

Three Generations of Prisoners in Ethiopia Today



Grandmother (74), Mother (35), and Daughter (4)
(Mrs Almaz G.E., Mrs Birtukan Mideksa, and Haale Mideksa)

By Negussay Ayele

Part I Contextual Profile On Re-imprisoned Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa of Ethiopia

Ethiopians who are in their 70's plus today have survived through four political tsunamis the country has undergone in the last six decades. These include the bestial but short-lived Mussolini/Fascist invasion of the country (1936-41); the resumption of semi-feudal imperial rule by Emperor Haile Sellassie (1941-1974); the popular mass revolution subsequently taken over by the military (Derg) (1974-1991). The fourth regime is the current tandem occupation of the country and the severing of Eritrea from Ethiopia by Isayass/ EPLF and the crony, the Tigrayan TPLF under Meles (1991-present). Among other things, the most tragic and defining characteristic in the transitions and tenures of the regimes—with the qualified exception of periods of the Haile Sellassie era—is the cyclical rampancy of violence, oppression, death and destruction visited upon the ever enduring Ethiopian people. There were also famines, environmental degradation as well as internal and interstate conflicts that further exacerbated the suffering of the people.

What emerges as an explanatory paradigm for analysis of political phenomena in Ethiopia in general revolves around what I call “***the culture of violence and the violence of culture***” that has permeated and defined Ethiopia’s political history, not just for the past seven decades but for centuries? The current tribalist regime has already used its monopoly of deadly force and absolute political hegemony to sever Eritrea and wantonly land lock Ethiopia. It continues to use brute force to massacre Ethiopians and obliterate Ethiopia *per se*. It is in the context of its words and, more importantly, its deeds that one can at least attempt to reckon with current events such as the regime’s capricious incarceration (again) of **Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa**, Chairperson of the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party of Ethiopia.

For virtually all of its history, political leadership or right to rule in Ethiopia has not been a matter of peoples choice or but of divine ordination. Hence, one of the several titles of Emperor Haile Sellassie was “Elect of God.” Such a political culture does not engender or encourage political participation by citizens be they males or even less so females—unless elected by God or by the Gun. Indeed some emperors reached the pinnacle of power by the gun and then coerced the clergy to confirm them as “elect” of God. Still, there were some female empresses as well by virtue of being

a king's daughter. Empress Zewditu Menelik at the turn of the twentieth Century was one such example.

The Modest Beginnings of Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa

Having come of age in a stifling political culture, the young, dynamic and charismatic Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa emerged into the political spotlight in the early period of the 21st Century. She was born in 1974 in Addis Ababa. On the material side of life, hers were low income parents but she said she was raised with so much rich love and care. She had a positive and friendly disposition towards all she encountered. She was superior at school and eventually joined Addis Ababa University. She recalls that she wanted to do public service and her shortlist was law or medicine. She then heard about a lady judge who had reached the level of Justice of the High Court of Ethiopia. That inspired young Birtukan to aspire to serve her people in the realm of law and justice. In 1989, shortly after her graduation, she was appointed judge and served with competence and equanimity—insofar as the system would allow—for the next six years, followed by law practice.

The Janus-faced devious regime of autocrat Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia operates with absolute armed power at home and duplicitous propaganda abroad. *It denies what it really is and does in the country while it projects what it is not to the rest of the world.* Under such circumstances a general “election” was slated for 2005 and a number of patriotic, democratic and dedicated Ethiopians formed parties and coalitions to peacefully contest in the “election”—even though they had serious doubts about the regime’s trustworthiness. They were, however, encouraged in this endeavor by European and American groups and election observers who promised to be rigorous in monitoring the voting and counting processes and holding the ruling regime and all concerned accountable. It was at this momentous occasion that Birtukan joined the democratic movement and she was selected to be Deputy Chair of the **Kinijit** (Coalition) Democratic Party of Ethiopia.

