immediately and unconditionally, as Amnesty International believes they are prisoners of conscience, held solely for exercising their right to peacefully express their opinions and to work as trade unionists.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

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

Fax: +251 11 5517775

+251 11 5520874

Email: ministry-justice@telecom.net.et

Salutation: Dear Minister

Federal Commissioner of Police

Mr Workneh Gebeyehu, Ministry of Federal Affairs, PO Box 5068, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi, Office of the Prime Minister, PO Box 1031, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 1552020

Minister of Education

Mr Sintayehu Woldemikael, Ministry of Education, PO Box 1367, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 155 08 77

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 13 August 2007.