



EMAIL ALERT
for prayer & action

APRIL 2006

Haile Naizgi

Dr Kiflu Gebremeskel

Country: Eritrea

Approximately 150 Full Gospel house churches were effectively closed by government decree at a meeting with a government official on May 15, 2003. At that time the church groups were given an application form for government registration. The form was duly completed and returned to the appropriate offices, but no reply was ever received. In an escalation of events, two key leaders of the Full Gospel (Mullu Wongel) Church, one of Eritrea's largest Pentecostal denominations, were arrested at 6am at their homes in Asmara on Sunday 23rd May 2004. During the arrests, police officials confiscated the keys to the pastors' church offices and verbally threatened the men's wives.

Haile Naizgi, who served as chairman of the Full Gospel Church and Dr. Kiflu Gebremeskel, as chairman of the Eritrean Evangelical Alliance, were initially held in Asmara's 1st and 6th police stations respectively. Neither were allowed access to their families or other visitors. Both pastors are in their 40's, married and with four children.

Naizgi previously worked as an accountant for World Vision. Dr Kiflu Gebremeskel, a member of the executive committee to the Full Gospel Church of Eritrea, was a mathematics lecturer, department and faculty head at the University of Asmara until 1999, when he became a full-time pastor at the Southwest Full Gospel Church. He has a PhD in mathematics from Chicago University.

The arrests took place within a week of the arrest of another key Eritrean Christian leader Pastor Tesfatsion Hagos from the Rema Evangelical Church. All three remain incarcerated in the

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Haile Naizgi



Dr Kiflu

notorious Karchele security Prison in Asmara. Karchele prison is a labyrinth of cells and rooms and houses a number of high profile political and military prisoners as well as Christians leaders and pastors. In a recent report, a former inmate said that in Karchele you can hear the screams throughout the night.

On one occasion as the families were attempting to contact the imprisoned pastors, word came from one of the three, saying, 'don't expect my release any time soon'. A recent Amnesty International report suggested that all three may have been sentenced extra-judicially to five years' imprisonment by a secret security committee.

PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ For God to intervene and for the release of all three pastors.
- ▶ For courage, safety and physical protection for each of the pastors together with approximately 1800 Christians currently imprisoned in Eritrea.
- ▶ For emotional, spiritual and physical strength.
- ▶ That they will soon be reunited with their families and loved ones.

'But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him'

Acts 12:5

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THE VOICE OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

The rule of law in Eritrea is severely undermined by the lack of an effective or independent judiciary. Lawyers do not dare to challenge the government in the courts. A secret security committee sentences some political and religious prisoners to prison terms without defence representation or appeal. Organisations who might potentially monitor human rights and press for remedies for human rights violations do not and cannot function inside Eritrea on account of the comprehensive denial of the right to freedom of expression of opinion. Human rights violations by members of the security forces are often committed with impunity.

Romans 12:14 'Bless those who persecute you' Christian greeting card action

The Eritrean authorities have not officially acknowledged the detention of these three pastors so it is not possible to send greeting cards directly to them. Instead, please send a Christian greeting card to General Sebhat Ephrem, the Eritrean Minister of Defence, wishing him God's blessing and asking him to pass on your greetings/ kind thoughts/ best wishes to those pastors and Christian prisoners currently detained in at least 12 different locations across the country. This will also ensure that the Eritrean authorities are aware of the international concern about the imprisonment of Christians in that nation. On the advice of our partners, it is inappropriate at this time to write to, or name, individuals when writing to the Eritrean authorities. In the past this has led to prisoners being relocated to a more isolated and a more difficult situation.

Please do not mention Release International, or advance your political opinion or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities. Please do not name individual prisoners.

Please send your greeting card to: General Sebhat Ephrem
Minister of Defence
Ministry of Defence
PO Box 629
Asmara
Eritrea

You may also write a short, polite letter to the Eritrean authorities in support of Prisoners of Faith. A sample letter is given below.

Dear [title],

I am deeply concerned for the nation of Eritrea at this time and in particular for the situation where up to 1800 Christians have been unjustly imprisoned. Where a prisoner is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion, which is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution, I request that they be released unconditionally.

In the interim, may I urge you to ensure that that all such prisoners are given access to their families, legal advice and any medical treatment required.

President
His Excellency Isaias Afewerki
President of the State of Eritrea
Office of the President
P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: + 2911 125123
Salutation: Your Excellency

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241
Asmara, Eritrea
Salutation: Dear Minister

Commissioner of Prisons
Brigadier General
Ghirmay Mehari
Department of Penitentiary Institutions
Ministry of Internal Affairs
PO Box 712
Asmara, Eritrea
Salutation: Dear Commissioner