

# **EFJA PRESS RELEASE**

Journalists in Ethiopia are being persecuted for being the eyes and ears of the downtrodden mass, for being the voice for the voiceless under tyrannical and dictatorial regimes of the continent. The situation has been aggravated in recent years. The regimes have stepped up the suppression in much worse condition than ever.

The tyrant and dictatorial regime of Ethiopia chose to suppress the media by charging journalists with outdated crimes under outmoded laws such as the “anti terrorist law”.

After the 2005 crack down the dictatorial government blocked almost all private newspapers from publishing, raided EFJA's and newspapers offices, confiscating Computers, Printers, Fax machines, documents and other materials.

The result of these heavy-handed and short-sighted actions greatly weakened private media that feels itself threatened and intimidated, causing a number of journalists to flee the country or retreat into hiding for fear of being arrested. At present more than 106 journalists are forced to flee the country to save their neck.

Any problem that is faced by the Ethiopian free press emerges from the fact that the Draconian Press Law and the new highly repressive terrorism legislation has been worked out in such a way that it suits the interests of the ruling party and that the laws lacks clarity.

EFJA strongly demand the review of the Draconian Press Law and the highly repressive terrorism legislation by pertinent and qualified professionals. These “laws” needs to be interpreted in line with international standards on press practices.

Of all the above mentioned strategies the question regarding the highly repressive terrorism legislation that could see journalists jailed for 20 years for articles that are seen to "encourage" terrorist acts must be dropped.

EFJA acknowledged it as a new trend of imposing harmful tactics contrary to the free press EFJA vividly protests the measure made by the authorities that intended to frustrate Journalists from exercising their duties & democratic rights.

We should stress here that a quick solution should be found to this serious challenge that poses a great danger to the very democratic right of the Ethiopian people.

The dictatorial government uses the free press as a "trade mark" of democracy for overseas consumption. It uses it as a means for obtaining loans, and funds. In the country it brutally and ruthlessly suppresses the free press. This is the objective reality prevailing in our country. This is the situation of the free press in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association ( EFJA) together with its entire membership continues to challenge and fight against the repressive law. Because the law contravenes major local legislations and international agreements.

The law attempts to violate the basic law of the country. In other countries, it is customary for the big fish to eat the small fish. In our country, the small fish is threatening to eat the big fish.

The objective of the struggle of the free press in Ethiopia is not to share state power with any government, but only to liberate itself from repression and terror and provide free information that is to the advantage of the country and the people.

In 1832, McKenzie King, a former Primer Minister of Canada, wrote: “Remember that wherever the press is not free, the people are poor, abject, degraded, Slaves, that the press is the life, the safeguard, the very heart’s blood of a Free country.”

The Ethiopian Free press Journalists' Association (EFJA) particularly calls on IFEX members, all International press institutions, counterpart professional associations, international human rights activists and organizations:

- ✓ To make their voices heard about serious challenge that poses a great danger to the very democratic right of the Ethiopian people as well as freedom of expression.
- ✓ To express their deep concern and protest against illegal actions and to send letters of protest to the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Ethiopian Minister of Justice and Communications.

Once again we request all human rights activists and organization and professional association throughout the world that have received this message to disseminate our call to all concerned.

The Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association (EFJA)  
July 27, 2009

Signed.  
Kifle Mulat  
President, EFJA (exiled)

***The information contained in this press release is the sole responsibility of EFJA.***