The Historic 2005 Elections

Next to the 1994 election in South Africa that transferred formal political power from the tribalist Apartheid regime to Nelson Mandela and his ANC, the May 2005 elections in Ethiopia was also historic on the African continent. Millions of Ethiopians converged in the streets and squares of Addis Ababa as they never had before in support of Kinijit’s bid to win the elections. The ruling TPLF tribal front also called “party” was drowned by millions of people supporting alternative democratic parties (often referred to as the “Opposition”). On election day hundreds of thousands thronged to voting stations throughout the country as never before. The regime could see that the democratic will of the people—when given a chance were not with the regime but with Kinijit and a few other alternative parties. So, immediately the ruthless regime set in motion its “security” thugs to rampage, kill, maim and otherwise disrupt the democratic process to nullify the results. But, at that moment, it could do very little to change the results in Addis Ababa, partly because there was a heavy concentration of international observers and monitors in the city and partly because ballot counting was done and results announced quickly before the regime could mess with it. As a result Kinijit won more than 80% of the seats to “parliament” and earned the leadership of the capital city. In fact, Kinijit had also **elected Dr. Berhanu Nega**, one of the rising stars of Kinijit to be Mayor of Addis Ababa.

In most of the country, the TPLF proxies were also trounced before all the hackneyed vote tampering actions were set in motion buttressed by the liberal use of the gun. In a BBC interview later the TPLF dictator, Meles Zenawi, had a slip of the tongue when he said “**we miscalculated...**” He was trying to rationalize the rash of killings and stealing or nullifying the phenomenal election victory by the peaceful and democratic challengers to perpetuate his despotic rule. In point of fact the “miscalculation” on the part of autocrat Prime Minister (pm) Meles and his TPLF cronies was its gamble of thinking it could control the outcome of the election just as they had done before without having their feet set to the fire by so much international exposure. In the event, European and

American observers made from strong to mild criticisms of the election process, but did not do anything consequential to restrain the regime from its binge of killing and incarcerating of hundreds of innocent Ethiopians and stealing the election. For what it is worth, Ms. Anna Gomez of the European Union stands out as practically the sole consistent and enduring voice of morality, integrity and courage on the matter--to this day.

From Winners to Prisoners

As if all that was not enough shame for the sinister Meles/TPLF occupation regime [for more on this, see my [Occupation of Ethiopia/Eritrea by Meles/Isayass](#) on Mediaethiopia.com], it arrested 131 top Ethiopian elected democratic party leaders, elder statesmen, activists, journalists, human rights advocates and academics and dumped them in Kaliti jail like common criminals on 7 November 2005. Predictably, among the jailed leaders was, of course, Judge Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa. The repressive Meles regime was impervious to incessant peaceful protests at home or mild expressions of concern abroad by human rights organizations, individual politicians and the press. These prisoners of conscience languished in prison for over a year before some serious action commenced for their release. A small group of elderly Ethiopians from various backgrounds and calling themselves a coalition of 'elders' (ሸማግሌ shemagelay) emerged on the scene to mediate between despot Meles and the trapped mass political prisoners. For the most part pm Meles dealt personally with the coordinator of the elders. The prisoners were paraded from time to time to hear bogus charges in the TPLF kangaroo court for publicity purposes. They pleaded not guilty whenever the "court" made perfunctory gestures to let them speak. There is an Ethiopian saying (አባቱ ዳኛ ልጁ ተግኛ እናቱ እግኛ) "*the son is the thief, his father is the judge, and one might add, his mother is the witness.*" In this case, pm Meles is the kleptomaniac who stole the election, thereby spawning intensive but peaceful protests resulting in the murder and the maiming of hundreds of Ethiopian citizens and the incarceration of the 131 prisoners of conscience. Meles is also the jailer who personally and absolutely controls his kangaroo courts. Likewise, his own gun crafted "constitution" is his witness. That is the brazen definition of "justice" and "rule of law" of autocrat Meles/TPLF. Thus, **he is thief/jailer, prosecutor/judge and the witness** all rolled into one.

