

June 15th, 2009

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA – The 32 defendants who are accused by Ethiopia's tribal junta of plotting to assassinate government officials appeared at the Lideta district court in Addis Ababa, the same kangaroo courtroom where Teddy Afro's sham trial was conducted.

General Asaminew Tsige, one of the accused, asked the judge why himself and four other people were held in solitary confinement in Kaliti.

He said that their human rights are being abused and asked the court to the measure. The judge said that it wasn't a court matter but rather an administration matter.

Also apart from five defendants all the 27 others don't have a legal representation. The court today agreed to have them represented by two lawyers, despite unwillingness from one of the three judges, and an aggressive opposition from the prosecution.

Once two of the three judge made the decision, 15 minutes were given for the lawyers to consult their clients.

Strangely enough, two cameras were rolling at the time close enough to record the voices of the defendants and their lawyers, clearly violating their privacy.

After less than five minutes of consultation between the lawyers and their clients, one police officer who was guarding the prisoners protested to the judges. He told the judges that there was no reason why the defendants needed to be allocated time to speak to the lawyers.

Surprised by the outburst from the officer, one of the judges told him off, telling him that it was the defendants' constitutional right, then adding: "if you don't allow this in court, what is it like in prison?"

The officer kept quiet, and the crowd cheered and clapped. To which the pro-government judge told off the crowd for showing its emotions. That is a kangaroo court in action.

The other interesting part in the hearing this morning is that the defense lawyer of Berhanu Nega's cousin Getu Worku asked for a private doctor to inspect her client. She added that the report would be kept as evidence.

Reuters managed to speak to several family members who said their loved ones were tortured. One of them had to be hospitalized after an injury to his penis due to the torture. Col. Biraa might have performed her specialty on him. She is a sadistic Woyanne intelligence officer whom Meles assigns to get any information out of suspected military officers.

The judges denied access to a private doctor, saying that the prison doctor should be enough.

The lawyer for Ato Tsige Habtemariam, the 80-year-old father of Ginbot 7 Secretary General, tried to get bail for his client. It was not denied, as the judges admitted that the health of the man and his age made it a special case, despite strong opposition from the prosecution. The prosecutor said that once freed Ato Tsige could be in touch with Ginbot 7 (his son in particular).

Next hearing is Friday, June 26.

Out of the 32 who appeared in court today, 14 are military military officer.

Also today, representatives from the Germany and American embassies were present at the hearing.

**Relatives say Ethiopia's regime tortured coup suspects
<<http://www.ethiopianreview.com/content/10082>>
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June 15th, 2009

By Barry Malone

Gen. Asaminew Tsige is one of the 46 suspects charged by Ethiopia's tribal junta

ADDIS ABABA (Reuters) - A group of men accused of plotting to topple Ethiopia's government were tortured in prison during lengthy interrogations, relatives said on Monday.

At a pre-trial hearing in Addis Ababa, a judge refused a request from a lawyer for one of the 32 men for a doctor chosen by the families to visit the detainees in prison to compile a report on any injuries.

The arrest of the group in the biggest such crackdown for several years has worried rights group, who say Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's government has become increasingly authoritarian and tough on any critics in the Horn of Africa nation.

Officials say the group planned bombs and assassinations.

At Monday's hearing, the judge said the group had access to a prison doctor, which was adequate. Some members of the group discussed with the judge how, with their meagre means, they should hire lawyers. A few threw waves and smiles at relatives.

After the hearing, three family members told Reuters suspects had spoken of mistreatment in jail.

"Some of them have been tortured and are injured," one relative, who asked not to be named, said outside court. "They have been interrogated for up to nineteen hours. One man with injuries to his penis had to be treated in hospital."

Lawyers said five of the group were being held in solitary confinement. The 32 accused were mainly former and current army personnel, including two generals.

"TERROR" ACCUSATIONS

A Government spokesman said the allegations were "baseless".

"They have the right to relate any indignities they allege they have suffered openly in court," Shimeles Kemal said. "If this had been the case, they would have, but they didn't."

The government has identified only two of the prisoners despite calls by rights groups to give all the names.

Another 14 people, some resident in the United States and Britain, have been charged in absentia.

The government says the accused, arrested more than a month ago, belonged to a "terror network" formed by Berhanu Nega, an opposition leader who teaches economics in the United States.

Berhanu denies the accusations.

Addis Ababa says the group had planned to kill senior government officials and blow up power and telecommunications facilities to provoke protesters who would then march on government buildings and attempt to topple the government.

Opposition parties have called the charges trumped-up.

Security forces killed about 200 protesters after elections in 2005 when the opposition disputed the government's victory. The next national election is due in 2010.

Berhanu was elected mayor of the capital Addis Ababa in the 2005 ballot, but was arrested and accused of orchestrating the street protests. He was pardoned and released in 2007.

His "May 15th" organisation was named after the date of the 2005 poll. He has made statements in the United States saying it wants to overthrow Meles' government.

The Ethiopian government says the plotters received money to buy weapons from Berhanu and other diaspora opposition members.

The accused will appear in court again on June 30th.

(Editing by Matthew Jones)