

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 64/006/2007

30 May 2007

Further information on UA 121/07, (AFR 64/005/2007, 23 May 2007) - Prisoner of conscience/detention without trial/incommunicado detention/medical concern New concern: Fear for safety

ERITREA Abune Antonios (m), aged 79, Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church

Abune Antonios, the 79-year-old Patriarch, or Head, of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, was reportedly taken into custody by security forces personnel at 5am on 28 May. He had been under house arrest since January 2006. His whereabouts are unknown and there are grave concerns for his safety.

The removal of Abune Antonios from his house followed the government's announcement on 27 May that they have appointed a new Patriarch. This is in spite of rules set out by the Orthodox Church, which reportedly forbid the appointment of a new Patriarch while the previous one is still alive, unless official church councils find him guilty of committing flagrant sin or heresy.

Amnesty International considers Abune Antonios to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful expression of his right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion. Both these rights are guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution. There is no further news on the medical condition of Abune Antonios. According to unconfirmed reports, he has not been receiving adequate medical attention for his diabetes. His life may be in danger if he does not receive the treatment that he requires.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Approximately 2,000 members of minority evangelical churches which have been outlawed since 2002, including pastors, and dozens of Orthodox Christians and Muslims, are currently detained incommunicado in harsh conditions without charge or trial. They are often held at army camps in various parts of the country, including the country's main military training centre at Sawa. Some are reported to be held in metal shipping containers or underground prisons. Several detainees have become seriously ill and are rarely provided with adequate medical treatment. Amnesty International has received reports that some detainees have been repeatedly beaten and tied up in painful positions in order to force them to renounce their faith.

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

- urging the authorities to immediately clarify the whereabouts of Abune Antonios;
- calling for Abune Antonios to be released immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience, detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression and freedom of religion, both of which are guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution;
- calling on the authorities immediately to allow Abune Antonios the medical attention he requires for his diabetes;
- asking the authorities to ensure that Abune Antonios is given immediate access to his family, colleagues and to a lawyer;
- expressing concern that he has been arbitrarily detained without access to legal redress, contrary to human rights provisions in the Eritrean Constitution and laws, which require that people are brought before a court within 48 hours of their arrest.

APPEALS TO:

President

His Excellency President Issayas Afewerki
Office of the President
P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea

Fax: + 2911 123 788 (via Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
Salutation: Your Excellency

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: +2911 126 422
Salutation: Dear Minister

Commissioner of Police
Ministry of Internal Affairs
P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea
Salutation: Dear Commissioner

COPIES TO:

Mr Semere Beyene
Director, Department of Religious Affairs
Ministry of Local Government
P O Box 225, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: +2911 120 014

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 11 July 2007.