

PRISONERS OF faith

KIDANE WELDOU

ERITREA

Pastor Kidane Weldou was abducted and arrested from a city centre street in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, on March 18 2005. A senior Pastor of Muluwengel (full-gospel) church in Asmara, his arrest appears to have taken place in an area of the city near the cinema Roma. The car that he was using was found abandoned close by. According to RI sources, Weldou expected to be arrested for his faith.

In his mid-50s and married with four children, Kidane Weldu was neither charged nor allowed outside contact. He is being held incommunicado; while two other pastors from the same church are also being held without charges.

In all, 17 pastors are currently imprisoned in Eritrea. Some have now been in jail for over a year. Most imprisoned pastors are held in high security prisons where they experience regular interrogation. Few detained Christians have been allowed visits from their families. While the government has conducted revolving door releases of lay church members, so far none of the detained leadership has been released.

According to *Compass Direct*, the pastors of the banned Protestant churches were reportedly ordered not to inform anyone outside Eritrea of their problems. Some of those arrested are held in metal shipping containers. Sweltering in the daytime and cold at night, the containers have no sanitation. Infectious diseases and diarrhoea are common.

The Eritrean government began forcibly closing evangelical Protestant churches in 2002. They have not allowed any of the independent Protestant churches to register and reopen since, even though 12 have applied for this official registration. Along with Islam, there are only three Christian churches authorized to worship by the government. These are the Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran churches. However, Orthodox Christians have also been arrested. The government has

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EMAIL ALERT
for prayer & action

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also forbidden members from worshipping privately in their homes.

Dr Berhane Asmelash of UK-based advocacy group Release Eritrea says the sole legal political party ruling the country has grown wary of evangelical growth and, '*by persecuting believers and closing churches, the government is carrying out its long-standing anti-religious ambitions*'.

PLEASE PRAY

- ▶ That God will intervene in a mighty way in Eritrea
- ▶ That Pastor Kidane and his family will know an extraordinary peace and joy that comes from the Holy Spirit
- ▶ For the release of Pastor Kidane and other Christians being detained

'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

PLEASE WRITE IN SUPPORT OF PASTOR KIDANE

Please ask the Eritrean government to allow prisoners to receive visits from immediate family members, and to ensure that those who are elderly and/or infirm receive medical assistance as required and are not subjected to forced labour or to harsh conditions that put their lives at severe risk.

Article 19 of the Eritrean constitution allows for freedom of religion and assembly. Human rights organisations suggest noting this when writing to Eritrean officials. Politely expressing your deep concern about the harsh treatment of Christians, also point out that Article 17 of the Eritrean constitution stipulates the right to a fair and public trial and the presumption of innocence.

Please write a short, polite letter to the following asking for the release of Pastor Kidane. Please do not mention RI when you write. A sample letter is given below.

Dear [title],

I am deeply concerned for the safety of Pastor Kidane Weldou of the Muluwengel Church, who was arrested on March 18 in Asmara. I ask you to please ensure that he is not tortured or ill-treated in custody, and is given access to his family, lawyer and any medical attention he may require. I also request that he is released immediately and unconditionally, as he is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of religion, which is guaranteed in the Eritrean Constitution.

President

His Excellency President Issayas Afewerki

Office of the President

P O Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea

Fax: + 2911 126422

Salutation: Your Excellency

Ms Fawzia Hashim

Minister of Justice

Ministry of Justice

P O Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Brigadier Abraham Andom

Commissioner of Police

Ministry of Internal Affairs

P O Box 1223, Asmara, Eritrea

Mr Semere Beyene

Director, Department of Religious Affairs

Ministry of Local Government

P O Box 225, Asmara, Eritrea

and to diplomatic representatives of Eritrea accredited to your country.