

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ethiopia-court-drops-one-of-three-charges-03-11-2011,41223.html>

Africa - Ethiopia

Charge dropped

Court drops one of three charges against Swedish journalists

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Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that an Addis Ababa court today dropped a charge of participating in terrorist activity against Swedish journalists **Johan Persson** and **Martin Schibbye** of the *Kontinent* news agency, who nonetheless continue to be tried on charges of supporting a terrorist group and entering Ethiopia illegally.

At the end of today's hearing, the trial was adjourned until 6 December. The two journalists will meanwhile remain in detention.

"We hope that the court will also drop the charge of supporting a terrorist group," Reporters Without Borders said. "Persson and Schibbye are recognized journalists and have nothing in common with terrorists. All they did was enter the Ogaden without proper documents because that region is closed to the media. Their goal was just to report on what is going on there."

Persson, a reporter, and Schibbye, a photographer, were arrested on 1 July after entering Ethiopia from Somalia with members of the separatist Ogaden National Liberation Front, which the Ethiopian government regards as a terrorist organization. When the trial opened last month, they admitted entering the country illegally but pleaded not guilty to the other two charges.

18.10.2011 - Outcome already decided in trial of Swedish journalists?

Reporters Without Borders will pay close attention to the trial of Swedish journalists **Martin Schibbye** and **Johan Persson**, which has begun on October 18th in Addis Ababa. Arrested on 1 July after illegally entering the south Eastern Ogaden region from Somalia, they are charged with terrorist activities and violating Ethiopia's immigration laws.

The terrorism charges are completely unfounded as Schibbye and Persson were just doing their jobs as journalists, the press freedom organization said.

"Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's claim in a recent interview for the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* that they were acting as the 'messengers of a terrorist organization' does not bode well," Reporters Without Borders said. "Has the outcome of the trial already been decided by the government? Asks the press freedom organization. RSF would like to urge the Ethiopian government to reconsider its expansive application of the anti-terrorism law to try local and foreign journalists. We also urge the Swedish authorities to give this case the importance it deserves and the European Union should also take an interest and use its relationship with Ethiopia to help find an acceptable outcome."

Schibbye, a reporter, and Persson, a photographer, were arrested upon entering the Ogaden region with members of the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), an armed separatist group branded a terrorist organization by the Ethiopian government, with the aim of covering human rights abuses in the region for the *Kontinent* news agency.

Immediately after their arrest, Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt criticized them for entering an area for which his ministry had issued a travel warning. The ministry's subsequent silence on the subject of their arrest has been heavily criticized by national and international news media and journalists' organizations.

Schibbye and Persson were not accompanied by a lawyer when they were formally charged on 6 September. If convicted, they could face the possibility of life imprisonment.

Photo of Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson.
