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TUR/JS

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Intimidation and harassment of trade union leaders

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), representing 307 affiliated member organisations, with a total membership of 168 million workers in 154 countries and territories, I protest strongly against the government intimidation and harassment of trade union leaders and members of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA) headed by Gemoraw Kassa.

The ITUC has been alerted by Education International, the global federation of teachers, that three Ethiopian colleagues – Tilahun Ayalew, Meqcha Mengistu and Antenech Getnet – were arrested in December 2006 and detained without warrant. It is reported that Tilahun Ayalew and Antenech Getnet have been tortured while in detention by government security agents.

The three men are respected teachers and hold elected mandates within the Ethiopian Teachers' Association. Their membership to the ETA would seem to be their only offence.

In the context of the continued interference by the authorities in its trade union activities and the creation of a rival union with the same name, the ETA, supported by Education International, submitted a complaint to the International Labour Organisation on 11 September 2006. As the names of Tilahun Ayalew, Meqcha Mengistu and Antenech Getnet were mentioned in the complaint, Education International is concerned that the current situation may be a reaction, which would tend to show a pattern of systematic harassment of ETA elected officials.

The right to be a member of a union and participate in activities aimed at defending the interest of workers in national and international fora is a fundamental human right of all workers. Ethiopia is under an obligation to respect the fundamental right to organise, as it has ratified the ILO Convention 87 on the right to freedom of association.

The ITUC urges your Government to respect this obligation and refrain from any further act of interference in the activities of the ETA headed by Gemoraw Kassa. It also urges you to ensure that detained union activists be released immediately and until such time ensure that the detainees are not subjected to torture or any other ill treatment and that they have access to a lawyer and to medical treatment. The ITUC also urges you to immediately order an independent investigation into the serious allegations of torture.

Yours sincerely,

General Secretary