



For immediate release – 31 March 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Ethiopia: ARTICLE 19 Comments on Anti Terrorism Proclamation

ARTICLE 19 today issues its Analysis of the Ethiopian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation 2009 and calls for the government to fully recognise the right to freedom of expression under international and regional human rights law.

In the Analysis, ARTICLE 19 isolates omnibus sections of the Proclamation that undermine international protections on freedom of expression. Freedom of expression may be subject to restriction to protect national security, but only if the government can demonstrate that the restriction is prescribed by law and is necessary in a democratic society to protect a legitimate national security interest. Of particular concern is the broad definition of terrorism, which would appear to apply to many legitimate acts of expression; the undermining of protection of journalists sources including by surveillance and an excessive duty to cooperate and provide information; and vaguely defined provisions on “encouraging” terrorism that would criminalise the legitimate exercise of freedom of expression and have a real chilling effect on debate on matters of public interest.

“The Proclamation seriously undermines freedom of expression rights in a manner that is unlikely to improve security and negates Ethiopia’s obligations under international law”, says Henry Maina, Director of ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa.

ARTICLE 19 recommends the Proclamation be amended. In particular, the legislation should narrow down the definition of “terrorism”, and should introduce specific provisions on the right of journalists and media organisations to protect their sources of information. This will include limiting obligations to provide information, restrictions on searching and seizing of information, and limits on surveillance to identify sources and information.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- To read the analysis: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/analysis/ethiopia-comment-on-anti-terrorism-proclamation-2009.pdf>
- For further details on the right to freedom of expression and its relationship with security, see ARTICLE 19’s Johannesburg Principles at: <http://www.article19.org/pdfs/standards/joburgprinciples.pdf>

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- ARTICLE 19 is an independent human rights organisation that works around the world to protect and promote the right to freedom of expression. It takes its name from Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees free speech.