

CPJ report: 52 journalists jailed in Africa



By [Theresa Mallinson](#)

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There are currently 52 journalists imprisoned in Africa, in nine countries. More than half the jailed journalists are held in that scourge of media freedom - Eritrea. The most disturbing news to come out of CPJ's recent report on journalists behind bars, is that the trend of imprisoning journalists - often on trumped-up charges - has seen a sharp increase over the last decade. And if the [Protection of State Information Bill](#) is passed next year, the 2012 CPJ report could very well see South African journalists join their colleagues across the continent in serving prison time for doing their job.

Last week the Committee to Protect Journalists published its annual special report on imprisoned journalists. As you read this, there are 179 journalists in prison across the globe - 52 of them in Africa. The 179 imprisoned journalists include only those who were actually sitting in jail on 1 December - not people who were released during the year. Worldwide, 34 more journalists were imprisoned than at the time of CPJ's 2010 report. This year's count is the highest since 1996; in 2000 there were only 81 imprisoned journalists, but since then the number has been on the increase.

Although "only" perhaps isn't the right word, as every one of those imprisoned in at the beginning of this decade, and all of those in jail now, are not merely statistics, but individuals whose lives - and careers - have been irrevocably altered by their time behind bars.

In Africa, by far the largest number of journalists are jailed in Eritrea, where, according to CPJ, there are currently 28 journalists in prison (the second-highest total in the world, after Iran). Said Abdelkader, Yusuf Mohamed Ali, Amanuel Asrat, Temesken Ghebreyesus, Mattewos Habteab, Dawit Habtemichael, Medhanie Haile, Seyoum Tsheya, and dual Eritrean-Swedish national Dawit Isaac have all been in prison for the last decade after President Isaias Afewerki launched a crackdown on free and independent media in September 2001. Television reporter Hamid Mohammed Said has been in jail almost as long - since 2002.

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ABOUT THERESA MALLINSON

Theresa Mallinson has lived and worked as an itinerant writer, subeditor and sometimes teacher, plying her trade in such exotic destinations as Vaduz, Dubai, and Cape Town. But that's all changed since she became a journalist at the Daily Maverick (www.thedailymaverick.co.za) and managing editor at Free African Media. For now, she's very happy to be living in Jozi. Follow her on Twitter at [@tmallinson](#) and contact her on theresa.mallinson@gmail.com.

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