The leaders and followers of the Ethiopian democratic alternative parties knew all along that their only "crime" was their astounding and embarrassing peaceful victory over the pompous gun-totting regime at the ballot box. Finally, after enduring for so long the physical and psychological harm and injustice visited upon them as well as their families, colleagues, and colleagues, the end of the ordeal was nigh. The elders announced a deal between pm Meles and his innocent victims, in the context of a maze of contradictory series of actions by the regime and they left the prison on 21 July 2007. While most of the leaders of the democratic alternative parties were in jail, the capricious regime was busy dismantling their organizations, changing the rules of the game, withdrawing "legal" status, evicting the political parties from their headquarters and using *divide et impera* tactics to sow the seeds of discord among the leaders and alienate members from the leaderships as well.

Shemaglays, 'Legal' Manipulation, and Release of Prisoners

The elders were communicating and liaising for about a year and a half between the prisoners and potentate Meles to attain the political prisoners' release. The elders—more specifically the coordinator--dealt exclusively with pm Meles. Technically, according to the Meles/TPLF 'constitution' matters, commuting or sustaining of sentences lies in the realm of the President or head of state and not with the prime minister. Neither the "courts" nor any other persons or institutions were involved with the elders from beginning to end. It has been pointed out recently ([AwdeEthiopia blog # 28](#)) that Meles, whose manipulative skill for evil is legendary, is said to have his "court" issue a retroactive life sentence on the prisoners of conscience after (emphasis added) he pocketed their obligatory signatures acknowledging his "clemency." The semantics of this tortured process was to come in

handy for him to send judge Birtukan to solitary confinement back in Kaliti “for life” on 29 December 2008.

After their release the Ethiopian citizens tried to attain a semblance of normalcy and pick up the pieces of their personal, social and political lives. It was not easy. All kinds of kangaroo court/parliament/bureaucracy “laws” and trip wires were set to frustrate, entrap and impede their paths to resuming their obligations to the Ethiopian people effectively. Parties like Kinijit were proscribed outright. Some followers had defected or abandoned the parties by force of circumstances spawned by the regime’s intimidations. The leaderships soon fractured and internecine political struggles ensued. In time, the decent, charming, serious Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa emerged as the overwhelming favorite to head a new democratic alternative party named Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ). The new parties were making the rounds in the country under difficult and terrorizing circumstances, and they also visited Europe and North America to touch base with Diaspora Ethiopian communities. In the course of one such visit to Sweden, UDJ chairperson Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa, was asked about the condition/s of the prisoners’ release. Sound bites quickly spread in earthly and cyber space pertaining to Mrs. Birtukan’s rendition of the circumstances of her release. The capricious pm Meles charged that she had been released by his “pardon” and if she questions or denies that, she would be arrested and jailed in solitary confinement “for life” unless she recants. There was no provision, written or implied, about breach of what was signed and consequences thereof. [For more on this, see Professor Alemayehu G. Mariam, “If you can’t beat up the big boys in Mogadishu, beat on the woman and the old man in Addis Ababa” in freebirtukan.org].

The upshot is that the release was not a simple matter of asking forgiveness for alleged crimes or breach of “law.” Except for the bogus charges of the regime, the prisoners were completely innocent in the first place. It was more a case of complying with age old Ethiopian cultural values--especially at the behest of Shemaglays--of letting go of mutual recriminations between the powers that be and the prisoners of conscience without compromising the rights and fundamental interests of the people. The draconian Meles regime dubbed its version of what Mrs. Birtukan said or meant to say as tantamount to breaching the terms of her release. In short order Meles sends his “security” goons to the home of one of the Shemagelays where she and Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, the veteran teacher, human rights advocate and fellow prisoner in Kaliti were at the time. The “police” could have given her a simple summons to appear in “court”. After all, by the regime’s own “standards”, Mrs. Birtukan is an attorney at law in good standing and a former judge. Instead they subjected her to a rough “illegal” arrest as if she had just committed or was about to commit a heinous crime. When the senior citizen and venerable Professor Mesfin tried to gently say that all the roughshod treatment was unnecessary, he was physically assaulted and tongue lashed. Mrs. Birtukan was hauled to prison on 29 December 2008 where she remains in solitary confinement—“for life.”

