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International Studies Colloquium Hosts Taye Woldesmiate

January 30, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Illinois Wesleyan's international studies department will host Taye Woldesmiate, visiting professor in the department of politics and government at Illinois State University (ISU), on Thursday, Feb. 1 at 4 p.m. in Beckman Auditorium of The Ames Library (1 Ames Plaza, Bloomington). He will present a talk entitled, "Poverty and Inequality in Ethiopia." An expert on issues of development and resource usage, Woldesmiate's talk will contribute to this year's international studies' theme: *Attacking Poverty at Home and Abroad*.

The event is free and open to the public.

Woldesmiate is the fourth Scholar at Risk (SAR) to have lectured at IWU since 2004. Scholars at Risk is an international network of universities and colleges that aims to educate the public about threats to academic freedom and attacks on scholars. SAR members participate in a variety of ways, including hosting scholars who have suffered violence and other threats for short-term academic positions. In return, scholars contribute to their host campuses through teaching, research, lectures and other activities.

Provost and Dean of the Faculty Beth Cunningham said: "We are excited to have the opportunity to bring Dr. Woldesmiate to campus to expose our students to his worldly knowledge and expertise. Scholars at Risk is an excellent program to help bring global issues to campus, and we hope to call in more scholars in the future."

Woldesmiate earned a masters degree from ISU, and earned a doctorate from the University of Missouri-Columbia in political science in 1989. He is also head of the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA). In May 1996, he denounced the repressive excesses of the Addis Ababa government to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva. He was arrested on his return trip with charges of terrorism and armed conspiracy against the government and imprisoned for six years. It is believed, however, according to The National Academies' Committee on Human Rights, that the actual reason for his arrest was his peaceful activities as president of the ETA. The evidence against Woldesmiate was a forged "confession" and witnesses who later recanted their testimony, saying that they had been tortured to testify. The government withheld evidence from Woldesmiate's lawyers and refused to allow adequate cross-examination. Human rights advocates condemned his arrest and trial as unfair.

During his imprisonment, Woldesmiate endured solitary confinement for four months and being shackled in handcuffs 24 hours a day for two years. He received constant death threats and harassment from prison guards, was not allowed to meet with his lawyer in private, and was permitted to see his family for only 30 minutes once a week.

Woldesmiate was freed from prison in 2002 following an international trade union campaign with which ILO was associated. Despite his release, Ethiopia still faces serious threats to the efforts to create a free and democratic society. Woldesmiate said, "My release does not in any way indicate the prevalence of peace in this country." Also, after the fraudulent 2005 national election that received international criticism, Woldesmiate was among 123 politicians, scholars and activists charged with crimes. His trial is ongoing.

For additional information, contact Professor of Educational Studies Irv Epstein at iepstein@iwu.edu.

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