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<http://www.rsf.org/eritrea-eritrean-officials-accused-before-03-07-2014,46576.html>

Africa - Eritrea

Universal jurisdiction

Eritrean officials accused before Swedish court of crime against humanity

3 July 2014

Reporters Without Borders welcomes the decision to file a legal complaint in Sweden accusing Eritrean President Issayas Afewerki and other senior officials of a crime against humanity, enforced disappearance and torture in the case of Dawit Isaac, a journalist with Swedish and Eritrean dual nationality detained in Eritrea since September 2001.

The complaint was filed on 30 June by three lawyers – Jesús Alcalá, Percy Bratt and Prisca Orsonneau, who heads Reporters Without Borders' Legal Committee. As well as the president, it names foreign minister Osman Saleh, justice minister Fawzia Hashim, defence minister Gen. Sebhat Ephrem and a presidential adviser.

Isaac was one of the "[information heroes](#)" that Reporters Without Borders profiled for this year's World Press Freedom Day on 3 May.

Filed in anticipation of Sweden's new universal jurisdiction law, which took effect on 1 July, the complaint is not the first joint action undertaken by the three lawyers. They have filed similar complaints with [Eritrea's supreme court](#) and with the [African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights](#), so far without success.

The United Nations Human Rights Council sent an encouraging signal on 23 June when it requested the [creation of a special commission](#) to investigate all human rights violations in Eritrea. It will be led by Sheila Keetharuth, who has been prevented from visiting Eritrea since her appointment in 2012 as special rapporteur for human rights in Eritrea. She is to present a report in June 2015.

"The silence from the western democracies on the subject of Eritrea must end," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk. *"In April, the Eritrean authorities told the Human Rights Council that there was no arbitrary detention in Eritrea and that no one was being held because of their opinions or for criticizing the government. This position is no longer tenable."*

Kahn-Sriber added: *"What we expect from the Swedish authorities now is that they intercept and question those responsible for these abuses when they visit Sweden so that they finally account for their actions before a court."*

The co-founder of the weekly *Setit*, then Eritrea's most popular independent newspaper, Isaac was arrested in Asmara on 23 September 2001, a day when many government opponents and independent journalists were rounded up and their newspapers were closed for good.

He has been held ever since without being formally charge or tried, without being allowed access to his lawyers and without being allowed family or Red Cross visits. His case is unfortunately not isolated. According to Reporters Without Borders' tally, [28 journalists are currently detained](#) in Eritrea.

Of the 11 other journalists arrested at the same time as Isaac, seven have since died in detention. Isaac was last seen alive in January 2010.

Eritrea is ranked last in the Reporters Without Borders [press freedom index](#) for the seventh year running.

[Additional information on the Isaac case](#)

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