

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/eritrea-pirate-transmission-silences-sole-03-09-2012,43323.html>

Africa - Eritrea

Sabotage

## Pirate transmission silences sole independent news outlet for three weeks

3 September 2012

*Radio Erena* (Our Eritrea), a Paris-based radio station that broadcasts to Eritrea, one of the world's most closed countries, and to the Eritrean diaspora, has been the victim of sabotage that prevented it from being carried by the Arabsat radio and TV satellite service for three weeks.

The sabotage took the form of a pirate transmission from within Eritrea that jammed *Radio Erena's* signal. The station was unable to resume broadcasting until around 6 p.m. yesterday.

Launched by Reporters Without Borders in 2009, *Radio Erena* is the only source of independent news in the local language for Eritreans inside Eritrea and, as such, has been the target of the government's constant hostility. ([Watch a presentation video about Radio Erena that was made in March 2010](#))

"The fact that *Radio Erena* was off the air for more than three weeks is no trivial matter," Reporters Without Borders said. "The station plays a key role by offering impartial and responsible news coverage to an entire people that is otherwise deprived of this. Open to all participants in Eritrean life, whether from the opposition, civil society or the government, *Radio Erena* is now paying a high price for its independence."

Arabsat, the owner of the BADR-6 satellite that normally carries *Radio Erena's* signal, suspended the station on 14 August because of the pirate transmission that had just begun to interfere with its signal.

The interference began a day after Arabsat received an Eritrean government complaint claiming that, during an interview with Ethiopian information minister Bereket Simon, *Radio Erena* had "incited its listeners to acts of violence against Eritrean government representatives."

This was a complete lie, as Reporters Without Borders explained when it provided Arabsat with a transcript of the interview. Let it be noted in passing that Eritrea's President Issaias Afewerki is [one of the world's worst "Predators of Press Freedom."](#)

### Baseless allegations

Broadcast in three parts, on 6, 8 and 10 August, the interview with the Ethiopian information minister covered several topics including relations between his government and the Eritrean opposition and the development of the Ethiopian economy. Although the minister expressed himself freely and directly about the Eritrean government, the radio station did not in any way call for an uprising or acts of violence.

The Eritrean journalists who operate *Radio Erena* were astonished to discover that station's signal had been cut at around 4 p.m. on 14 August. From that moment onwards, reliable and balanced news reporting was no longer available to Eritreans in Eritrea. All they had was the political propaganda provided by state-owned *Eri-TV* and *Radio Dimtsi Hafash* and the government daily *Hadas Eritrea*.

### Sabotage

Arabsat concluded from its tests and its investigation that the jamming came from a pirate transmission from within Eritrea. The pirate transmission blocked the entire BADR-6 satellite and forced Arabsat to suspend all of the services it normally offers. Once Radio Erena's signal had been suspended, the pirate transmission blocking the entire service also disappeared, Arabsat said. In another surprising development, Radio Erena's website was brought down by a cyber-attack on 28 August.

The site was back online on 1 September, while satellite transmission of Radio Erena's signal finally resumed the next day.

### **War of words**

"Irritated by the interview with the Ethiopian information minister, the Eritrean government tried to silence the alternative voice that Radio Erena offers to Eritrea's citizens," Reporters Without Borders said.

Relations between Asmara and Addis Ababa have been tense every since Eritrea won its independence from Ethiopia in May 1992. Reinforced by a war from 1998 to 2000, the mutual hostility between the two countries has shifted in part to the terrain of the media. Although not a party to the dispute, Radio Erena found itself being targeted.

[Ranked last in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index for the past five years](#), Eritrea is [one vast open prison for the journalists](#). It is Africa's biggest jail for journalists and the world's fourth biggest, after China, Iran and Syria.

Held for years in various detention centres, many of them since the roundups of September 2001, [Eritrea's imprisoned journalist are dying one by one, forgotten by a largely indifferent world](#).

To prevent a new cyber-attack from depriving Eritreans of the Radio Erena website's independent news coverage, [Reporters Without Borders has created a mirror site](#). It invites Internet users to use this link <http://erena.commentcontournerlacen...> to access an exact copy of the Radio Erena site.

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