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Three more Christians die inside military prisons: Toll now at 21

By Alex Murashko

The Christian Post (26.10.2011) / (09.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Three more Christians imprisoned for practicing their faith have died while inside military prison camps in western Eritrea, said officials from an international persecution watchdog group.

The number of believers in Christ now dying in the country while serving time in prison for their belief totals 21, said officials at Open Doors USA.

Terhase Gebremichel Andu, 28, and Ferewine Genzabu Kifly, 21, died as the result of starvation and untreated health problems, confidential sources inside Eritrea told Open Doors. Andu died on Oct. 16 and Kifly died one week later on Sunday.

Both were arrested during a prayer meeting in 2009 at a private home in Tesenai, according to Open Doors. They faced two years of physical torture and were denied medical care inside Adersete Military Camp.

Angesom Teklom Habtemichel, 26, who was imprisoned at Adi Nefase Military Camp in Asab, died at the end of August, officials with the ministry said. He suffered from severe malaria but was "denied medical treatment because of his written refusal to recant his Christian faith."

All who perished were buried outside the military camps, according to Open Doors.

"Eritrea is a small country that has a bulls-eye on the backs of evangelical Christians," Open Doors spokesperson Jerry Dykstra told The Christian Post. "President Afewerki denies that persecution takes place but the persecution of Christians, including keeping them in shipping boxes in the hot sun, has been well documented."

The government in Eritrea outlawed all religious activities outside of the Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, and Islamic faiths in 2002. Around half of Eritrea's population is from an ethnic Muslim background, according to Open Doors statistics.

The number of Christians living in Eritrea, which is located in the Horn of Africa, is estimated to be about 2.2 million. Most of the Christians belong to the Orthodox Church, and the total amount represents approximately half of the country's population.

Evangelical Christians, meanwhile, are struggling. Dykstra told CP, "Small evangelical churches have been closed and cannot be registered."

Church leaders say that there are around 1,500 believers in prisons specifically for their faith. Christians are arrested and released at different times in waves. Those not

suspected of being involved with leadership in the church are often released after signing some kind of agreement.

Church leaders in general are not allowed to leave the country and they feel isolated.

A large number of Christians are involved in obligatory military service and exercise their faith under severe restrictions. Large numbers of soldiers are being converted.

In general, it is risky for the churches to receive literature and other items.

Religious prisoners and their families/dependents are another burden on the already financially weak churches.

Dykstra is asking Christians to "pray for God's sustaining grace upon those suffering in military prison camps. Pray that they would remain strong in the faith."

"Pray for victims' families that they would experience God's grace and peace. Pray for God's intervention in His time in Eritrea," Dykstra asked in an email to CP. "Until He changes things, pray that the reaction of the Church in Eritrea would be an example and encouragement to the worldwide Body of Christ."

"That international pressure would bring an end to the government of President Isalas Afewerki's repressive policies," he concluded.

One of Jehovah's Witnesses dies while imprisoned

ASMARA (05.10.2011) / (09.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Misghina Gebretinsae, one of Jehovah's Witnesses imprisoned in Eritrea without any specific charges, died under mysterious circumstances during his detainment by Eritrean authorities. He was 62 years old.

Although Mr. Gebretinsae was buried on July 20, details of the exact cause of his death are sketchy. Reportedly, Mr. Gebretinsae was put in solitary confinement in a sheet metal container for a week sometime prior to his death. Local Witnesses were told that Mr. Gebretinsae "fell sick" in the Meitir prison camp, where he was detained, and was pronounced "dead on arrival" at the Gindae Hospital near Massawa. Later, Mr. Gebretinsae's body was brought to Halibet Hospital in Asmara and local Witnesses were contacted with the news of Misghina's death. He is survived by a son and three daughters.

Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea were only recently provided with this information on the death of Mr. Gebretinsae, who was known as a faithful Christian and family man. His family and fellow worshippers are grieving his loss. Mr. Gebretinsae was widely known as being trustworthy and dependable. Many local Witnesses viewed him as an asset to the congregation and to the community.

Jehovah's Witnesses around the world are deeply troubled that their law-abiding fellow worshippers in Eritrea are being arrested and imprisoned without being charged with a crime or being given a trial. Mr. Gebretinsae was one of many Witnesses, including women and children, who experienced especially harsh treatment by Eritrean authorities during a wave of systematic arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses from July 2008 through June 2009. The government has banned all minority religious groups in the country since 2002, but Witnesses in Eritrea appear to be a special target for mistreatment by the authorities. Three conscientious objectors among Jehovah's Witnesses in Eritrea have been imprisoned for more than 17 years, and two children—who were just 2 and 3 years

old at the time of their arrest in June 2009—are still imprisoned with their mothers. Imprisoned Witnesses have also been denied visitors, including their family members. As of April 5, 2011, there were 51 imprisoned Jehovah’s Witnesses in Eritrea, including Mr. Gebretinsae.

