

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/nearly-three-years-in-prison-for-03-01-2014,45695.html>

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Judicial persecution

## Nearly three years in prison for journalist who got his facts wrong

3 January 2014

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Reporters Without Borders condemns the 33-month jail sentence that a court in the southwestern city of Awasa has imposed on the journalist **Asfaw Berhanu** under article 486/1 of Ethiopia's criminal code, which penalizes starting "false rumours" and thereby "creating a danger of public disturbances."

The case against Berhanu stems from a story he wrote for the 4 September issue of the Addis Ababa-based *Reporter* newspaper, in which he said the government of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Regional State (SNNPR), of which Awasa is the capital, had dismissed its three vice-presidents.

The story turned out to be wrong, with the result that *the Reporter* issued a retraction and an apology in its next issue, on 8 September, and announced that it had fired Berhanu.

"This case has yet again highlighted how the Ethiopian authorities use existing legislation as grounds for behaving in an authoritarian manner towards journalists," Reporters Without Borders said.

"No evidence of the alleged 'public disturbances' was produced in court but imprisoning a journalist is anyway completely unacceptable. The severity of the sentence is also remarkable given that the maximum jail term under article 486/1 is three years."

Reporters Without Borders added: "We urge the judicial authorities to release Berhanu and to overturn his conviction when they hear his appeal."

Ethiopia is ranked 137th out of 179 countries in [the 2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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