

PRESS RELEASE

Ethiopia: Jailing of journalists on anti-terrorism a travesty of justice

ARTICLE 19

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ARTICLE 19 condemns in the strongest terms the 11 year sentence imposed on two investigative Swedish journalists - Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson – charged with supporting a terrorist group and illegal presence, under Ethiopia’s anti-terrorism law. The harsh sentence is another travesty of justice, which have characterised the arrest and prosecution of these journalists.

“The sentencing of the two Swedish journalists is clearly a mockery of justice and yet more evidence of Ethiopia’s slide towards complete disregard for human rights.” said Dr Agnes Callamard, ARTICLE 19 Executive Director.

The 2009 anti-terrorism legislation under which the two journalists were prosecuted is overly broad, ambiguous and deprives defendants of the right to be presumed innocent. Ethiopia’s anti-terrorism legislation undermines international guarantees of freedom of expression especially through its broad definition of terrorism, which has been applied, as in this particular case, to what are legitimate forms of expression. On 21st December 2011, the judge had stated that the two were esteemed reporters but that they had been unable to prove that they did not support terrorism.

“Journalists’ contact with proscribed groups in no way means support for their causes. This continued prosecution of local and now international journalists working in Ethiopia demonstrates the dangers of Ethiopia’s anti-

terrorism legislation, which is being used by the Ethiopian government to thwart legitimate political dissent, freedom of expression, and freedom of the media in particular” said Henry Maina, Director of ARTICLE 19 East Africa.

Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson, were arrested in early July 2011 after crossing from Puntland into Ethiopia’s troubled Ogaden region. The two journalists claim that they were investigating human rights abuses by Ethiopian troops in the Ogaden region where foreign companies, including the Swedish firm Lundin Petroleum, have interests.

ARTICLE 19 is calls for the repeal of the state’s anti-terrorism legislation, which violates international law. It also urges the superior courts to hear the merits of the case and acquit the two journalists on appeal.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- For more media interviews please : Mona Samari, ARTICLE 19 Senior Press Officer, mona@article19.org or call +44 (207)324 2510;
- For a copy of the ARTICLE 19 analysis of the Anti-terrorism legislation of Ethiopia, see <http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/analysis/ethiopia-comment-on-anti-terrorism-proclamation-2009.pdf>.