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Action Alert, For Immediate Distribution

The Association of Andinet Support Organizations in North America has learnt disturbing developments in the prison conditions of Ms. Birtukan Mideksa, Chairwoman of UDJ. According to our sources, Ms. Mideksa still continues to be held in solitary confinement- nearly two months now. Her lawyer is once again prohibited from contacting her after he was allowed to meet with her only once following an international outcry. Ms. Mideksa's niece, who was allowed to visit her in order to relieve her 72 year old frail mother from the burden of carrying food and other essentials on a long trip, is no more permitted to show up at the gates of the prison. As of today, it is only her elderly mother and her four year old daughter who have a weekly visitation rights.

More disturbing and alarming is the information we are receiving from credible sources inside the prison about the government security operatives' physical and psychological torture against Ms. Mideksa. Ms. Mideksa is held in a small unhygienic cell infested with bugs. She is not allowed to read books or listen to radio or watch television like the other prisoners. Prison sources have informed us that Ms. Mideksa is subjected to sleep deprivation for days at a time. It is apparent that the government security operatives are putting inhuman and illegal means to break her will. The physical and mental ill-treatment that Birtukan is subjected to is corroborated by her mother who told relatives and friends that she observed an unusual behavior from Ms. Mideksa emanating from distress. Ms. Mideksa's mother said recently that her daughter has told her, "the ill-treatment is getting beyond she could bear as a human being". The regime has blocked access to Ms. Mideksa and her condition in prison by all independent observers including human rights organizations.

We call upon all freedom loving governments to protest against this barbaric violation of the basic rights of Ms. Birtukan Mideksa. We particularly urge the donor community to release that their financial support to Meles without a strong demand for change in his regime's behavior has been an enabler for repression against Birtukan and other political opponents. We want also to remind these donors that Ethiopians are truly baffled by the contradictory stances of the donor countries' laudable stand and action against Mugabe of Zimbabwe and the absence of any meaningful actions against the human rights abuses of Ethiopia's Meles.

Finally, we call on the new US administration to use every influence to exert pressure on the Ethiopian dictators to unconditionally release Ms. Birtukan Mideksa who is in prison for the last two months in blatant violation of all laws of the country and international covenants to which Ethiopia is a signatory.

February 16, 2009