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**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL
FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD**

**Written statement* submitted by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
of the World Council of Churches, a non-governmental organisation in general
consultative status.**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in
accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2006]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting
non-governmental organization(s).

1. The United Nations Human Rights Commission has, over the years, provided a forum for the exposure of gross and systematic violations of human rights around the world. It has extended the provisions of the technical services, established new international standards and elaborated new enforcement mechanisms. The CCIA has played a significant role in these developments. It has urged governments to ratify the Conventions, supported UN efforts to eliminate racism and contributed to the development of standards such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Declaration on Religious Intolerance, Convention on Torture and other Cruel Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment and further worked for the protection of Rights of Human Rights Defenders.
2. The CCIA believes that the task of upholding human rights is based on the Christian conviction that God wills a society in which all can exercise full human rights. All human beings are created in the image of God, equal and infinitely precious in God's sight. The CCIA reiterates that it is the right and duty of the international community to hold all state and non-state actors accountable for violation of human rights which occur within their jurisdiction or control or for which they are directly responsible. Since the 1975 WCC Assembly in Nairobi, the CCIA has viewed forced disappearances as a crime against humanity which affects not only individual persons but entire families. When family members are abducted, the hiding of information about the fate of the disappeared is a cause of major pain and suffering to the victims' near and dear. Affected families have the right to know the truth and to demand from civil authorities, armed forces and police personnel as to who is responsible for such ghastly actions. The fear when people disappear or their whereabouts are unknown normally is that they have been kidnapped and/or have become victims of extra judicial killings.
3. The CCIA is concerned about the growing culture of impunity that is now prevalent in many countries. The security officials and those responsible for law enforcement are often not reprimanded and punished for the abuse of power and authority vested in them by the state. Lack of accountability by the state for such heinous crimes is directly responsible for nurturing a climate of impunity. This culture of impunity is growing in many parts of the world and is a major factor responsible for continued deterioration in the human rights situation. In such situation abuses and violations take place without perpetrators being brought to justice. This lack of action on part of governments and state authorities not to hold security personnel who commit such human rights abuses accountable creates fear and despondency amongst the public and is an encouragement to impunity. The issue of impunity has ethical, theological, social and political implications. It has to be taken seriously not only by governments but also civil society movements as well as religious organisations.
4. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO) is a long-standing partner of CCIA, the two have worked in close cooperation on issues of justice, peace and human rights not only in Ethiopia but also in the African region as well. The CCIA since the May 2005 elections has monitored the situation in Ethiopia and has received regular reports of human rights violations. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council has consistently urged the government to take immediate steps to stop these human rights violations including the killings, illegal detentions, beatings, torture and harassment being committed by various organs of the state. Such an action on part of the government

will help to bring an end to unrest and thus hopefully the problems created in the country by mass unrest can be resolved in an amicable and legal manner. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council has also called on the government and the opposition parties to conduct their affairs within the framework of law and adopt peaceful means for resolving their disagreements. However, despite these appeals the conditions in Ethiopia have continued to deteriorate with the government's arrest of top leadership of the opposition political parties.

5. Since the third week of September 2005 the Ethiopian government's security forces, members of the police force and the Kebele militia men have detained and forcefully kidnapped, beaten, tortured, and inflicted severe bodily harm against members and supporters of the opposition Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF). According to the information provided to EHRCO by CUD it is clear that since the trouble began in May 2005 more than 1,250 of its members were put under detention in different regions; and twelve of its offices were closed down. The Coalition parties request to organise peaceful rallies was turned down by the authorities. Not only the opposition parties, but others too have been treated harshly by the government. There have been numerous complaints by the Ethiopian Teachers Association that their members are being illegally detained and harassed. The names of some of those illegally detained include: Teferi Gessese, the General Secretary of the Addis Ababa Teachers' Association; Kassahun Kebede, President of the Addis Ababa Teachers' Association; Tamrat Tesfaye, member of the Executive Committee of the Addis Ababa Teachers' Association, and a host of others. The list of such detentions runs into thousands and have been well documented by EHRCO. All these actions are indicative of the fact that the government is not prepared to enter into a dialogue with the opposition. It appears to be bent on resolving a political dispute through military action.
6. The government presently is continuing with its high handed tactics and taking recourse to illegal actions and indulging in brutal treatment of opposition party leaders and supporters as a matter of routine. This is done on a regular basis particularly in rural areas. It has used the pretext of terrorism and the armed insurgency in the vast Oromia region to justify torture and illegal detentions in order to silence dissidents and those opposed to the regime. Hundreds of students have been arrested since May 2005 protests began. Heavy penalties are selectively imposed against the Oromia people and restrictions placed on their movements making it difficult for them to pursue their livelihood.
7. In November 2005, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches visited Ethiopia. He had amongst others a meeting with President of Ethiopia Meles Zenawi. During the meeting the General Secretary expressed his concern at the growing tension between the government and the opposition political parties in the aftermath of the general election. He requested President Meles that the dispute with the opposition be resolved through dialogue and that the government should exercise moderation, patience and tolerance in dealing with the opposition political parties. It should as well explore all avenues for a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Subsequent to his meeting with President Meles, the General Secretary of WCC also met with key leaders of CUD and UEDF and repeated his plea for a dialogue in the long-term interest of the Ethiopian people. Regrettably, despite these appeals, following

demonstrations and riots in Addis Ababa hundreds of people were injured and some were killed. The key opposition leaders were placed under detention. The WCC called upon the government of Ethiopia to refrain from any further military action as this would result in escalation of violence likely to further damage the political climate and make dialogue even less possible.

8. On 24th November 2005 the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches wrote to Her Excellency Ms Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressing concern at the continued detention of the leaders of opposition political parties including Dr Mesfin Woldemariam who has been suffering ill health since August 2005 and is in urgent need of medical care and attention. Dr Mesfin is a well-known human rights defender and founding member and former chair of EHRCO.

It is accordingly submitted that UNCHR should call on the government of Ethiopia to:

- Release all political prisoners including Dr Mesfin; while in detention he should be provided with adequate medical care and attention;
- take immediate steps to engage the leaders of the opposition political parties in dialogue in order to create a conducive environment for a government of national unity so that peace, democracy and human rights can be restored;
- guarantee freedom of the press and to ensure that civil society organisations are allowed to carry on their tasks without hindrances;
- to facilitate the visit of a UN Special Rapporteur to Ethiopia in order to monitor the critical human rights situation.