Mrs. Birtukan later issued what she called “my testimony” [The quotes from her in this section are from the English version that is posted in www.freebirtukan.org] in which she made a competent crisp legal analysis of the “clemency” fracas. She began by saying “*Although there is nothing that I will say different from what I know and believe in, I have decided to write this to clarify the issue since what happened has raised questions among the public.*” And, she added somewhat ominously: “*Perhaps this can be my last word.*” She then goes on to elaborate on the fact that the elders explained that “*if we sign the document, which was crafted on the basis of our country’s tradition of forgiveness, the case would be stopped and the court file would be closed.*” She notes that the elders cited pm Meles’s exact words: “*If this document is signed, using my executive power I will make sure that the charges be dropped.*” The Meles-manipulated “mediation” process that produced the “document” the prisoners signed on 18 June 2006, was a complicated Byzantine political, legal and personal (Meles) maze. Those Kaliti fellow prison graduates who came out and spoke on the subject

have corroborated the veracity of what she said. Mrs Birtukan concludes her brief with the following on the arbitrary and boorish manner of her arrest by the police and the real motive, for her re-imprisonment:

“The only person that can remove the pardon is the President, and not the Executive (i.e. Meles) that you consider the government. Twenty days after the request for removal of pardon has been received by the person, if the pardon board agrees with the decision, the request will be presented to the President, and it is only after that the President might revoke the pardon. I wanted to explain to the Commissioner (of Police) these proper procedures that are necessary to remove a pardon. But I did not (get to) do that. After confirming that he has finished his speech, I left the room without saying a word. In my opinion, the reason why all these illegal intimidations and warnings have been aimed at me, have nothing to do with playing with words or inaccurate statements or rules broken. The message is clear and this message is not only for me but also for all who are active in the peaceful struggle. A peaceful and law-abiding political struggle can be conducted only within the limits the ruling party and individuals set and not according to what the constitution allows. And for me it is extremely difficult to accept this.”

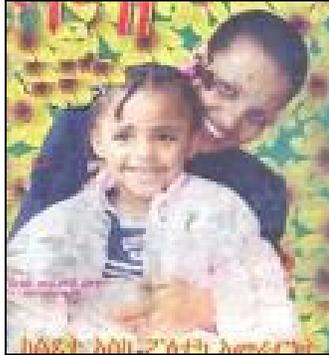
What Mrs. Birtukan points to at the end of her statement is the open secret that the Meles regime has another general “election” coming up in 2010. The popular, competent and charismatic Mrs Birtukan and her UDJ party constitute once again a palpable threat to oust pm Meles in a free and fair election. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to remove her from the political scene to insure the perpetuation of Meles/TPLF repressive rule in Ethiopia. [AwdeEthiopia](#) summarizes what Mrs. Birtukan’s incarceration means in the wider scheme of things.

Imprisoning Birtukan is not just a matter of taking one individual or one party out of circulation. Holding Birtukan captive is snuffing out the dreams and hopes of our sisters and daughters. Jailing Birtukan is arresting the patriotism and aspirations for leadership of young Ethiopians. Incarcerating Birtukan is derailing the path to civil and peaceful political succession in place of the hackneyed cyclical violence and rule by the gun. Caging Birtukan is dousing our chance of leadership by a capable young lady.

Part II A poignant interview with Birtukan’s mother and her 4-year old daughter follows

An interview with Mrs. Birtukan's Mother and Daughter (Translated from the Ethiopic)*

Political Prisoner Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa of Ethiopia Chairperson of Unity for Democracy & Justice Party



Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa with her daughter Haale Mideksa

Interview by **Addis Admas** Ethiopic newspaper with **Mrs. Almaz Gebre Egziabher**, the mother of **Mrs. Birtukan Mideqsa**, Ethiopian Democratic Party leader, whose current address is (again) Kaliti prison near Addis Ababa, and her daughter **Haale (alpha) Mideksa**. The interview was subsequently posted on *Ethiopiazare.com*.

Question (Q) *Is Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa your only child?*

Answer (A) I have a son from my first husband. After settling in Addis Ababa later on, I was married to Ethiopian Imperial Bodyguard veteran, Corporal Mideksa Demie, and gave birth to my only daughter Mimi—Birtukan's [affectionate name] in 1974.

