

URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE NEEDS URGENT TREATMENT

Ethiopian prisoner of conscience Bekele Gerba has been denied access to specialised medical treatment that he urgently needs. He has high blood pressure which is affecting his sight, leaving his left eye operating at 25% capacity. He was sentenced to a year in prison after being held in contempt of court twice.

In late January, **Bekele Gerba**, an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience and the Deputy Chairman for the Oromo Federalist Congress, was taken for eye treatment at Menelik Hospital in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. According to his daughter, the doctors at the government hospital told Bekele and his family that they did not have the necessary equipment to treat his eye ailment. They referred him to a private hospital in Addis Ababa that is equipped to help him, however prison authorities at Menelik Hospital told his family that they would not permit him to be treated anywhere other than in a government hospital.

According to his family, his retinal blood vessels are severely damaged due to high blood pressure he has developed due to the stress he has been under while in detention. His left eye is currently operating at 25% capacity. Bekele has had a consistent blood pressure reading of 190/110 over the past few weeks meaning he is experiencing hypertensive crisis and urgently needs medical treatment. Ideally his blood pressure should be less than 120/80.

On 5 February, Bekele and three others were in court which was due to pronounce its verdict on their arrests for terrorism and criminal charges in November and December 2015. Bekele and the others refused to stand up and confirm their presence when called by the judges, choosing to raise both arms instead. They explained to the court that standing and speaking to the judges was the reason they had been held in contempt of court in January 2018. By refusing to stand, Bekele Gerba, Gurmessa Ayano, Dejene Tafa and Addisu Bulala were once again found to be in contempt of court. They are now serving out two contempt of court sentences of six months each- totalling to a year in detention. Amnesty International considers the actions of Bekele Gerba and the three other prisoners that led to the charges of contempt of court, as protected by the right to freedom of expression. Bekele Gerba is a prisoner of conscience as he is being detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his human rights.

Please write immediately in English or Amharic urging the authorities to:

- Immediately grant Bekele Gerba permission to seek necessary, specialised medical treatment, such that his blood pressure is brought back into a safe range and his eyes are treated;
- Release Bekele Gerba immediately and unconditionally, as he is a prisoner of conscience detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression; and
- Refrain from using 'contempt of court' to silence and prevent Bekele Gerba and others from exercising their human rights.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 23 MARCH 2018 TO:

Federal Attorney General

Getachew Ambaye

Jomo Kenyatta St.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

P.O. Box 1370

Email: justabr@ethionet.et

Salutation: Your Excellency

Director of Federal Prison Administration

Desalegn Regassa

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Email: prisonadmin@ethionet.et

Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HIS EXCELLENCY DR HAILEMICHAEL ABERRA AFEWORK, Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 17 Princes Gate SW7 1PZ, 020 7589 7212, Fax 020 7584 7054, info@ethioembassy.org.uk, www.ethioembassy.org.uk, Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE NEEDS URGENT TREATMENT

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bekele Gerba's political career began in 2009 when he joined the opposition party, Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM). He participated and lost in the 2010 parliamentary elections, in which the ruling party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front claimed over 99% of the seats in parliament. Bekele Gerba is the deputy chairman of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), an opposition political party that represents one of the country's largest ethnic groups in Ethiopia, the Oromo.

Bekele Gerba was first arrested on 27 August 2011, after having a meeting in Addis Ababa with representatives of Amnesty International, who were expelled from the country soon after. He was charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) for being a member of the banned opposition group, the Oromo Liberation Front, and sentenced to three years and four months in prison. He was released in April 2015, just in time to run for office in Ethiopia's election as a member of the now Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) (previously OFDM) in May 2015.

On 24 December 2015, Bekele Gerba was arrested for the second time by 14 armed Federal Police at his home in Adama, Ethiopia. The police took him away while two other intelligence officials led a search of his house without a warrant or stating why they were conducting the search.

Three months later, on 18 March 2016, Bekele Gerba was brought before xyz court after being held in incommunicado detention. Pursuant to Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, the court decided to delay his hearing for an additional 28 days until 15 April 2016. After further procedural delays, Bekele Gerba, together with others, was formally charged under Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Proclamation for "mobilizing protest against the government" on 22 April 2016. At the time of his arrest in December 2015, protests in Oromia against the Addis Ababa Master plan (a plan to expand Ethiopia's capital into the Oromia region) were growing. Bekele Gerba has been very vocal about issues affecting the Oromo community including the government's plans to expand Ethiopia's capital into Oromia region. Amnesty International is concerned that he was charged under the terrorism law due to his critique of the government and his support for protestors fighting for the rights of the Oromo community.

Bekele was first held in contempt of court this past January for protesting the court's decision not to call high level government officials as defense witnesses. He is currently awaiting his verdict on criminal charges, which has been postponed to 7 March 2018.

UA: 27/18 Index: AFR 25/7844/2018 Issue Date: 9 February 2018