

PUBLIC

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UA 255/06 Detention without charge/ Incommunicado detention/ Fear for safety

ETHIOPIA Wasihun Melese (m)] teachers and trade unionists
Anteneh Getnet (m), aged 43]

Wasihun Melese and Anteneh Getnet, both members of the teachers' trade union, the Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA), were arrested in the capital, Addis Ababa, on 23 September. They are being held incommunicado without charge and are at risk of torture, ill-treatment, or "disappearance".

Wasihun Melese was arrested at his home by police, who took him to the police Central Investigation Bureau (known as Maekelawi), where he is still detained. He is a teacher at Addis Ketema High School in Addis Ababa and a prominent activist in the Addis Ababa branch of the ETA. He is an elected member of the ETA's National Executive Committee.

Shortly after his arrest, three men in plain clothes reportedly entered the ETA's office in Addis Ababa and were later seen leaving in a car with Anteneh Getnet, a teacher and ETA activist who had been in the organisation's office. He had been attending an Addis Ababa Region teachers' meeting. His whereabouts are still unknown. Anteneh Getnet was previously abducted and beaten in May 2006, allegedly by members of the security forces. He is still suffering from injuries sustained when he was beaten.

These new arrests may be a response by the Ethiopian authorities to a complaint lodged by the ETA and the global union federation Education International with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Committee on Freedom of Association, citing government interference with ETA activities and intimidation of ETA members, including the arrest of numerous teachers since May 2005.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The ETA, which is affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and Education International, is the oldest trade union in Ethiopia, to which half a million teachers in primary, secondary and higher educational institutions belong. The ETA has been critical of government education policies and has been subject to numerous government attempts to close it. There have been attempts by the Ethiopian authorities to replace it with a pro-government union created with the same name.

The ETA issued statements criticizing the government in connection with the post-election crisis in mid-2005. In two incidents in June and November 2005, over 80 opposition party supporters were killed by the security forces, and seven police officers were also killed by demonstrators protesting at alleged election fraud in the May 2005 elections. There were mass arrests of opposition members and many are reportedly still detained without charge.

Hundreds of teachers and ETA members in different regions have been detained or arbitrarily dismissed in recent years, reportedly because they failed to support the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Kassahun Kebede, an ETA official arrested in November 2005 in connection with the demonstration, is now on trial alongside the leaders of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), several journalists and human rights defenders. He faces serious charges including 'outrage against the Constitution' and could be punished with the death penalty. He is a teacher and the chair of the Addis Ababa branch of the ETA. Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and has called for his immediate and unconditional release (see AI report *Ethiopia: Prisoners of conscience*

on trial for treason: opposition party leaders, human rights defenders and journalists, AI Index AFR 25/013/2006, May 2006).

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

- expressing concern over the arrests on 23 September of Wasihun Melese and Anteneh Getnet, who appear to be prisoners of conscience arrested on account of their non-violent trade union activities;
- asking the authorities to disclose the location where Anteneh Getnet is held;
- urging the authorities to either bring charges, within the 48 hours provided by the law, against Wasihun Melese and Anteneh Getnet if they are reasonably suspected of a criminal offence; or to release them immediately;
- urging the authorities to ensure Wasihun Melese and Anteneh Getnet are given immediate access to their families and legal representatives, with medical treatment if required, and are treated in accordance with regional and international standards on the treatment of prisoners.

APPEALS TO:

Minister of Justice

Mr Assefa Kesito

Ministry of Justice

PO Box 1370

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: + 251 11 5517775

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Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Education

Dr Sintayehu Woldemikael

Ministry of Education

PO Box 1367

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Fax: +251 11 5511355

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Prime Minister

His Excellency Meles Zenawi

Office of the Prime Minister

PO Box 1031,

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Salutation: Your Excellency

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 7 November 2006.