

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/ethiopie-two-swedish-and-three-ethiopian-08-09-2011,40944.html>

Africa - Ethiopia

Persecution

Two Swedish and three Ethiopian journalists charged with terrorism

8 September 2011

Reporters Without Borders condemns the charges of “terrorist activities” which, according to Ethiopian government spokesman Shimeles Kemal yesterday, were brought against Swedish journalists **Johan Persson** and **Martin Schibbye** of the *Kontinent* news agency when they appeared before an Addis Ababa court on 6 September.

Two Ethiopian journalists – Wubeshet Taye, the deputy editor of the weekly *Awramba Times*, and **Reyot Alemu**, a columnist for the Amharic-language weekly *Fitih* – were also formally charged under Ethiopia’s anti-terrorism law in a separate case the same day. They are all facing the possibility of life imprisonment.

A third Ethiopian journalist, **Elias Kifle**, the editor of the Washington-based *Ethiopian Review* website, was charged in absentia with terrorism as the other two Ethiopians. He lives in the United States and is the only one of the five journalists who is not currently detained in Ethiopia.

“These charges confirm the fears we voiced when the Ethiopian authorities adopted the anti-terrorism law in the summer of 2009,” Reporters Without Borders said. “Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s government is using the law against journalists who create problems by daring to criticize it or by doing investigative reporting in remote areas where rebels are active. We urge the government to drop these serious but absurd charges and release these four journalists at once.”

Jesper Bengtsson, the president of the Swedish section of Reporters Without Borders added: “I had long hoped that the Ethiopian authorities would realize the absurdity of these terrorism charges. The Swedish government must now ask itself whether the ‘silent diplomacy’ it has been using until now is really the most effective way to obtain their release.”

Schibbye, a reporter, and Persson, a photographer, were arrested on 1 July after illegally entering Ethiopia’s southeastern Ogaden region from Somalia with members of the separatist Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) with the aim of investigating human rights violations in the region.

The Swedish section of Reporters Without Borders responded by creating a support fund for them.

Government spokesman Kemal told the news agency Bloomberg that, as well as “terrorist activities,” they were also accused of “supporting terrorists and providing them with professional aid” and “entering a sovereign country without a valid visa or legal authorization.” During the 6 September hearing, the prosecutor screened a propaganda video in support of the charges, one that was posted on the Caakara News website a few days after their arrest.

The two Ethiopian journalists were arrested in June, Wubeshet on 19 June and Reyot two days later. Reporters Without Borders wrote to the prime minister on 25 August voicing concern about their deteriorating health and calling for their immediate release. The letter also requested an investigation into the conditions in which they have been held.

Photo : Martin Schibbye / Johan Persson (Radio Sweden)

