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THOUSANDS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS STILL SUFFERING

The release of Danial Bekele and Netsanet Demissie after two years of illegal incarceration is a welcome news but the regime should not be allowed to cover up the grim fact that there are still more than 35,000 political prisoners being held without any due process of law.

Prison conditions in Ethiopia are worse than horrible. In small cells, prisoners are packed one on top of the other and the sick are dumped with others as the absence of proper medical care has become more glaring. Wardens routinely beat and mistreat the prisoners most of whom have never been brought before a court of law even though the judiciary is controlled by the ruling front. Holding pens and detention camps like Dedesa, Zwai and Bir Sheleko are complemented by secret prisons all over the country and overcrowded hell holes in the major towns. Rough estimates put the number of political prisoners at more than 35,000 while the regime has increased the number by an ongoing indiscriminate round up of youths in Tigray region itself. Latest report says that in Maichew alone some 6,000 youngsters are being held.

The Mele Zenawi regime denies it is holding "even one political prisoner" and alleges that all the detained are criminals. Detention without due process is routine and there dozens of Ethiopians that have been disappeared since 1991. Journalists like Berhanu Ijigu, trade unionists like Abebe Ainekulu, teachers like Demissie Tesfaye, EPRP leaders like Tsegaye Gebre Medhin and Yishak Debre Tsion, and many others are still unaccounted for. The regime has banned human rights bodies from visiting Ethiopia or getting access to the very many prisons and conflict areas where atrocities are becoming common. The violation of human rights by the State is presently undeniable despite the cover up attempted by the regime's lobbyists in the USA and Europe.

In Ethiopia, there are at least 35,000 political prisoners denied due processes of law. In the known and secret prisons, political prisoners are mistreated and subjected to torture and hard labor.

The call for the release of all political prisoners should be heard from all quarters.

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