

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 64/01/98

UA 209/98 Fear of ill-treatment / Arbitrary detention and deportation/
Possible prisoners of conscience 23 July 1998

ERITREA Hundreds of Ethiopians detained or deported

Since mid-June 1998, a month after the outbreak of a border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Eritrean authorities have detained and deported hundreds of Ethiopian citizens resident in Eritrea. After allegations of the ill-treatment of some of those detained Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of those in custody.

Details of the identities and numbers of those arbitrarily detained or deported are not yet known. Additionally no access to the detainees or prisoners of war has been given to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

The Eritrean government is denying the mass detentions and deportations of Ethiopian nationals though it has acknowledged the deportation of 46 Ethiopian students from the University of Asmara. The exercise appears to parallel, though on a lesser scale, the mass detention and deportation by the Ethiopian government of people of Eritrean origin, many of whom were Ethiopian citizens resident in Ethiopia for many years prior to Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia in 1991.

There is currently no actual fighting and mediation efforts continue.

BACKGROUND

Many of the Ethiopians detained in Eritrea had been living there for many years prior to the victory in 1991 of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) against the Mengistu Haile-Mariam government which resulted in formal independence for Eritrea in 1993. Eritrea deported about 140,000 Ethiopians of non-Eritrean origin in 1991, allowing tens of thousands of others to remain and work in Eritrea. The recent deportees seem to be mainly people originating from the Tigray border region of Ethiopia and working in Assab port.

Amnesty International has been making urgent appeals to the Ethiopian government concerning the detentions and deportations of people of Eritrean origin (see UA 177/98, AFR 25/20/98, 16 June 1998 and follow-ups).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/faxes/express/airmail letters in English or your own language:

- expressing concern for the safety of Ethiopian citizens detained in Eritrea after reports that some have been ill-treated in custody;
- urging that their basic human rights are respected and that they are humanely treated in detention, including being given immediate access to relatives and lawyers and visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross;
- calling for them to be immediately and unconditionally released if they are not charged with a recognizably criminal offence;
- urging that people are not deported without clear and fair procedures, including the right to challenge the deportations through open and fair court proceedings.

APPEALS TO:

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His Excellency President Issayas Afewerki
Office of the President
Asmara, Eritrea
Telegrams: President Issayas Afewerki, Asmara, Eritrea
Faxes: + 2911 125123
Salutation: Dear President

Mrs Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241
Asmara, Eritrea
Telegrams: Justice Minister, Asmara, Eritrea
Faxes: c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs + 2911 123788
Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Mr Haile Wolde-Tensae
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
P O Box 190
Asmara, Eritrea
Faxes: + 2911 123788

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 3 September 1998.