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## ARTICLE 19

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### Eritrea: ARTICLE 19 Calls for an End to Arbitrariness and Impunity

**As the world celebrates the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, many Eritrean journalists and political opponents are still detained without charges for more than seven (7) years. Eritrea has the highest number of jailed and exiled journalists in Africa.**

The journalists and politicians detained since 2001 have never been charged or brought before the Eritrean courts; they have been held in secret locations without access to their families or legal assistance. Some of the detainees have been reported in ill health and some have died in custody.

In January 2007, a key figure of Eritrean media, Fesshaye “Joshua” Yohannes, a publisher and editor of the former weekly *Setit* was reported to have died while in detention. Yohannes was also a poet and playwright who had fought for Eritrean independence alongside President Isaias Afewerki, as a member of the rebel movement.

In 2003, after protests and appeals to the Eritrean government, ARTICLE 19 filed a law suit on behalf of the detainees before the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR, the African Union human rights body).

In May 2007, after four (4) years of legal battle -and many attempts by the Eritrean Government to unduly delay and frustrate the case- ARTICLE 19 won the case for the detainees. The ACHPR made a final ruling condemning the wholesale banning of the private media, the arbitrary and unlawful detention of journalists, among other violations. The decision called on the Eritrea government to end the detention and pay compensation to the victims.

The Eritrean Government has not respected the decision of the ACHPR and still continues its repressive policy to curb free speech.

*“We call on the international community to put more pressure on Eritrea to end the human rights tragedy for the detainees and their families and to account for those who lost their lives in prison”,* says Dr. Agnes Callamard, Executive Director of ARTICLE 19.

ARTICLE 19 calls on the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression in Africa:

- To follow up the ACHPR' decision and urge the African Union to take appropriate measures and prioritise the resolution of the political and human rights crisis in Eritrea,
- To urge the Eritrean government to release journalists and politicians unlawfully detained as ordered by the ACHPR and to account for journalists who died in government custody,
- To undertake a mission in Eritrea in order to mitigate the situation and provide assistance to the victims and their families.

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

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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.