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Africa - Eritrea

New legal move

Three jurists refer imprisoned journalist's case to African human rights panel

29 October 2012

Three European jurists referred the case of the imprisoned Swedish-Eritrean journalist **Dawit Isaac** to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on 27 October, his 48th birthday and the 12th in succession that he has spent in an Eritrean jail.

The Swedish section of Reporters Without Borders issued the following press release about the initiative:

Today, 27 October 2012, Dawit Isaac turns 48.

It is his twelfth birthday in an Eritrean prison.

The struggle to free him goes on.

His case is now being brought to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

Reporters Without Borders welcomes the initiative by jurists Jesús Alcalá, Percy Bratt and Prisca Orsonneau. They have sent a legal writ to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights in The Gambia. The Commission protects and promotes Human Rights within the African Union. This means that the three jurists take the case from last year, further. Then they filed a writ for Habeas corpus for Dawit Isaac with the High Court of Eritrea.

In an earlier case before the African Commission the Eritrean Government has stated that its own court system is independent and could handle the case of Dawit Isaac and others. It was also stated before the Commission that Habeas corpus is a principle in the country as a protection from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment.

But the High Court of Asmara has not reacted to the writ for Habeas Corpus for Dawit Isaac.

Therefore the case is now being brought to the African Commission. The imprisonment of Dawit Isaac runs counter to both Eritrean law and several African and international conventions.

Several of his colleagues have died in prison already. [In August Reporters Without Borders reported that three more had perished](#): **Dawit Habtemichael, Mattewos Habteab and Wedi Itay**.

In an article published on 26 October 2012 in the Swedish daily *Svenska Dagbladet* the three jurists write:

We are running out of time and Dawit Isaac runs the risk of ending up like his colleagues.

It is still possible for the Eritrean High Court to demand that the authorities bring Dawit Isaac from his prison and present him.

But instead of doing this Eritrea may now be forced to an embarrassing process before the African Commission. Lately the Eritrean regime has come under growing criticism from other African countries. Eritrea's actions harm the reputation of the entire continent.

There is a simple way to stop that.

All that Eritrea has to do is to abide by its own laws and release Dawit Isaac.

The writ for Habeas corpus in 2011 was supported by editors from 21 European news organisations. Amongst them *El País*, *Spiegelonline*, *Gazeta Wyborzca*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *TAZ*, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Aftonbladet*, *Aftenposten*, *Verdens Gang*, *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Iltalehti*, *Berlingske* and *BT*.

Photo : Isaac Dawit

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