

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED OPPOSITION MEMBERS RISK ILL-TREATMENT

Ethiopian security forces have arrested Aweke Tezera, Blen Mesfin, Eyasped Tesfaye, Abebe Akalu and Tena Yitayew for exercising their freedom of expression to criticise the government. This comes after a state of emergency was declared in Ethiopia following a week of protests in Oromia region.

Ethiopian security forces arrested several members of the political opposition Semayawi (Blue) Party on 9 October. The police took **Aweke Tezera** from his home on 9 October to Kirkos Sub-City Police Station. **Abebe Akalu** was arrested on 10 October from his workplace in Addis Ababa. He remains detained at the Lege-Tafo Police Station. Relatives of **Blen Mesfin** found her at Lazarist Police Station in Gulele Sub-City on 11 October in a search following her failure to return home. Aweke Tezera, Blen Mesfin and Abebe Akalu have all been charged with 'incitement of violence' due to speaking publicly against the government.

Eyasped Tesfaye was arrested from his office on 11 October and taken to Amichae Police Station in Bole Sub-City. The police have not yet brought **Eyasped Tesfaye** to court. **Tena Yitayew** was arrested on 13 October and taken to Amichae area in Bole Sub-City. **Tena Yitayew** has not yet been charged.

A state of emergency was declared on 9 October 2016 after week-long protests took place in several locations in Oromia and Amhara regions. The protests ensued after at least 55 people were killed in a stampede at the Irrecha ceremony in Bishoftu in Oromia region, which protestors believe was caused by security forces. . During a 'week of rage' against the security forces, protestors burnt businesses, vehicles and properties across Oromia region.

Amnesty International believes the arrests of Semayawi Party members is due to their public critique of the Ethiopian authorities given the current political situation. These arrests violate Ethiopia's international and regional human rights obligations including the right to freedom of expression. Amnesty International is also concerned that the members of Semayawi Party in detention may be subjected to torture or ill treatment.

Please write immediately in Amharic, English or your own language:

- Calling on the Ethiopian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Aweke Tezera, Blen Mesfin, Eyasped Tesfaye, Abebe Akalu and Tena Yitayew, who are in custody solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on the Ethiopian authorities to ensure they are not subjected to torture or other ill-treatment pending their release;
- Calling on the Ethiopian authorities to stop arresting people for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 25 NOVEMBER 2016 TO:

Prime Minister
Hailemariam Dessalegn
FDRE Prime Minister
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 122 6292

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister
Getachew Ambaye
FDRE Ministry of Justice
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Fax: +251 11 551 7775

Email: justabr@ethionet.et

Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Commissioner
Addisu Gebre-egziabher (PHD)
Ethiopian Human Rights Commission
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY MR BERHANU KEBEDE, Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 17 Princes Gate SW7 1PZ, 020 7589 7212, Fax 020 7584 7054, info@ethioembassy.org.uk, www.ethioembassy.org.uk, Salutation: Your Excellency.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Protests against the Ethiopian Government have been ongoing in Oromia region since November 2015. The Addis Ababa City Integrated Development Master Plan was the immediate cause for the region-wide protests. The protesters allege that the Master Plan allows the expansion of Addis Ababa through forced eviction of the Oromo farmers without due process of law and adequate compensation. However, the Ethiopian Government's announcement that it had cancelled the Addis Ababa Master Plan in January 2016 did not abate the protests. By then, the protesters' demands had evolved to include justice, freedom and the release of Oromo political leaders such as prisoners of conscience Bekele Gerba and Dejene Tafa.

Residents of the Amhara region's cities of Gondor, Debre Tabor, Bahir Dar and Debre Markos joined the protests at the end of July 2016 following the arrest of Wolkait Amhara Identity and Self-Determination Committee members. The Committee was established in November 2014, in order to facilitate the right of self-determination of the Amhara people in Wolkait district in the Tigray region. The Amhara residents of Wolkait district have been agitating for decades to be merged with Amhara region rather than Tigray.

Protests in other cities in the Amhara and Oromia regions and in Addis Ababa on 5 and 6 August 2016 were dispersed using excessive force including lethal force, even though the protests were largely peaceful. More than one hundred people were killed in the two days. The security forces also arrested many protesters and detained them in unofficial places of detention, including military and police training bases. Amnesty has previously documented the use of torture and other forms of ill-treatment in official and unofficial places of detention.

Despite relative calm since mid-September 2016, the tragedy that occurred on 2 October 2016 in Bishoftu during the Oromo celebration of Irrecha further escalated the situation in Oromia region. The death of protesters in a stampede during the celebration is apparently because of the disproportionate and unnecessary use of force by police. However, the exact particulars of what happened, the number and cause of deaths and details of measures taken by the security forces during the Irrecha ceremony remain unclear. Amnesty International is calling for an independent investigation into the incident. Following the incident, residents of many towns and cities in Oromia region resumed protests, and escalated their action to attacks on foreign-owned properties and businesses.

The Council of Ministers declared a nation-wide state of emergency on 8 October 2016 derogating from their international treaty obligations including the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The official content and scope of the state of emergency declaration are not yet fully public and Ethiopian Authorities have not yet complied with their obligation to notify the state of emergency to the other State Parties of the ICCPR as required by Art 4(3).

A Command Post chaired by the Prime Minister has been established under the state of emergency. The Prime Minister will determine the members of the Command Post. The Command Post will identify and announce localities where restrictions on individual rights will apply. The state of emergency declaration listed the restrictions the Command Post is allowed to impose, including; limitations of the rights to expression, association and peaceful assembly; and suspension of substantive and procedural laws.