

## Details of the Imprisoned Church Pastors: 22 August



### May 2004

Senior church leaders **Rev. Haile Naizge**, chairman of the Full Gospel (Muluwengel) Church, **Dr. Kuflu Gebremeskel**, chairman of the Eritrean Evangelical Alliance, visiting lecturer at Eritrea's now-closed University were arrested in early morning raids on their homes on 23 May 2004. They were initially held in police cells in the capital, Asmara, and are now believed to be held incommunicado in Wengel Mermera Criminal Investigation Centre, a dungeon-like maximum security prison in Asmara also known as Karchele.

Rev. Naizge's mother, who was seriously ill at the time of his detention, died without being allowed to see her son. His wife Rahel and their three children, Shalom, Joel and Naher, were forced to flee and eventually found refuge in North America.

Both men are believed to still be alive. Rev Gebremeskel was last spotted during hospital visits in 2021, while news has emerged that Rev Naizge is in good health.

### June 2004

**Rev Million Gebreselassie:** Also known as Meron, he was the leader of Rhema Evangelical Church in Massawa and worked as an anaesthetist at Massawa Hospital. He was arrested on 3 June 2004 at a police checkpoint at the entrance of Asmara, and was held at Asmara's 2<sup>nd</sup> Police Station for two months before being imprisoned in Wengel Mermera.

### November 2004

Three Orthodox priests detained on 19 November 2004 also remain in prison, despite the fact that the church was one of only three religious communities ostensibly permitted to operate in Eritrea. **Dr Futsum Gebrenegus**, Eritrea's only psychiatrist, **Rev Dr Tekleab Menghisteab**, a highly respected physician (who until his day of arrest was the most senior physician at St. Mary Psychiatric Hospital in Asmara), and **Rev. Gebremedhin Gebregiorgis**, an expert theologian who had spearheaded an award winning educational programme to combat the spread of HIV, were involved in the renewal movement within the Orthodox Church, and were based in the Medhane Alem Church.

The government disliked this movement and had ordered the Orthodox patriarch at that time, Abune Antonios, to close it and excommunicate its 3000 members. The patriarch's refusal to do so, and his stance against further efforts by the government to control ecclesiastical affairs culminated in his own removal from office in violation of Church Canon, and his house arrest.

All three men are thought to be detained in Wengel Mermera.

In February 2005 it was rumoured that Rev Dr Menghisteab was suffering from hypertension. Later reports emerged that Rev Dr Menghisteab had collapsed on at least one occasion and been taken to hospital after being unable to obtain his medication. However, even during this critical time his family were not allowed to visit him and news of his ill health and hospitalisation only reached his family through prison and hospital personnel. His wife Wubie Kahsay and their daughters Hana, Sesayit and Rediet have since fled the country to ensure their own safety.

Dr Gebrenegus' wife and father died in the years following his incarceration, and his elderly mother received medical treatment in South Africa in late 2023.

In June 2022, Rev Gebregiorgis' wife, wife Tsegeweyni Mekonnen Haile died of cancer, leaving behind her husband and three children.

## **March 2005**

While the church leaders listed above will be marking their 21<sup>st</sup> year of incarceration without due process this year, **Rev Pastor Kidane Weldou**, who was arrested on 18 March 2005, marked his 20<sup>th</sup> year of arbitrary detention earlier in 2025. A married father with four daughters, the Senior Pastor of the Church in Asmara was forcibly disappeared from the streets of Asmara by policemen. Rev Weldou was also a member of the Executive Committee of Gideons International in Eritrea.

He too is believed to be in Wengel Mermera.