

22 August 2025

Berhane G. Solomon

Chargé d’Affaires

Embassy of the State of Eritrea in the USA

1708 New Hampshire Ave NW, Washington, DC 20009

Re: Unconditional release of prisoners of conscience

Your Excellency Berhane G. Solomon,

The Eritrean Constitution of 1997 states that “no person may be discriminated against on account of...religion”. It upholds the international standard that proscribes the use of torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment, slavery, forced labour and servitude. Article 17 prohibits arrest and detention without due process, stating that individuals should be informed of the grounds for their arrest or detention, be brought before a court within 48 hours of their arrest, or as soon as possible thereafter, and should not be held beyond this period without authorisation from a court. The Constitution also stresses the presumption of innocence and that anyone charged with an offence ‘is entitled to a fair, speedy and public’ court hearing, and should not be punished until found guilty by a court.

Although ratified in May 1997, this commendable Constitution is yet to be fully implemented. Nevertheless, Eritrea is also party to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which prohibit arbitrary arrest or detention, and emphasise the right to a fair trial within a reasonable time.

Despite these assurances, six Eritrean Christian leaders are marking their 21st year, and a seventh his 20th year, in arbitrary detention in 2025. They have been held without charge, denied both due process and a fair, speedy and public hearing. Furthermore, the conditions of their imprisonment violate the protections afforded to them both under the Constitution and the international obligations Eritrea has pledged to uphold.

The names of those who deserve protection, not imprisonment:

Rev. Haile Naizge (detained since May 2004)

Dr. Kuflu Gebremeskel (detained since May 2004)

Rev Million Gebreselassie (detained since June 2004)

Dr Futsum Gebrenegus (detained since November 2004)

Rev Dr Tekleab Menghisteab (detained since November 2004)

Rev. Gebremedhin Gebregiorgis (detained since November 2004)

Rev Pastor Kidane Weldou (detained since March 2005)

These are sons, husbands, fathers and men of good character. Unfortunately, they are representative of many more men, women and even children held in violation of both their constitutional and internationally recognised rights.

We therefore call on your government to release these men and every prisoner of conscience unconditionally, beginning with those detained for excessive periods without charge, trial, or access to their families or legal representatives.

We appeal for your government to reverse the decision to proscribe legitimate religious traditions on the basis of inequitable registration legislation and, instead, to fulfil the right to freedom of religion or belief for all faith communities, in accordance with Eritrea's obligations under Article 18 of the ICCPR, and Article 8 of the African Charter.

We also urge you to implement the 1997 Constitution fully, facilitate all rights enshrined within it, and bring all decrees, legislation, policies and practices into compliance with international standards and Eritrea's regional and international legal obligations.

Thank you for your urgent attention to this critical matter.

Yours sincerely,

Voices4Justice

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