



Advocacy for Ethiopia

For Immediate Release

January 4, 2010

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Release Birtukan Mideksa and All Political Prisoners!

In recognition of the first anniversary of Judge Birtukan Mideksa's unlawful imprisonment, **Advocacy for Ethiopia** (AFE) calls for the unconditional release of Ethiopia's prisoner of conscience, and the first female political party leader in Ethiopia's long history, Judge Birtukan Mideksa. Judge Birtukan Mideksa was condemned to life imprisonment by Ethiopia's dictatorial regime on December 29, 2008 for exercising her right to free speech. Judge Birtukan has been kept in solitary confinement for over six months. She has been denied visitation with her lawyer, media or human rights observers. She also has no access to books, newspapers, and radio. Judge Birtukan is only allowed visits by her 70 year old mother and 5 year old daughter twice a week for 30 minutes at each visit. Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International have designated Ms. Mideksa as a prisoner of conscience and at risk of torture.

This is not the first time that Judge Birtukan Mideksa has been arrested unlawfully. Judge Birtukan was previously arrested in November 2005 after the Coalition for Unity and Democracy party, of which she was a vice chairwoman, disputed the results of local and parliamentary elections. The ruling party subsequently charged the Judge and her associates with treason. Birtukan Mideksa and her associates were unlawfully convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. After serving more than 18 months in prison, Birtukan Mideksa and her fellow political prisoners were released in June, 2007. Intense pressure from Ethiopians abroad and negotiations by Western countries and local elders with the ruling regime contributed to her release.

Barely six months later, on December 29, 2008, the ruling regime revoked the negotiated pardon and re-imposed the life sentence claiming the Judge violated the terms of the negotiated pardon by discussing her pardon and the process that led to her release.

Advocacy for Ethiopia strongly condemns Judge Birtukan Mideksa's unjust and illegal imprisonment and calls for her unconditional release. Believing that an environment devoid of political prisoners is one of the preconditions for free and fair elections in Ethiopia, **Advocacy for Ethiopia** also calls for the immediate release of all political prisoners prior to the national 2010 elections. We urge all organizations that support respect for human rights, the true principles of democracy, and the rule of law to call for the immediate release of Judge Birtukan and all political prisoners in Ethiopia.

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