

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ethiopia-columnist-s-sentence-on-terrorism-08-08-2012,43175.html>

Africa - Ethiopia

Still held

Columnist's sentence on terrorism charges cut from 14 to 5 years

8 August 2012

Ethiopia's federal supreme court reduced columnist **Reyot Alemu's** jail sentence from 14 to five years in prison on 3 August after overturning her conviction on charges of receiving money from illegal sources, conspiring and possessing material for a terrorist act but upholding her conviction on a charge of helping to promote or communicate it. She is being held in Kality prison on the outskirts of the capital.

"Ever since the start of this case, we have been saying that contacting members of the political opposition does not turn a journalist into a terrorist," Reporters Without Borders said.

"The July 2009 anti-terrorism law under which Alemu was convicted is being ill-advisedly used in a draconian manner, culminating with a federal high court sentencing her to 14 years in prison and a fine of 1,850 US dollars. Like fellow journalist, **Woubeshet Taye**, she should never have been jailed. We call on the authorities to overturn their convictions and release them."

The supreme court ruled that the prosecution had proved that she was paid for her reporting by **Elias Kifle**, founder of the *Ethiopian Review*, an opposition news website based in the United States, but had failed to prove how much money changed hands or whether it was illegally obtained and wired from a terrorist organisation.

The court also struck down the charges of conspiracy and planning to commit a terrorist act as unproven, but endorsed the high court decision that her actions promoted and supported the work of an entity with known ties to organizations labelled as terrorist by the parliament.

The supreme court said it upheld Alemu's conviction under article 652/7 of the anti-terrorism law because her work constituted "participation with covert forces of violence" and because she monitored and reported on the activities of individuals recruited by Kifle with the aim of harming constitutional order and damaging vital infrastructure.

The five-year sentence imposed by the supreme court is the minimum under article 652/7. The supreme court did not mention the fine that the high court imposed.

Alemu, a columnist for the weekly *Fitih*, and Taye, deputy editor of the *Awramba Times*, a weekly that has ceased to publish, [both received 14-year sentences in January on charges of helping to prepare and participate in a terrorist attack.](#)

Photo : Reyot Alemu
