Brussels, 8 February 2008

URGENT ACTION APPEAL – ETHIOPIA

Dissolution of Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (EI member)

Dear colleagues,

EI’s member organisation in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Teachers’ Association (ETA) created in 1949 and headed by Gemoraw Kassa, has been dissolved by decision of the Ethiopia Supreme Court on 7 February 2008.

The Court upheld an earlier decision which ordered the EI member organisation to hand over property, other assets, and its name – in other words, its very identity and existence - to a rival union which was formed in 1993 by the government and also named ETA.

There is one legal option left to EI member ETA and that is to petition the Court of Cassation to ensure no procedural errors occurred. There is, however, little expectation that this technical process will improve the situation for EI member. It would thus appear to be the sad end of a long legal process, begun in 1993, and during which time several Federal High Court rulings in favour of EI member ETA were never implemented.

EI has previously noted, and found highly regrettable, that the Court decision was not based on a proper examination of the facts and appeared to be politically motivated. EI also deplores a clear violation of ILO Convention 87, ratified by Ethiopia in 1963, which states clearly that "Workers’ and employers’ organisations shall not be liable to be dissolved or suspended by administrative authority". A legitimate trade union exercising its fundamental right of freedom of association and representing its members cannot and should not be done away with, except by choice of the members themselves, which is patently not the case here.

This decision of the Court to dissolve the ETA follows years of harassment and intimidation of ETA and its members; the killing of the ETA Deputy General Secretary, Assefa Maru; the 6-year detention of ETA former President Taye Woldesmiat; the imprisonment of many ETA officials and the detention and torture of ETA activists and their families.

Dialogue is needed with the Government

Dialogue is more than ever needed with the Ethiopian authorities. For more than a year, EI has been requesting a meeting with the government to propose a long-term solution, such as the co-existence of two teacher organisations, but to no avail.

EI will redouble its efforts to achieve a meeting with government for this purpose and also to press for the government to extend proper trade union rights to teachers in the public sector. So far only teachers in the private sector are allowed to form trade unions (and they have not used that right) which is also in breach of ILO Convention 87.

EI will also seek to obtain guarantees from the Ethiopian authorities that if the ETA officials and activists form a new association, there will be no interference in the creation, registration and activities of the new teacher association.

EI calls on all members to write to the Minister of Justice of Ethiopia, the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and to approach their own governments to express those requests. You will find attached a model protest letter which can be used by your organisation to express your concern. More information about EI’s action can be found on the EI website (http://www.ei-ie.org)
What can you do?

As an EI member, your organisation adopted unanimously a resolution on Ethiopia at the World Congress of Education International in July 2007. This resolution "calls upon EI affiliates to make representations to their own governments to press the Ethiopian Government to cease all actions interfering in the internal affairs of the ETA and other unions".

As a national teacher association, you can therefore undertake the following actions:

1. **Protest to the Ethiopian authorities** > a model letter is attached. The letters should be addressed to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and to the Ethiopian embassy in your country and to the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations. A copy of your letter should also be forwarded to EI for our records.

   **Please send appeals to:**

   **Prime Minister**
   His Excellency Meles Zenawi
   PO Box 1031
   Addis Ababa
   Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
   Fax: +251 11 552020
   (the fax is often engaged, so also use surface mail and copy to the embassy)

   **Minister of Justice**
   Mr. Assefa Kesito
   PO Box 1370
   Addis Ababa
   Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
   Fax: + 251 11 5517775, + 251 11 5520874

   **Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations**
   Ambassador Fisseha Yimer
   56, rue Moillebeau
   P.O. Box 338
   1211 Geneva 19
   Switzerland
   Fax: + 41 22 919 7029

2. **Contact the ETA officials to express your solidarity** > the ETA may be without proper office soon, use therefore the personal email of Gemoraw Kassa or send solidarity messages to EI which will transmit safely to the colleagues in Ethiopia.

3. **Give visibility** to the situation of teachers in Ethiopia in your magazine, on your website, during meetings and via other appropriate means.

EI will of course keep you updated on all development. For additional information or to discuss possible action, contact the EI Human and Trade Union Rights Coordinator.

I thank you in advance for your support of our Ethiopian colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Fred van Leeuwen
General Secretary