The death of Misghina Gebretinsae marks the first time one of Jehovah’s Witnesses has died while in the custody of Eritrean authorities.

Fifty-one imprisoned Jehovah’s Witnesses as of April 5, 2011
(Listed by Date of Imprisonment)

Name of Prisoner	Age	Gender	Prison	Date Imprisoned	Reason for Arrest
Paulos Eyassu	38	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
Isaac Mogos	35	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
Negede Teklemariam	37	male	Sawa Camp	September 24, 1994	Conscientious objection
Aron Abraha	37	male	Sawa Camp	May 9, 2001	Conscientious objection
Mussie Fessehaye	39	male	Sawa Camp	June 2003	Conscientious objection
Ambakom Tsegezab	35	male	Sawa Camp	February 2004	Conscientious objection
Bemnet Fessehaye	40	male	Sawa Camp	February 2005	Conscientious objection
Henok Ghebru	27	male	Sawa Camp	February 2005	Conscientious objection
Worede Kiros	54	male	Sawa Camp	May 4, 2005	Religious activity
Yonathan Yonas	25	male	Sawa	November 12,	Religious activity

			Camp	2005	
Kibreab Fessehaye	33	male	Sawa Camp	December 27, 2005	Conscientious objection
Bereket Abraha Oqbagabir	43	male	Sawa Camp	January 1, 2006	Conscientious objection
Yosief Fessehaye	22	male	Sawa Camp	2007	Conscientious objection
Amanuel Abraham		male	Sawa Camp	2007	Conscientious objection
Mogos Gebremeskel	65	male	Serejjeka	July 3, 2008	Unknown
Bereket Abraha	64	male	Meitir Camp	July 8, 2008	Unknown
Mesgina Gebretinsai	60	male	Meitir Camp	July 10, 2008	Unknown
Goitom Gebrekristos	75	male	Meitir Camp	July 11, 2008	Unknown
Ermias Ashgedom	21	male	Meitir Camp	July 11, 2008	Unknown
Habtemichael Mekonen	70	male	Meitir Camp	July 17, 2008	Unknown
Tareke Tesfamariam	60	male	Meitir Camp	August 4, 2008	Unknown
Tesfai Teklemariam	58	male	Meitir Camp	August 5, 2008	Unknown
Goitom Aradom	67	male	Meitir Camp	August 8, 2008	Unknown; father of Misghana Goitom Aradom

Habtemichael Tesfamariam	63	male	Meitir Camp	August 8, 2008	Unknown
Tewoldemedhin Habtezion	52	male	Meitir Camp	August 9, 2008	Unknown; husband of Liya Hidru and father of Yamin Tewoldemedhin
Ghebrehiwet Ghebremichael	67	male	Meitir Camp	August 22, 2008	Unknown
Yohannes Haile	68	male	Meitir Camp	September 18, 2008	Unknown
Teferi Beyene	70	male	Meitir Camp	September 23, 2008	Unknown, a publisher
Beyene Abraham	58	male	Meitir Camp	October 23, 2008	Unknown, publisher, formerly served as elder
Asfaha Haile	77	male	Meitir Camp	December 2, 2008	Unknown
Semere Negussega	74	male	Meitir Camp	December 22, 2008	Unknown
Muse Paulos	66	male	Meitir Camp	December 23, 2008	Unknown
Tsehay Leghesse	72	male	Meitir Camp	December 23, 2008	Unknown
Tsegezeab Tesfazghi	62	male	Meitir Camp	December 23, 2008	Unknown
Tsehay Tesfamariam	70	male	Meitir Camp	January 5, 2009	Unknown
Yoab Tecele	60	male	Meitir Camp	April 23, 2009	Rearrested
Yoel Tsegezab	35	male	Meitir Camp	August 26, 2008	Conscientious objection

Nehemiah Hagos	25	male	Meitir Camp	August 26, 2008	Conscientious objection
Samuel Ghirmay	29	male	Meitir Camp	March 2009	Conscientious objection
Teklu Gebrehiwot	36	male	Meitir	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting; MS
Isaias Afeworki	26	male	Meitir	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting; MS
Liya Hidru	37	female	4 th Police Station	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting; wife of Tewoldemedhin Habtezion; mother of Yamin Tewoldemedhin
Awet Andemariam	31	female	4 th Police Station	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting; wife of Natnael Ghebreyesus and mother of Yocabed Natnael Ghebreyesus
Milen	21	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
Faiza Seid	26	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
Merhawit Tadesse	21	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
Yodit Mekonnen	29	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
Misghana Goitom Aradom	19	female	Meitir Camp	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting; daughter of Goitom Aradom
Yamin Tewoldemedhin	5	male	4 th Police Station	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting
Yocabed Natnael Ghebreyesus	4	female	4 th Police Station	June 28, 2009	Religious meeting; daughter of Natnael Ghebreyesus and Awet Andemariam
Misghina Semereab		male	Adi-Abieto	Unknown	Unknown

