

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ethiopie-anti-terrorism-law-among-targets-01-10-2013,45264.html>

Africa - Ethiopia

Draconian law

Anti-terrorism law among targets of Addis Ababa protest

1 October 2013

A major street protest took place in Addis Ababa on 29 September in response to a call from Unity for Democracy and Justice, an opposition political party headed by the previous president, Dr. Negasso Gidada.

The demonstrators protested against the arbitrary detention of journalists, human rights activists and dissidents, which is made possible by the 2009 anti-terrorist law.

Independent estimates put the number of demonstrators at between 12,000 and 15,000 while government sources said they were a few hundred.

The urgent need to amend this repressive law was of one of the recommendations that Reporters Without Borders included in its submission on Ethiopia to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 19th Universal Periodic Review session to be held between April and May next year.

"The anti-terrorism law is one of the most serious obstacles to the promotion and protection of freedom of information in Ethiopia," Reporters Without Borders said. "Ever since its adoption, the government has used it as a legal tool to clamp down on dissidents and create a cloud of fear that limits the ambition and activity of the media.

"Without taking any position on the politics of the demonstrators, we urge the government to respond to the widespread demand by concerned citizens and activists for immediate and participatory reform of the anti-terrorism law. We also call on the government to respect the freedom of expression of all news and information providers, regardless of their political views."

According to the organizers, the demonstration's aim was not only to condemn the law but also to demand the release of opposition members and journalists who have been jailed under it. They include activist Eskinder Nega, detained since 15 September 2011 for alleged "links with terrorist organizations and conspiracy to harm national security".

Journalists **Reyot Alemu**, winner of the 2013 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano press freedom prize, and **Woubeshet Taye**, the deputy editor of the Amharic-language weekly *Awramba Times*, [have been detained](#) under this law since June 2011.

Reyot Alemu has been reportedly subjected to mistreatment including solitary confinement, minimal access to medical care and restricted visits from family and friends. They are serving jail terms of five and 14 years respectively, on charges of "conspiring with a terrorist organization and taking part in planning terror attacks".

Two Swedish journalists working for the Kontinent news agency, [reporter Martin Schibbye and photographer Johan Persson, were arrested on 1 July 2011](#) after illegally entering Ethiopia's southeastern Ogaden region from Somalia with members of the separatist Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) with the aim of investigating human rights violations in the region. Sentenced to 11 years in prison on a charge of "terrorist activities", they were released after 450 days in detention thanks to pressure from the international community.

In an interview for Reporters Without Borders, Schibbye said: "The mere fact that these

protests are taking place is a positive sign in Ethiopia. This shows the growing implication of the youth, namely through social networks, and their refusal to live in a society where journalists and dissidents can be jailed arbitrarily."

Ethiopia is ranked 137th out of 179 countries in the [2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

More information about [Ethiopia's anti-terrorism law](#)
