

PUBLIC

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30 October 2007

Further Information on UA 190/07 (AFR 54/038/2007, 20 July 2007) Forcible return/Fear of torture/Arbitrary detention

SUDAN Several hundred Ethiopian and Eritrean nationals

The Sudanese authorities forcibly returned 15 refugees to Ethiopia on 27 September. They are now at risk of enforced disappearance, arbitrary and incommunicado detention, torture and unfair trials. They were among the several hundred Ethiopian and Eritrean nationals who were arrested by Sudanese authorities in early July. (See UA 280/07, AFR 25/024/2007, 30 October 2007)

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced on 11 October that the 15 had been part of a group of more than 30 Ethiopian refugees arrested in early July 2007 by Sudanese intelligence officers in Khartoum and Blue Nile state, and expressed fears that up to 20 more refugees still in jail were facing forcible return. The UNHCR said that the Sudanese authorities had not responded to its repeated appeals to provide information about the remaining refugees in detention and prevent them being forcibly returned.

Amongst those who were returned and detained are reported to be alleged members of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), which is fighting the Ethiopian security forces in the Oromia Region. Several thousand members of the Oromo ethnic group have been arbitrarily detained and tortured in Ethiopia in recent years.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Hundreds of Ethiopian and Eritrean nationals were arrested in Sudan in early July 2007. Many of those detained were asylum-seekers or recognized refugees. Some were held in Omdurman prison in Khartoum, but the whereabouts of most is not known. Some were taken to court in Khartoum, charged with illegal entry and summarily sentenced to imprisonment or immediate deportation as "illegal migrants".

Sudan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU – now the African Union) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, all of which oblige the authorities not to forcibly return any person to a country where they risk torture or other serious human rights violations.

The Sudan government has recently improved political relations with both the Ethiopian and the Eritrean governments. The recent detentions of Ethiopians came immediately after the Ethiopian foreign minister visited Sudan in June 2007. Many of the detainees have been living in Sudan as refugees since the late 1970s, and others are opponents of the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, who have been arriving in Sudan since the 1990s to seek asylum.

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

- expressing deep concern that 15 Ethiopian refugees were forcibly returned to Ethiopia on 27 September in clear breach of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees;

- calling on the authorities not to return the Ethiopian refugees and asylum-seekers now in custody to Ethiopia;
- reminding the authorities that they are obliged under the ICCPR, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol and the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa not to forcibly return anyone to any country where they would be at risk of torture or other serious human rights abuses;
- urging the authorities to ensure that all Ethiopian refugees detained in Sudan are treated humanely, provided with adequate medical treatment, allowed to challenge the lawfulness of their detention before a judicial authority and given immediate access to the UNHCR.

APPEALS TO:

Head of State

Field Marshal Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir
Office of the President, People's Palace, PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan

Fax: +249 183 782541

Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Interior

Professor Al-Zubair Bashir Taha
Ministry of Interior, PO Box 281, Khartoum, Sudan

Fax: +249 183 774 339 (Mark "FAO Minister of Interior")

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Sudan Commission for Refugees (SCOR)

Office of the Commissioner for Refugees, PO Box 1929, Khartoum 780201, Sudan

Fax: +249 183 780 622

Salutation: Dear Commissioner

Dr Abdel Moneim Osman Taha
Rapporteur, Advisory Council for Human Rights
Khartoum, Sudan

Email: human_rights_sudan@hotmail.com

Salutation: Dear Sir

and to diplomatic representatives of Sudan accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 11 December 2007.