Land & Eid: Lifting heavy hand of religious repression

Eritrea's persecution of believers turns gold into blood money

By Rev. Richard D. Land and Imam Talal Y. Eid

The Washington Times (18.03.2011) / HRWF (22.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - In the Horn of Africa, a minerals boom has begun and the tyrannical leadership of Eritrea, which regularly imprisons and tortures people on account of their religious faith, stands to reap a windfall of profits. Will the developed world - and the United States and Canada in particular - turn a blind eye to this repression in exchange for the modern-day equivalent of 30 pieces of silver?

Rich in base metals and gold, Eritrea has been granting licenses to foreign firms for exploration projects. The first of these projects, the Bisha mine, run by Canada's Nevsun Resources, Ltd., is about to become a major gold producer.

With the price of gold hovering near record highs, there is money to be made for Nevsun and other companies - blood money.

We visited with two of Eritrea's religious leaders. They are scared and beaten down. Extending an economic lifeline to Eritrea's government can only make matters worse, bolstering an atrocious regime that abuses its people, denying them their fundamental rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The regime has controlled Eritrea since 1993, when, after a 30-year war, its leaders secured Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia. For many Eritreans, independence was a dream that came true. For the next few years, under President Isaias Afwerki and the revolution's other leaders, Eritrea made positive strides, including the ratifying of a constitution in 1997 that upheld democracy and human rights.

That dream, however, soon became a nightmare. In 1998, war with Ethiopia suddenly resumed, exacting an enormous toll on Eritrea's people and economy. Elections were postponed and mass conscription instituted. Although the war ended in 2000, Eritrea's paranoid leaders moved to a permanent war footing. When others in the government called for change a year later, they were rounded up and detained and all independent media were shuttered.

Since 2001, human rights violations have escalated in every arena, from universal forced labor through middle age at near-starvation wages to the torture and killing of religious adherents and others deemed threats to the regime.

Eritrea recognizes just four religious communities: the Coptic Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, the Roman Catholic Church and a Lutheran-affiliated denomination. In contrast, all other religious groups must register with the government. While some have applied for registration, no applications have been approved. Every religious group outside of the four recognized communities is considered illegal.

The implications for the excluded groups and their members are chilling. Members have been arrested and detained without charge. While imprisoned, they have been beaten,

tortured, packed into crowded quarters and exposed to extreme temperature fluctuations. The regime has banned their public religious activities, disrupted their gatherings and closed their places of worship.

A number of groups, including Muslims and Coptic Orthodox, have suffered because of their objection to excessive state interference in their affairs. In May 2007, the government appointed a new patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Eritrea after deposing Patriarch Abune Antonios, who has been under house arrest since 2006 and is reportedly being denied access to a telephone and to medical attention.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians have received some of the worst treatment. Thousands have been imprisoned and many of them tortured in order to compel them to recant their faith. In one instance, 20 individuals, mostly Jehovah's Witnesses and some Pentecostals, were allegedly forced into a 20-foot container during their imprisonment. Because of their religious beliefs, including conscientious objection to military service, Jehovah's Witnesses had their citizenship revoked in 1994. They are barred from obtaining government work, business licenses and identity and travel documents.

Due to Eritrea's systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), on which we serve as commissioners, has been recommending since 2004 that it be designated a "country of particular concern," or CPC. Since that year, the State Department has followed our recommendation. In 2005, as part of this designation, the U.S. government did more than just "name and shame" - it denied the commercial export to Eritrea of defense articles and services covered by the U.S. Arms Export Act.

Given our concern that today's minerals boom may strengthen tyranny's grip on Eritrea, USCIRF has called on the U.S. government to prohibit any foreign company such as Nevsun from raising capital in the United States or listing its securities there until it ceases all engagement in developing the mineral resources or involving itself with the ventures of a world-class human rights abuser. Mindful of our good neighbors to the north and their commitment to human rights, we urge advocates in the Canadian government, legislature and civil society to join in this fight for religious freedom and related rights in Eritrea.

Let our message be clear: No partnering with Eritrea until it stops abusing religious freedom.

Rev. Richard D. Land and Imam Talal Y. Eid are commissioners for the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.
