



Inter-Parliamentary Union **Human Rights**

COMMITTEE ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF PARLIAMENTARIANS

10 YEARS OF INCOMMUNICADO DETENTION: A call to action to help 11 former MPs in Eritrea

On 18 September 2001, exactly 10 years ago, 11 members of the Parliament of Eritrea were arrested and have since been held without any contact with the outside world and have never been brought before a judge. Their only mistake was to call for democratic reforms in their country. Among them are the country's vice-president and former foreign minister, Mahmoud Ahmed Sheriffo, two other former foreign ministers, Haile Woldemensae and Petros Solomon, and the former army chief, Ogbe Abraha.

The Eritrean authorities have consistently refused to heed any calls for their release. They have rejected a decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to this effect and have consistently refused to provide any information about their situation.

Last year, unofficial reports circulated that all but two of the former parliamentarians had died in detention, with the two surviving ones in poor health. In the absence of any information from the Eritrean authorities, however, it has not been possible to confirm or deny this information.

The IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians believes that the international community can and should do much more to help obtain from the Eritrean authorities official information about the fate of those MPs and, more importantly, to secure the release of those still in detention.

To mark the 10 years of intolerable incommunicado detention, and at the Committee's request, the IPU Secretary General has made a written appeal (<http://www.ipu.org/hr-e/eritrea120911.pdf>) to all IPU Member Parliaments, calling on them to take action in solidarity with the 11 former MPs, whose names are: Ogbe Abraha, Aster Fissehatsion, Berhane Gebregziabeher, Beraki Gebreselassie, Hamad Hamid Hamad, Saleh Kekiya, Germano Nati, Estifanos Seyoum, Mahmoud Ahmed Sheriffo, Petros Solomon and Haile Woldemensae.



Ms. Aster Fissehatsion is one of the 11 former MPs. She joined the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in 1974, becoming a political commissioner and representative of its women's association. After independence in 1991, she worked in government ministries in Asmara, and was elected to the central committee of the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice party. Like all central committee members, she automatically became a member of the First National Assembly in 1997. In May 2001, a group of 15 senior party officials (known as the G-15) published an open letter with proposals for what it called the "crisis of Eritrea", making "a call for correction, for peaceful and democratic dialogue, for strengthening and consolidation, for unity, for the rule of law and for justice, through peaceful and legal ways and means". On the night of 18 September 2001, 11 of the 15 signatories of the letter, including Ms. Aster Fissehatsion, were arrested. It is not clear whether she is still alive or not.