Even though our family's standard of living was low, we raised her with special care and doting as our only daughter. Upon reaching school age, she attended Miazia 23 School in Addis Ababa.

What amazed us about Birtukan was that she would come home from school and just drop her books and notes and not even spend time studying. And we also learned that she had the habit of always raising her hand in class a drilling her teachers with questions. Still, she earned very good grades at every level and completed her eighth grade with a perfect 100 point scholastic score. I was, of course, elated at her brilliant achievement. She entered the well known Empress Menen high school and finished with very good grades. She was admitted at Addis Ababa University where she majored in law. Her streak of academic excellence continued unabated, and we proudly celebrated her University graduation by hosting a big open door public reception.

Q. *How did she get along in the neighborhood as a child?*

A. What I say about Mimi (affectionate name for Birtukan) is not just because she is my daughter. Everyone in our neighborhood can readily attest to her impeccable personality as a young person. She never had any fights or altercations with anyone. She was always respectful to everyone. She was blameless then and she is blameless now.

Q. *How was your mother-daughter relationship during her student days in College?*

A. She attended Addis Ababa University not very far from where we live, and she used to come to see us every week. Sadly, two years later her father passed away. I can say to you that he has been spared not to witness the torment that she has been undergoing at this moment in her life. Upon her graduation she came home and lived with me. She then began practicing law and became a judge in 1989. Shortly thereafter, she gave birth to a beautiful daughter, Haale. As we say in Ethiopia, my daughter Birtukan availed for me—the opportunity “*to see my own eyes through my eye.*” Our house was too old and collapsing and Birtukan had it rebuilt. She then became the center and sole provider of our three generations of life. Before she had a chance to relax and savor her family, however, she got involved in peoples’ causes for which she has been incarcerated.

Q. *How young was Haale when Mrs. Birtukan was jailed?*

A. When Birtukan was imprisoned three years ago my granddaughter Haale was only six months young. Even though I am advanced in age, I have been taking care of my grandchild most of the time. I used to take infant Haale also to see her jailed mother.

Q. *How did you manage to carry provisions and travel to Kaliti jail [a distance of about 25 kilometers from Addis Ababa] to see Mrs. Birtukan during her incarceration in 2005-2007?*

A. I was relatively stronger physically at that time. Sometimes I got a lift by some family and friends. Otherwise, I would take public transportation. However, I have gotten older and physically weaker this time around. Besides, I am burning inside with so much rage every day at her brutal treatment.

Q. *In what condition do you find her now?*

A. Despite her solitary confinement her health seems to be holding up. I must gratefully say that God is with her. Still, the fact remains that no one, even at a young age, can be comfortable in jail. Because of her steely spirit, however, she smiles and chats to relax us. Nevertheless, as a mother, I know she is hurting inside. I can visualize how, after we leave her, she goes to the solitary jail cell and begin fretting about her vulnerable, helpless, horrible condition. Her young adult life is being wrenched from her and her future rendered bleak. When I wake up from my nightmares about her I go through my own pangs of angst and pain. As for me, the inevitable death is near at hand. But, I thought that “government”—which is run by people who have families also—is supposed to be capable of mercy. I am at a loss as to what I could do or where I could go to save her. Rulers forgive countless criminals all the time—let alone Birtukan who is completely innocent. I appeal to her jailers to release my Birtukan and I give my word to restrain her from getting into trouble.

Q. *You can communicate your message through this medium.*

A. At first, I did not understand how it was that the jailers would relegate her to solitary confinement and then say that she could not see anyone else except her mother and daughter. Then we were told that the ruling was modified to allow other family members to visit her, but when we tried to do that the prison guards at Kaliti prison confounded us by saying that the order had not reached them. Under such frustrating circumstances, all I can say is that I will go on suffering because I am predestined to suffer.

