

Ethiopians on hunger strike in London



By Wondimu Mekonnen, 3 November 2009 – The Zenawi regime may have publicly exhibited its latest and additional trophy on television by parading Hailu Shawel as a loyal opposition but Ethiopians in London have decided to risk the freezing November cold by going out on hunger strike to remember the 2005 martyrs for freedom and democracy and those who are languishing in jail under trumped up charges. The demonstration was organised by **Network against Repression and Injustice in Ethiopia**. The network is made up of civic organisations (representatives of human rights, teachers and journalist associations), political organisations (mainly UDJP) and some concerned Ethiopians affiliated to no organisation.

While the hunger strikers and demonstrators were taking up their post at The Parliament Square, three representatives of the network (Ato Zelalem Tessema, Dr Ermias Alemu and this writer) went into the Parliament to meet **Ms. Nicole Piché, Coordinator of All Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group UK**. The three representatives of the network explained the purpose of the demonstration and the gross violation of human rights in Ethiopia.

The delegates explained how the 2005 election was stolen and the unelected regime stayed in power. It did so by gunning down hundreds of people, mass-arresting hundreds of thousands and detaining them for years in malaria-infested zones throughout the country and subjecting thousands to death as a result, shaving several inmates with one razor in a country where HIV is prevalent. and then culminating with outrageously imprisoning the leaders of CUD and unashamedly charging them with treason and genocide and going ahead with sentencing them to life imprisonment. Pointing to the reports of European Union and particularly the work of MEP Anna Gomez, the delegates explained to Ms Piché the whole saga of the last election and persecution that followed. The delegates also graphically demonstrated the persecution that has been taking place

daily against innocent Oromos, Amaras, Gurages and Somalis. They discussed about the **Terror Law** that is planned to terrorize with innocent citizens and also deliberate instigation of ethnic conflict.

Among the thousands of prisoners, the delegates raised the case of **Ms. Birtukan Midekssa, a leader of the main opposition party in Ethiopia (Unity for Democracy and Justice Party)** and former High Court Judge, who is currently detained in solitary confinement for 10 months and counting with no right to be visited by a legal representative or the Red Cross. Ms. Birtukan Midekssa, a single mother of a 4-year-old child has been physically and psychologically tortured to a breaking point. Amnesty International and other human rights organisations recognize Ms. Birtukan Midekssa prisoner of conscience.

Ever since Mr Meles Zenawi came to power his regime has been persecuting its citizens, killing thousands, imprisoning hundreds of thousands and forcing millions to exile, some of whom visibly reached Britain. Among the imprisoned people like Abera Yemane Ab, Tsegaye Gebremedhin, Aberash Berta, Sitotaw Hussien are just few to mention.

The delegates took turn and explained what was going on regarding the upcoming yet another fake election. The dictators in Addis have already made sure they win the election. They have detained most of the credible potential opposition candidates that could repeat the 2005 victory for the opposition. Members of UDJP, ONC, Oromo Federalist and SEPD are already rounded up and jailed throughout the country. The Electoral Board is handpicked and appointed to warrant victory for the regime. The justice system, the police force and the army has come under the direct control of the regime ready to be used avoid to avoid the May 2005 type of defeat.

The delegates further pointed out at research output on gross violation of human rights by credible international organisations, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and US State Department for Human Rights. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has been referred to the International Criminal Court of justice, for the genocide committed against the Anuaks in Gambella and there is a possibility that he might be indicted like that of Mr Beshir of Sudan. They also pointed out to the work of The International Crises Group and corroborated all their complaints filed against the regime in Addis Ababa.

Ms Piché, who listened attentively and took notes throughout the briefings, did at times ask for clarifications. She commented that **The All Party Parliamentary Group for Human Rights** had been aware of all the points the delegates raised and had raised these issues with the Government delegates whenever they visited the Parliament and with the Ethiopian Embassy in London. However, one weapon the Ethiopian government had at its disposal was complete denial of glaring facts. She promised to set arrange a meeting with **Rt Hon Anne Clwyd, Chairperson, Lord Avebury, and Rt Hon. Robert Walter,** Deputy Chairs and decide where to go from here.

After getting reassurance from the **Co-ordinator of All Party Parliamentary Group for Human Rights** on steps to be taken in the future to tackle the gross violation of human

rights in Ethiopia, the delegates left Westminster to join the demonstrators at Parliament Square.