

Ethiopia



Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No.87).
(Ethiopia ratified Convention No. 87 on 4 June 1963)

ETHIOPIAN LEGISLATION IMPOSES STRICT LIMITATIONS ON FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND THE RIGHT TO STRIKE, AND THE PROMISES MADE TO THE ILO BY THE GOVERNMENT TO CHANGE THIS STATE OF AFFAIRS HAVE NOT BEEN HONOURED. THE GOVERNMENT CONTROLS THE COUNTRY'S TRADE UNION ORGANISATIONS. THE REGIME STILL HAS THE ETHIOPIAN TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (ETA) FIRMLY IN ITS SIGHTS. THANKS TO INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CAMPAIGNS, IN PARTICULAR BY EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL (EI), ETA PRESIDENT TAYE WOLDESMIATE WAS RELEASED FROM PRISON IN MAY 2002. HE HAD BEEN IN JAIL SINCE 1996.

Key facts

- Ethiopian labour law only authorises the existence of a single trade union in companies employing at least 20 workers.
- The government has placed the Confederation of Ethiopian Trade Unions (CETU) under its control.
- Civil servants and teachers are deprived of their constitutional to union affiliation.
- The definition of what constitutes 'essential services' is so broad that it effectively precludes strikes in most sectors.
- The government is continuing to harass members of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association (ETA). Its President, Taye Woldesmiate, was jailed from 1996 to 2002, accused of terrorism. He was freed in May 2002 following campaigns by the international trade union movement.
- Two leading members of ETA and one activist have died in prison. Another leader, Assefa Maru, was killed by the police.
- At the time of writing, no independent enquiry into the killing of Assefa Maru had yet been held, despite an ILO request to this effect.
- In December 2001, two members of ETA's Executive Committee were arrested in Jinka where they were preparing a conference.



Special paragraph

In its report, adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2001, the Committee on the Application of Standards devoted a special paragraph to Ethiopia in relation with Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association and the Protection of the Right to Organise, 1948. That paragraph reads as follows:

The Committee noted the statement made by the Government representative and the discussions which took place thereafter. The Committee shared the serious concern of the Committee of Experts with regard to the trade union situation. The Committee was deeply concerned by the fact that no progress had been made in respect of the serious complaint pending before the Committee on Freedom of Association concerning government interference, in particular, with the functioning of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association and that its President had now been convicted, after three years of preventive detention, on charges of conspiracy against the State and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment. It recalled that the Committee of Experts had requested the Government to indicate that the precise provisions permitting teachers' associations to promote the occupational interests of their members and to provide information on the progress made in adopting legislation to ensure the right to organize for employees of the state administration. It also recalled the concern raised by the Committee of Experts about the cancellation of the registration of a trade union confederation, as well as broad restrictions placed on the right of workers' organizations to organize their activities in full freedom. The Committee regretted to note that apparently no progress had been made in this respect since the last time this case was before it. The Committee strongly urged the Government to take all the necessary steps as a matter of urgency to ensure that the right of

association was recognized for teachers to defend their occupational interests, that workers' organizations were able to elect their representatives and organize their administration and activities free from interference by the public authorities and that workers' organizations were not subject to administrative dissolution, in accordance with the requirements of the Convention. It urged the Government to respect fully the civil liberties essential for the implementation of the Convention. The Committee expressed the hope that the ILO Office in Addis Ababa could visit the detained trade unionists. While noting the statement of the Government representative concerning legislative changes under way, the Committee was obliged to note with concern that no progress had been made. The Committee made an urgent appeal to the Government to put an end to all violations to the Convention both in law and in practice. The Committee also requested the Government to provide any relevant draft legislation, as well as the court judgement concerning the appeal made by the President of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association. The Committee urged the Government to supply detailed and precise information on all the points raised in its report due this year on the concrete measures taken to ensure full conformity with the Convention, both in law and in practice. The Committee expressed the firm hope that it would be able to note concrete progress in this case next year.

Trade union demands

The situation in Ethiopia remains a serious concern of the ILO's Workers' Group, which is demanding:

- That the Ethiopian government immediately re-establish freedom of association in accordance with ILO Convention No. 87.
- That the government immediately take steps to bring its legislation and practices into line with the freedom of association and in so doing comply with the recommendations drawn up by the ILO's supervisory bodies, especially where the freedom of association for teachers is concerned; and that the government immediately stop interfering in the affairs of trade union organisations.
- That ILO constituents seize every opportunity to express the organisation's concern about the situation in Ethiopia in international forums and in particular vis-à-vis the various bodies of the Organisation of African Unity (African Union) so that measures can be planned to put pressure on the Ethiopian authorities.
- That trade union organisations throughout the world continue their campaign of solidarity with the Ethiopian trade unionists in their efforts to restore freedom of association in the country.



Taye Woldesmiat was released in May 2002

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