Q. *Did the court of the jailers not allow two people to help you carry provisions for Mrs. Birtukan?*

A. What actually happened was as follows: As you can observe, I am a frail old lady. For some time now since my daughter has been jailed, I have had to carry provisions and on occasions my granddaughter Haale by myself. But thanks be to God there were people who helped me some times. I had to carry everything not only to the Kaliti prison but to the place of her solitary confinement which is much farther from the gate. At first, the word was that nobody else was allowed to visit her until a “court” order could allow it. Some of the jail guards sometimes helped me with the load inside the prison grounds. And I was getting very exhausted and frustrated. So, I implored the jail guards to give me some slack and allow a couple of people to help me in accord to my appeal to the jailers court. They said that the order had not yet arrived but asked me to give them two names and temporarily they will try to let such people to help—provided they are cleared through background checks. I had also requested that since the same two people may not always be able to help to get two passes for other volunteers. But, the request was denied. Why should I be in such a quandary as if I am not a social being. After all, other prisoners are visited by their family and friends without restrictions. I thought that “courts” have higher authority. If that is so, why isn’t their ruling not honored in our case? Everyone is thoroughly searched before entering the jail anyway and no one can take anything out of the jail. So, I do not understand why everything is in a knot for us.

Q. *Is your granddaughter Haale difficult to handle when you take her to see her jailed mother?*

A. Perhaps God has graciously limited my woes on some fronts; my granddaughter Haale does not bother me at all. She has been used to being with me and in an uncanny way, her demeanor and precocious behavior reminds me so much of Birtukan at her age. We get reports from her preschool that Haale is extremely bright—and I say to myself, ‘like mother like daughter’. Frequently, the school paints star images on Haale’s hand saying that she has been chosen the star of the month. And when she sees her mother in jail they hug, chat and kiss and enjoy each other as long as allowed and, as Haale leaves she says to her mother, “You are coming home at night, right?” Nowadays, whenever something is being prepared at home, young Haale says “This is for Burte, (my Birtukan) yes?”

Q. *What are your expectations from here on?*

A. There is not much I know about the situation and nothing positive I can see on the horizon. But there is something I believe in strongly. Human beings are flawed and everyone makes mistakes in life. Even if Birtukan was in error, why can she not be forgiven for God’s sake and for the sake of humanity and of their own children? I am sure those who have children understand what being a mother is. Birtukan is an educated, capable and innocent young citizen. Why is it that this young lady who could make much contribution to her fellow Ethiopians, is thrown into jail and placed in solitary confinement “for life” like a murderer or other high profile criminal? And, lest I forget, she is also my only solace and pension at this point in my dwindling life. Even God would approve their act if jailers deem that she has had enough punishment and let go of her. I pray that God softens their hearts.

***** ***** *****

[Interviewer comment]

Birtukan’s daughter, Haale is an adorable, precocious girl. Having watched the recording with her grandmother, the young Haale asked us to record her also. So, we happily obliged and conducted the palaver with her.

Q. *What is your name, your age and where do you go to school?*

A. My name is Haale Mideqsa; I am four years young; I go to One Planet School.

Q. *Who is Birtukan Mideqsa to you?*

A. She is my mother and I love her. When I go to see her I hug her and kiss her. She loves me too. I ask her if she is alright. She quickly prepares to nourish me.

Q. *Who do you go with to visit your mother?*

A. I go with Emama (referring to her grandmother) as well as my mother's cousin Emusha and Gashe Dereje who drives us to Kaliti.

Q. *So, you went inside where she is imprisoned to see her?*

A. Yes, I had to see her by any means. Here her grandmother intervenes to say that a couple of times Haale went back to her mother's room because she had to relieve herself, and at another time she had cried because she had not said goodbye to her mother, and the guards smiled and let her in again briefly.

Q. *What sort of conversation do you have with your mother?*

A. One day I said to my mother "Happy Birthday" [DOB: 27 April 1974]. But when I ask her how many days are left before she is released, she does not give me an answer. She does not say she will be released or not released. I long for her so much!

*Unsolicited, unofficial, personal translation from the Ethiopic original, **NA**.

