



The late General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, Rev. Gudina Tumsa, who was strangled to death and secretly buried by Mengistu's squad in 1979.

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ETHIOPIAN CHURCH LEADER IS DECLARED DEAD 13 YEARS AFTER
HE WENT 'MISSING'

ADDIS ABABA (APS) May 11 - The controversial General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), the Reverend Gudina Tumsa, was officially declared dead on April 29, 1992, after his body was dug out from the grounds of a palace where he was secretly buried in 1979, by former President Mengistu Haile Mariam's Special Security Branch.

The announcement of his death in the last week of April, was made following necessary investigations and documentation into his disappearance nearly 13 years ago. President Zenawi's Security Department which officially announced Gudna's death, stated that the torture and final strangulation of the Mekane Yesus Church leader was accomplished by a special commando death squad groomed by Mengistu's Security Branch.

Zenawi's Security Department told members of Tumsa's family that the controversial church leader was kidnapped by armed men in civilian clothes on the evening of July 28, 1979.

His kidnapping, said Zenawi's Security Department, was followed by some unspecified time in detention, after which the leader of the Mekane Yesus Church (current membership of about 900,000 followers) was brutally murdered and secretly buried in the sprawling gardens of the Ras Kassa Palace situated in the rolling mountains of Entoto, northern Addis Ababa.

Ras Kassa (name of the palace), is a cousin to the late Emperor Haile Selassie and father of Dejazmach Asrat Kassa, a long time Personal Representative of the Emperor in Eritrea and later aspirant to the imperial throne.

Tumsa together with Abuna Theophelos, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church were buried in the plush gardens of the palace which was used by Mengistu's 'boys' and their Cuban counterparts as a leisure place.

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According to a witness who identified the spot where Gudna was buried, and who witnessed his exhumation, the late Gudna, a remarkably tall and ever-smiling man, was strangled using a specially made belt. He (Gudna) was made to pace up and down a dark room to which he was confined. Because of his towering height, said a witness, the person who strangled the Mekane Yesus Church leader had to climb onto a chair in order to reach his victim.

Tumsa, who according to witnesses was dressed in white payjamas before he met his cruel death, was tortured brutally and had his limbs broken.'

Gudna's exhumation was witnessed by hundreds of people who turned up at the Ras Kassa palace to watch as their departed church leader's body was returned to his people and the church.

Through an announcement on the Ethiopian National Television and Radio, made by Negasa Tumsa, a brother to the late Gudna and an official in the Transitional Government's Light and Power Authority, friends and relatives had been invited to witness the exhumation of Gudna's remains.

There was no difficulty in identifying Tumsa's body. The long bones of his limbs and the skull were unmistakably what remained of the Mekane Yesus church leader.

While Mengistu's government had persistently "assured" Ethiopians and the International Community, that Gudna was still alive, faithfuls, friends, relatives and government officials on April 29, 1992 watched as his remains were dug from a three-metre deep grave.

Gudna's remains have since been placed in safe-keeping by the Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Church where he had served as part-time Minister for many years. His wife Tsehai (who had been imprisoned for several years after her husband's kidnapping') and children have been living abroad. Upon his family's return home, a funeral service which would be attended by people from all over the world, will be conducted for the late Gudna.

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For security and investigative reasons the full story surrounding Tumsa's death as well as the specific signatories to his death sentence is not made public. However, a person very close to Mengistu is said to have placed his signature to Tumsa's sentence. Motive for his kidnapping and ultimate cruel death was, although unconfirmed, his 'high level' involvement related to particularly the Meeson political wing of the time. It was also indicated by his brother that his adamant and consistent refusal to declare that Mengistu's regime (the Dergue of the time) was no enemy of the churches and that churches were doing their jobs without any interference by the Dergue.

Other Ethiopians who were buried in the Ras Kassa palace included Haile Fida and Adanech Negusse, both ardent Marxists educated in Russia and leaders of the Meeson party. Former President of the Addis Ababa University, Lidje Kasa Woldemariam is also believed to be buried in the "luxurious" Ras Kassa palace.

(APS)

March-April, 1992

REMAINS OF REV. GUDINA TUMSSA, FORMER EECMY GEN. SECRETARY DISINTERRED

Addis Ababa - The Remains of the Rev. Gudina Tumssa, former General Secretary of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) who was exterminated by the squads of the Ex-Socialist Government of Ethiopia were collected here Thursday April 30, 1992 from prince Ras Asrate Kassa's compound in Addis Ababa. Present at this occasion were: the EECMY leaders, EECMY pioneer fathers (Dr. Emmanuel G/Silassie and Ato Emmanuel Abraham), his friends and relatives and the representatives of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, led by Abune Barnabas.

The whereabouts of the late Gudina who was kidnapped in April 1979 when returning to his home after leading an evening service at Urael congregation of Mekane Yesus in Addis Ababa was not known to the Church and the friends until April 29, 1992 when the criminal detective offices of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia made it possible by the assistance of personalities who knew how Gudina and many other persons were massacred at the very same compound. It was learned that Gudina and many others were massacred at this place through brutal strangle.

The EECMY, the Overseas sister Churches, missionary Societies and relatives and friends had extensively endeavoured through various machineries in order to identify where Gudina was and what happened to him. Particularly, the Lutheran World Federation, the biggest global Lutheran unity of 107 Churches with more than 54 million members played very invaluable role in efforts made to trace Gudina's whereabouts until the last minute. Missionary societies in Sweden and Germany exerted continued support in many ways to help the Church and the family in their grievance since the loss of Gudina.

Gudina's remains were taken to Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus Congregation's Church/Cathedral where prayer services were conducted prior to placing it where it will be resting until the date of funeral services which is to be announced over the mass-media later. Gudina's closest relatives are not in the country but, one his brother Ato Negassa Tumssa. The family (his wife and children) and relatives are expected from the overseas soon.

The Rev. Tekle Haimanot W/Giorgis of the Addis Ababa Mekane Yesus congregation led the prayer services and Rev. Megarsa Gutta President of the Addis Ababa Synod preached at this occasion. The family expressed appreciation and gratitude to