



Ethiopian Diaspora Human Rights Advocacy Group

Open Letter of Appeal to Save the Life of Ato Lidetu Ayalew, a Political Prisoner in Ethiopia

November 17, 2020

Following years of tumultuous uprisings in different parts of the country against the government of the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), Ethiopians both inside and outside of the country enthusiastically welcomed Dr. Abiy Ahmed as the new Prime Minister almost three years ago. With PM Abiy Ahmed at the helm, Ethiopians very much hoped and expected that their human rights would be respected, peace and stability would be restored, and democracy would get a chance to flourish. The new PM's courageous steps in the first few months of his tenure showed promising and encouraging results which gave Ethiopians much hope for more freedom and a brighter future.

There is no question that transitioning from years of undemocratic and tyrannical rule to a democratic one could be quite challenging. Notwithstanding the enormity of possible challenges though, the sanctity of respect for basic human rights and human dignity, and the prevalence of the rule of law are prerequisites for any viable transition to a democratic order. Regrettably, we find very disturbing signs of the country's slide back to dictatorial rule where those basic and fundamental values are being trampled upon. And this has become increasingly evident specially in the last several months where the human and democratic rights of citizens are being violated. Victims of these unfortunate turn of events that violate citizens' human and political rights include prominent opposition political figures including Ato Lidetu Ayalew, a prominent political personality, Ato Eskindir Nega, a former political prisoner of conscience, an award winning journalist, a civil rights and human rights advocate and leader of a legally registered political organization, and many others.

As concerned Ethiopians about the current discouraging political developments in our country that are dampening the hopes of many, we are hereby appealing for the release from prison of Ato Lidetu Ayalew, a prominent politician, a former parliamentarian, an avowed proponent of peaceful struggle, a founding member and former leader, and currently a member of the Central Committee of the well-known democratic opposition Ethiopian Democratic Party (EDP).

Ato Lidetu is accused of unmeritorious charges for crimes his accusers could not produce any plausible evidence to prove their case. Ever since his arrest on July 24, 2020, Ato Lidetu has so far appeared 22 times before three different courts: 5 times before Bishoftu Woreda Court, 11 times before East Shewa

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High Court and 6 times before Oromia High Court. Unable to provide any credible incriminating evidence to prove their case before the courts, the prosecutors resorted to presenting new charges at every juncture just to keep him in detention. The court ordered his release on a 100,000.00 Birr bail. And Ato Lidetu posted his bail right after the first court order. Unfortunately, the court's orders were defiantly ignored by his jailers. Thus, in a blatant defiance and flagrant violation of all court orders and knowing too well that he has a life-threatening health issue, the government continues to illegally detain this political prisoner.

What makes Ato Lidetu's illegal detention so egregious and inhumane is the fact that he was detained just a couple of days before his flight to the US for a prescheduled medical appointment with his doctors. As evidenced by his medical doctor's affidavit attached herewith, Lidetu has a serious cardiovascular illness that threatens his life if he does not get the medical treatment he so desperately needs. His appointment was due few months back, and the court as well as his accusers are aware of that.

Ato Lidetu is not a flight risk who would fail to appear before any court as he is someone who has no intention of living outside of his country. Even after having been jailed several times by the previous government, and having travelled to the US and Europe on many occasions where he could have stayed away if he so desired, Lidetu never showed any inclination of staying away from his country. And the government knows that very well. We see no convincing reason whatsoever for keeping him in detention. Because of the state of the prison condition where he has been kept in detention, his doctors have notified the courts about Ato Lidetu's vulnerable disposition to Covid-19 infection, but to no avail.

Ato Lidetu's case is a stark reminder of what the previous government of PM Meles Zenawi did to another high-profile political figure. The vindictive Meles Zenawi kept a renowned Ethiopian Surgeon and the leader of an opposition political organization, the All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO), Professor Asrat Woldeyes, in prison for a very long time denying him medical treatment he so desperately needed only to finally let him travel to the US after it was too late to save his life. That left an indelible mark on the memories of many Ethiopians. The dreary similarity between the two cases is discernible.

It is our belief that Ato Lidetu is imprisoned not for committing any crime, but for exercising his constitutional right to freely express his political views. As a political figure very much concerned about his country, Lidetu is very well known for openly expressing his political views - through his writings, public speeches, and debates. Before his latest incarceration, Lidetu publicly offered his proposal to prevent the country's endangered reform from being derailed. And offering an alternative approach to solving the country's problems by peaceful means is not only his constitutional right, but also his obligation expected from any a political leader with any sense of responsibility. Detaining political leaders for publicly expressing a contrarian viewpoint and for presenting an alternative approach to solve the country's problems will have a chilling effect on all genuinely reform-minded and responsible political figures and their organizations. This may discourage honest dialogue among political leaders and negatively affect genuine political reform the country needs to pursue.

