

AS PROTEST TRIALS APPROACH, U.S. URGES ETHIOPIA TO TREAT DEFENDANTS

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By ANDnetwork .com

The State Department called Wednesday for fair treatment for 80 Ethiopian opposition leaders who are due to stand trial on charges of treason and a variety of other offenses.

"We call for the application of the rule of law fairly, transparently, with full consideration given to the needs and rights of those who are accused," spokesman Adam Ereli said. The defendants, who face charges stemming from anti-government protests late last year, are to go on trial Thursday.

Ereli acknowledged that some protesters engaged in violence but said the government acted irresponsibly as well. He said widespread arrests of students occurred, government agents committed violence against peaceful demonstrators, and rights of the free media were suppressed.

Amnesty International said Wednesday the 80 should be released unconditionally. It contended they were guilty only of expressing their opinions. The anti-government demonstrations broke out last November in response to alleged fraud in national elections held in May.

Source : Sapa-AP /ak