Part III Concluding Remarks

Referring to the 2005-2007 incarceration of the 131 Ethiopian political leaders and activists, himself included, Dr. Berhanu Nega made an astute remark when he said that in Ethiopia "*all of us are prisoners, be it within narrower (local) or wider (national) prison walls of the country.*" Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa is the only woman in Ethiopian history to have been victimized and imprisoned in solitary confinement "for life." In point of fact, she may be the only woman anywhere in recent memory to be victimized in this fiendish and unscrupulous manner based on spurious, self-serving, illicit charges by a tyrant. It is not only Birtukan who is imprisoned but also her daughter Haale and her mother, Weizero (Mrs) Almaz--all three generations. Birtukan is a single mother who is the only breadwinner in her family. **What crime did she commit to be thrown into solitary confinement to vegetate "for life"** at the prime age of 35? How does the punishment fit the "crime?" Even for Ethiopia--a country that is hoary with age, this is not the 7th or the 12th Century; it is the 21st Century. How is it possible that Mrs Birtukan's human and civil rights can be so grossly abused without incessant and effective indignation and outrage being brought to bear on the sadists in Addis Ababa who get away with such brutality in this day and age? This is cruel and unusual punishment. It is a clear violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

By dint of historical coincidence news about two other female figures on the international political scene has commanded much attention recently. One is the case of the indefatigable Nobel Peace Prize winner and veteran pro-democracy leading lady, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar (Burma). She had won the 1990 election but was forbidden to assume power and jailed instead since then, including house arrest for the past three years. The military junta under General Than Shwe has

now charged her with breach of her house arrest conditions and is awaiting “court” proceedings. As in the case of Birtukan Mideksa of Ethiopia, an election is scheduled hence in Myanmar also and the regime wants her out of any political action. The other recent news is about an Iranian/Japanese American lady, Roxana Saberi, who was thrown in jail in Iran charged with spying. After 100 days of non-stop media coverage of her case and international pressure, she has just been released and is back home in the United States safe and sound. In both of these cases, the White House and the State Department have made timely, explicit and, one must say an effective benign intervention on behalf of the causes of both detained ladies.

One wonders why such principled benign intervention has not been forthcoming with regard to Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa of Ethiopia, Africa. Ethiopians/Africans/Ethiopian Americans and all peoples of goodwill everywhere who value justice, democracy and human rights have yet to hear from not only the White House and the State Department but many others as well on behalf of Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa of Ethiopia. She has already been vegetating in solitary confinement for over five months or 150 days and 150 nights over semantics. She ought not be in jail **for a day, an hour or even a minute.**

Mrs Birtukan did not kill or hurt anyone
She did not conspire to overthrow the regime
She did not steal or engage in corruption
She did not betray her country or her people
She did not desecrate the Ethiopian flag
She did not commit crimes against humanity
She did not sever or land lock the country
She did not serve or spy for un-Ethiopian interests
She did not insult or defame anyone
She did not use or sell drugs

A horrific crime is being committed in Ethiopia today. In this day and age, how can innocent Mrs. Birtukan Mideksa of Ethiopia be sent to (a) **solitary confinement** (b) **in prison** (c) **for life** because of some semantics in interpretation of a flawed document signed under duress? How long must Birtukan, her daughter and her mother continue suffering before appropriate and effective benign intervention happens? Mrs. Birtukan’s, young, promising, and productive public service life is halted. Her ability to nurture her daughter and care for her aged mother has been interrupted. Her daughter Haale has been deprived of her mother’s love and parenting. At her advanced age, her mother, W/o Almaz has been left to fend for herself and her granddaughter in the horrible circumstances prevailing in Addis Ababa and in Ethiopia at large today. Also, the country is deprived of a rare inspiring and empowering young female leader. Thus, it is not only the three generations of the Birtukan family that are imprisoned; but Ethiopia as a whole is also held as a hostage by the fiendish Meles/TPLF regime. By any measure, this is a crime against humanity. And, **where is the outrage by humanity?**

June 27, 2009

Negussay Ayele

Professor Negussay teaches at UCLA. His recent books are Ethiopia & the United States, the Season of Courtship, Volume 1 and In Search of the DNA of the Ethiopia/Eritrean Problem.

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