



Ethiopia - Urgent Medical Alert Birtukan Mideksa

freebirtukan.org



Information we have obtained in the past few days regarding Birtukan's physical and mental health have concerned us in the extreme. Birtukan's situation has been steadily getting worse since she was released from solitary confinement, where she spent more than six months. However, the following recent events have heightened our concern.

1. Birtukan's mother, Mrs. Almaz Gebregziabher, visited Birtukan on Saturday March 20, 2010. During the visit, Birtukan asked Mrs. Gebregziabher to petition for medical care on her behalf since prison administrators have refused her request to see a physician. Mrs. Gebregziabher reported to us on Sunday March 21, 2010 that Birtukan was whisked out of the visitation room by security officers as soon as she made her plea for medical care.

2. Birtukan's sister has now been permanently banned from visiting Birtukan. We believe that this was a deliberate action by the government to prevent any leakage of information. We understand that Birtukan's sister is better able to communicate with Birtukan than the only other person who is allowed to visit her; the ailing 76 year old mother, Mrs. Gebregziabher.

3. The government controlled media seems to be engaged in a preemptive propaganda aimed at talking-up Birtukan's health in prison. The Prime minister himself responded to a pre-arranged question that singled out Birtukan's health above all other political questions surrounding her imprisonment.

4. The 2009 report on Human Rights in Ethiopia by the US state department, released March 11, 2010 warned that "There were credible reports that Birtukan's mental health deteriorated significantly during the year." [Click here to read the full report.](#)

Therefore, we strongly believe that Birtukan Mideksa is in need of urgent medical care and that she continues to be at a high risk of abuse by the authorities. The Ethiopian government has so far refused repeated requests for visits by medical professionals.

Urgent Action Items

Contact your elected officials and demand Birtukan Mideksa receive urgent medical care. [Click here to find your representatives.](#) The Free Birtukan organization will soon post campaign and lobby materials on this web site.

Call the Ethiopia office at the East African desk, US State Department and express your concern and demand action: 202-647-6473.

Planned Actions

The Free Birtukan and all Prisoners of Conscience in Ethiopia organization plans to take the following actions:

1. Petition the ICRC to immediately visit Birtukan Mideksa in prison.
2. Petition Amnesty International to elevate Birtukan's status to Priority.
3. Lobby the United States State Department to look in to this matter immediately.

We have been informed that the political party she leads, the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party, has taken the following steps:

1. The party's MPs have started a petition in parliament condemning the prisoner abuse and demanding Birtukan's immediate release.
2. The party leadership has requested an immediate and urgent meeting with the Development Assistant Group (DAG) on Birtukan's condition. The meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, March 24, 2010. DAG members are African Development Bank(AfDB), Austrian Development Cooperation, Belgium Development Cooperation, CIDA, Denmark Embassy, DFID, European Commission, Finland Embassy, French Embassy, German Embassy, GTZ-Ethiopia, IMF, Indian Embassy, Irish Aid, Italian Cooperation, Japan Embassy, JICA, KfW, Netherlands Embassy, Norwegian Embassy, SIDA, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation(AECID), UNDP, USAID and World Bank.
3. The party has initiated an appeal process to ask the courts to address the lack of enforcement of its prior ruling affirming Birtukan's visitation rights. The government has refused a court ruling that ordered it to respect Birtukan Mideksa's visitation rights.
4. The party is attempting to convene the council of elders that mediated the release of political prisoners, including Birtukan Mideksa, in the aftermath of the 2005 elections.