

PRISONERS OF faith

Mussie Ezaz Country: Eritrea

For countless prisoners of faith and their families in Eritrea, 2008 may well be another year of anguish, torture and, in some cases, death. In his New Year message to the nation, President Isaias Afewerki again ignored international calls to release or at least bring to trial the thousands of prisoners in jails throughout the country. Many have now been imprisoned, sometimes in dungeon-like cells or metal shipping containers, for over five years. The atrocious and wholly unsanitary conditions are unbearable, whether in the smouldering heat of the day or the freezing cold at night. Some may die as a result; others will certainly be left mentally and physically scarred for life as a result of their experience.

Evangelist Mussie Ezaz had worked with Youth for Christ for a number of years before developing his own ministry to young people as a leader in the Kale Hiwot Church. Married and with three children, Mussie Ezaz is a kind, generous and gifted evangelist who was first arrested in September 2007. Currently no one knows where he is being held or if he is alive.

When initially arrested, Mussie was taken to a small village prison staffed mainly by young soldiers. From here he managed to escape and attempted to flee the country. He then made his way to Asmara and sought the aid of some friends and fellow Christians.

In what was a terrifying situation, he phoned his family to say good bye and headed south, out of Asmara, towards the Ethiopian border. Having travelled around 100km he reached the town of Adi Kaih and again called his wife and family to let them know he was okay. It was here the authorities caught up with Mussie and after a brief struggle he was rearrested. He hasn't been heard of, or seen since. His family, including his wife and three children, remain extremely concerned. It is frightening to be separated and then to have your husband or father put into

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EMAIL ALERT
for prayer & action

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prison, but at this moment in time brother Mussie's family don't even have that to hold on to.

Following Mussie's arrest a number of other Christians were detained allegedly for having helped him. Two of those arrested in this regard are Pastor Oqbamichael Tekle-Haimanot and a local Christian businessman. We believe that around 37 Christians were arrested following Brothers Mussie's arrest and since then a number of others have also been detained.

PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ For news of brother Mussie and that God would preserve his life
- ▶ That his wife and children will experience God's grace, comfort, care and support
- ▶ That Eritrean Christians will be remain bold and bear faithful witness to the Lord Jesus Christ

'But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him'
Acts 12:5

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THE VOICE OF THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Hebrews 13:3 'Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering'

The Eritrean authorities have not officially acknowledged the arrest or detention of Mussie Ezaz, nor do we have any information as to his whereabouts, so it is not possible to send greeting cards or letters to him. Instead please continue sending letters to the Eritrean authorities. This will help ensure that the Eritrean Government is aware of the international concern about the imprisonment of Christians in that nation. On the advice of our partners, it is inappropriate at this time to write to, or to name, individuals when writing to the Eritrean authorities.

Please do not mention Release International, or advance your political opinion or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities. **Please do not name individual prisoners.**

A sample letter is given below.

Dear [title],

I am deeply concerned for the nation of Eritrea at this time and in particular for the situation where more than 2000 Christians have been unjustly imprisoned. Where a prisoner is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion, which is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution, I request that they be released unconditionally.

In the interim, may I urge you to ensure that that all such prisoners are given access to their families, legal advice and any medical treatment required.

Please send your letter to:

His Excellency Isaias Afewerki
President of the State of Eritrea
Office of the President
P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea
Fax: + 2911 125123
Salutation: Your Excellency

Ms Fawzia Hashim
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P O Box 241
Asmara, Eritrea
Salutation: Dear Minister

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