



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SMNE Press Release on Recent Arrests in Ethiopia

April 27, 2009

The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, (SMNE), a grassroots, non-political movement of diverse Ethiopians working for human rights, freedom, justice, equality and peace in Ethiopia, calls on the International Red Cross, Amnesty International and concerned members of human rights organizations to urgent action on behalf of 35 new prisoners, arrested on April 25, 2009 in Ethiopia for their alleged involvement in a plot to overthrow the Ethiopian government of Meles Zenawi.

Those arrested in relationship to the suspected coup plot are said to be working in partnership with the Ginbot-7 Movement for Justice and Democracy, a political opposition group led by Berhana Nega and Andargachew Tsige, both currently living in exile outside of the country. Among those arrested include family members of Ginbot-7 leaders, including the 80-year-old father of Andargachew Tsige, (known to be diabetic and to be recovering from recent heart bypass surgery) and at least one member from Nega's family, who were reportedly taken to Maekelawi Prison.

EPRDF government reports allege that weapons, land mines and copies of plans were uncovered, leading to the arrests of the 35, but are not specific about who was arrested and where the weapons were found. Official reports do indicate that the leader of the foiled coup was General Teffera Mammo, an organizational leader for the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) opposition group whose widely supported and popular leader, Birtukan Mideksa, is serving a life sentence.

We in the SMNE are very concerned about the well being of these people, particularly the elderly father of Andargachew Tsige, Mr. Tsige Habtemariam, due to his medical condition. It is not established as to whether there is any legitimate basis to these charges and subsequent arrests, but there is concern for these individuals because the EPRDF is a government known for its widespread use of beatings, torture, detention and imprisonment to repress any political opposition.

Recently, Genocide Watch president, Dr. Gregory Stanton, called on the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights to open an investigation in the country due to a documented pattern of committing massive atrocities—including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes—with impunity.

Call to the International Red Cross:

According to international human rights law, the International Red Cross is given the legal authority to evaluate the conditions of those imprisoned to ensure that necessary medical treatment is given and that conditions of imprisonment are humane.

We in the SMNE are aware that your efforts in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia were severely restricted by this government in violation of international law after your organization objected to human rights abuses and to government barriers erected that obstructed free access to those in greatest need.

We anticipate that genuine access to these individuals may again be denied, but urge you and donor countries to once again take a strong stance in this case. This is a government who is enthusiastically entertaining Omar al-Bashir in defiance to the International Criminal Court's recent issuance of an arrest warrant linking him to millions of deaths of Sudanese civilians.

Call to Amnesty International and other human rights organizations:

The SMNE calls on Amnesty International, other human rights organizations and donor countries to intervene on behalf of those arrested in order to exert pressure on the Meles regime to give these people their full rights of due process and if there is no evidence linking them to the allegations, to release them immediately.

The people of Ethiopia have overwhelming evidence that the Ethiopian judicial system is corrupted and politically manipulated by the Meles government, making it highly unlikely that those imprisoned will be given their right of habeas corpus. In the case of at least some of those named in these recent arrests, it appears that they are people only "guilty" by association.

Another concern would be to examine the conditions of other political prisoners of conscience in Ethiopia such as Ms. Lalise Wodojo, Mr. Bashir Makhtal, a Canadian citizen who has been held without trial for the last two years in Ethiopia and Ms. Birtukan Mideksa who has been held in solitary confinement for the last four months and has not been allowed any visitors except for her mother and her young child. Many Ethiopians are very concerned with her welfare.

Call to investigate shooting and detention of Muslim students

We also call on the International Red Cross and Amnesty International to examine the condition of Muslim students who were recently beaten, some seriously, by the police on April 24, 2009 in Addis Ababa while peacefully exercising their constitutional rights. They were protesting the expelling of two Muslim students from Dessie University for following their Islamic dress code and for other incidents of abuse and discrimination.

During the protest, security forces fired automatic rifles, shooting two students whose condition is unknown. They beat many unarmed students with police bats and took an unknown number of students into custody. A young pregnant woman reportedly was seriously injured and remains in critical condition. Most of those detained were released, but 100 students are still being detained in an unknown location and in unknown condition.

This is an issue that the SMNE is very concerned about and the lack of resolution has contributed to the deterioration of relationships between Christians and Muslims in the country, something that has never been common before. The previous religious communities used to interact and live in harmony with each other, often intermarrying, but lately, it has become a problem that the government has failed to address except with brutality, as this incident demonstrates.

We in the SMNE are seriously concerned about those students being detained and call on the International Red Cross to investigate the situation and their condition. We fear that some could be seriously injured. We also call on the Ethiopian government to protect the well being of all Ethiopian citizens and to release these young people who broke no laws.

Warning of newly drafted Anti-Terrorism Proclamation bill:

A new anti-terrorism law is in the makings and could unleash new justification for the exercising of harsh and sweeping penalties for dissent or insurgency efforts, even when those insurgents are reacting to aggressions by the EPRDF regime. The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia recently received a copy of a draft of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia's (FDRE) "Anti-Terrorism Proclamation" from a source not wanting to be identified.

This law, if passed, threatens violators with penalties of death or up to 15 years in prison for terroristic acts, which in itself, may not seem to be out of line for extreme and actual cases; however, there are many vague areas in this law that could easily be manipulated to repress, intimidate and eliminate opponents. In addition this law would give unbridled power to the government to shut down organizations and seize property due to the lack of an independent judiciary.

Violations could start as minor infractions, which could then be inflated into serious ones. Ill-defined laws could be tailored to justify what are actually politically-motivated charges and the innocent could be targeted with trumped up charges while government-supported perpetrators went free. For more information, please see the draft law in its entirety ([Anti-terrorism Law](#)) or see the SMNE article where this law is discussed at: www.solidaritymovement.org

Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia willing to assist:

The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia is an organization that is grounded on the principles, "humanity before ethnicity" and that "no one is free until all are free." Based on these beliefs, we endeavor to advocate for the rights of all members of Ethiopian society regardless of ethnicity, political view, religion, gender, class, regional background or any other distinctive.

Our vision is to bring about a more reconciled Ethiopia where robust freedoms, the rule of law, respect for human rights, equal opportunity and good governance undergird a societal structure conducive to the enhancement of life and well-being for all its citizens.

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This Press Release has been cc to:

Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton
Senator Kerry, John F. Chairman of Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Lugar, Richard G. Ranking Member of Committee on Foreign Relations
Senator Feingold, Russell D, Chairman of Subcommittee on African Affairs
Congressman Donald M. Payne, Chairman of Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health
EU Committee on Foreign Affairs
EU Subcommittee on Human Rights
Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs
UK Minister of Foreign Affairs
UN High Commissioner of Human Rights
Amnesty International
Human Rights Watch