We appeal to the government of PM Abiy Ahmed to release Ato Lidetu Ayalew on humanitarian grounds without further delay and before his situation worsens, causing irreparable damage or worse.

Similarly, we appeal to all humanitarian organizations and concerned governments to urge PM Abiy to

get Ato Lidetu released from detention so that he could get medical treatment to save his life which is seriously at risk.

Any further delay to release Lidetu from detention would be a cruel death sentence on him. And that is nothing short of an abhorrent disregard for human life.

Thank you.

Ethiopian Diaspora Human Rights Advocacy Group (EDHRAG)

cc.

- H.E. W/ro. Sahle-Worq Zewdie, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. W/ro Meaza Ashenafi, President of the Federal Supreme Court of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Judge Birtukan Midekssa, Chairperson of the National Election Board of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Dr. Daniel Bekele, Commissioner, Ethiopian Human Rights Commission.
- H.E. Dr. Gedion Timothewos, Attorney General of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- H.E. Mr. Deprese Muchena, Director of Amnesty international Southern and Eastern Africa Regional Office, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- H.E. Deacon Yoseph Tafari, Chairperson of Ethiopian American Civic Council, Auroa, Colorado
- H.E. Obang Metho, Chairperson of Solidarity Movement for New Ethiopia, Washington DC
- Office of the United Nations, High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNOG-OHCHR; 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
- The Honorable H.E. Congresswoman Karen Bass, Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus & Chair of Africa Subcommittee, US Congress Foreign Affairs Committee
- The Honorable H.E. Congressman Eliot L. Engel, Chair, US Congress Foreign Affairs Committee
- The Honorable H.E. Senator James E. Risch, Chair, US Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- H.E. The Honorable Michael Pompeo, Secretary of State, U.S. State Department
- Amnesty International
- Human Rights Watch
- African Union Human Rights Department
- European Union Human Rights Department



October 15, 2020

Lidetu Ayalew Mihretu

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a patient of mine who has advanced coronary disease. He had stenting of a vessel on September 5, 2019 and has other coronary lesions that need to be addressed. It is critical that he comes to the United States to have another catheterization performed as soon as possible. He has unstable angina. This is potentially a life-threatening situation. Please contact me for any further information or copies of his records.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Lipsitt", written over the word "Sincerely".

Dr. Michale Lipsitt

Marc Unterman, MD, FACC FSCAI

Marcus Sims, MD, FACC, FSCAI

Michael Lipsitt, MD, FACC, RPVI

Edward Clermont, MD.

Demir Baykal, MD, FACC, FASE

David Casey, MD, PhD.

Cardiac catheterization study

Patient details

Name: Mihretu, Lidetu Ayalew	DOB: 1/7/1970
MRN: 8X101927047	Gender: Male

EASTSIDE MEDICAL CENTER
DEPARTMENT OF CARDIOVASCULAR SERVICES
1700 MEDICAL WAY, SNELLVILLE, GA 30078
(770) 979-0200

NAME: MIHRETU, LIDETU	DICTATED BY: Lipsitt, Michael A MD
ACCOUNT#: E05029702208	DOB: 01/07/70
UNIT#: E000794148	ADMISSION: 09/05/19
ATTEND PHYS: Lipsitt, Michael A MD	DISCHARGE: 09/06/19

CARDIAC CATHETERIZATION

Date of Operation: 09/05/2019

The patient had cardiac catheterization and coronary angiography reported elsewhere.

Following the above procedure, he was given 5000 units of heparin IV. We used an EBU 5-side hole guide to access the left coronary system and a 7-French sheath. A Whisper wire was placed distally in his circ system and a separate Whisper wire was placed across the stenosis and OM3 at its orifice. We did balloon dilatation with a 2.5 x 12 _____ balloon to a maximum of 8 atmospheres followed by the placement of a 3.0 x 12 drug-eluting stent expanded to 12 atmospheres. Followup angiography was performed.

FINDINGS:

Predilatation stenosis of greater than 75% reduced to less than 10% residual stenosis without complications. The patient will be treated overnight with a low dose nitroglycerin drip to prevent any vasospasm as long as his blood pressure tolerates this. We will consider a staged procedure of D1 after discussion. We may also repeat his stress test in the interim with a nuclear isotope in attempt to localize his ischemia.

Dictation ID / Confirmation #:4779108/403115
Authenticated by Michael A Lipsitt, MD On 09/19/2019 05:09:06 PM

D: 09/05/19 0907
T: 09/05/19 1007
RPT#:0905-0192

Electronically Signed by Michael A Lipsitt, MD on 09/19/19 at 1809

Cardiac catheterization study

Patient details

Name: Mihretu, Lidetu Ayalew	DOB: 1/7/1970
MRN: 8X101927047	Gender: Male

PT: MIHRETU, LIDETU

UNIT#: E000794148

ACCT#: E05029702208