

URGENT ACTION

UNIVERSITY LECTURER MUST BE RELEASED

On 17 August, University lecturer Firew Bekele was arrested and charged under Ethiopia's draconian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP). For the last decade, the ATP has been constantly used to suppress any form of dissent. Firew Bekele is accused of writing a book that criticises Ethiopia's new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed. Firew Bekele denies having written the book. He is a prisoner of conscience that should be immediately and unconditionally released.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed
PO Box 1031
Lorenzo Te'azaz Road
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Email: info@pmo.gov.et
Twitter: @PMEthiopia

Dear Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed,

Firew Bekele, a Marketing lecturer at Rift Valley University, was arrested by Federal police on 17 August 2019 outside his home. Before searching his home, the police read him a court order that stated he was suspected of writing and publishing a book entitled "Yetetlefe Tigil" (the Hijacked Struggle), which criticises politicians, security officials, business people and other individuals for having allegedly hijacking Ethiopia's current political transition. Amnesty International has found nothing in the book that refers to violence or incites it in any way. Firew Bekele agreed to having assisted the author with the book's publication, but he vehemently denies having written the book. The book has been banned from stores, but it continues to be privately distributed around the country. During the search, the police found Firew Bekele was in possession of a copy of the book.

Following his arrest, Firew Bekele was first brought before the first instance court on 20 August and charged with incitement to terrorism, under the current Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP). His hearing was postponed twice; he was then remanded to police custody for 28 days on 27 August, as instructed under the ATP. Firew Bekele's access to his lawyer has been hindered under ATP regulations, and his wife, parents and siblings were all denied access, as he was being charged with terrorism. His lawyer has told Amnesty that he is being interrogated to get him to confess to having authored the book, or to share name of the author.

In light of the above I urge you to:

- **Immediately and unconditionally release Firew Bekele, as he has been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights;**
- **Ensure that until his release, Firew Bekele has unhindered access to his family and lawyer, and that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment;**
- **Cease using the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation until it is revised in line with international human rights law and standards.**

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In 2016, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed announced reforms to address structural and systematic human rights issues, releasing thousands of prisoners who were serving sentences on politically motivated charges. Spurred by systemic human rights repression and economic and political marginalisation, ethnic Amhara and Oromo youth in Ethiopia took to the streets in vast numbers and sustained manner until 2018. Many of the protestors were charged under the under the draconian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP).

Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's administration initiated an important reform agenda that has the potential to improve the Ethiopian human rights situation if effectively implemented. However, the current political climate in Ethiopia is a tense one, as priorities and loyalties are divided among different factions within the government coalition. The Prime Minister's party is the Oromo Democratic Party – many Ethiopians saw the Prime Minister's appointment to the position as significant for the Oromo ethnic group, as he is the first Oromo leader of Ethiopia in modern history. While there have been important steps taken towards reforming the draconian legislation used for decades to suppress criticism and dissent, the ATP has yet to be reformed, and the older version of the ATP continues to be used to charge individuals in a wide variety of contexts, many of whom are vocal dissenters of the current federal government.

The book, *Yetetlefe Tigil* (the Hijacked Struggle), discusses the growing rift between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the rest of his party, the Oromo Democratic Party, and accuses the Prime Minister of not only hijacking the Oromo struggle, but of neglecting the demands of the Oromo protestors. Amnesty International has found nothing in the book that refers to violence or incites it in any way.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: English.

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 1 November 2019

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Firew Bekele (he/him)