

Let all the jailed Ethiopian journalists go free

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum are calling for the release of all journalists still jailed in Ethiopia after a week in which six of their colleagues were freed.

Reeyot Alemu, a newspaper columnist and secondary school English teacher who had spent almost 1,500 days behind bars, was reportedly released on Thursday, 9 July, a day after five other jailed Ethiopian journalists were set free.

At least 11 journalists remain in Ethiopian prisons, including 2014 WAN-IFRA Golden Pen of Freedom laureate Eskinder Nega. In Africa, only Eritrea has more journalists in prison.



Image via [123RF](#)

"While delighted by the release of the journalists, they and their colleagues still in prison should never have been jailed in the first place," said a statement from WAN-IFRA.

"Jailing journalists simply for doing their job is contrary to the best interests of the nation. We hope this week's releases are more than simply gestures, that they signify a genuine turning point in the democratic future of Ethiopia. We call on the government to demonstrate its commitment by releasing those who remain behind bars. Criminalising journalism and punishing journalists must end. Let them all go free."

Among those still in prison is Eskinder Nega, who was arrested on 14 September 2011 and accused of colluding with the outlawed opposition party Ginbot 7 in an attempt to overthrow the regime - charges he has rejected on numerous occasions.

Despite government claims that the prosecution of Nega and others charged under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation is

unrelated to their work as journalists, independent inquiries have found this to be far from reality. In April 2013, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention held that the imprisonment of Nega violated Ethiopia's obligations under international law and requested his immediate release.

In addition to procedural violations, the Working Group found that the detention of Nega resulted directly from his exercise of free expression and that the overly broad offenses established by the 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation constituted "an unjustified restriction on expression rights and on fair trial rights." Despite such a finding, however, Nega and at least 10 of his colleagues remain in prison today.

To read WAN-IFRA's latest protest letter, visit www.wan-ifra.org/node/135369/.

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