

Ethiopian journalist likely held under anti-terrorism law

NEW YORK: Ethiopian authorities have been holding a newspaper columnist incommunicado since Tuesday, 21 June 2011, local journalists told the Committee to Protect Journalists. Reeyot Alemu, a regular contributor to the independent weekly *Feteh*, was expected to spend the next four weeks in preventive detention under what appears to be Ethiopia's sweeping anti-terrorism law.



Alemu is the second journalist picked up and held without charge in less than a week and taken into custody at the federal investigation centre at Maekelawi Prison in the capital, Addis Ababa. Deputy editor Woubshet Taye of the weekly *Awramba Times* has been held since Sunday, according to CPJ research.

Reason for arrest not disclosed

Authorities have not disclosed the reason for Alemu's arrest, but a local lawyer who requested anonymity for fear of government reprisals told CPJ that she has been transferred into preventive detention for a period of 28 days, pending further investigations. This is the minimum period for preventive detention under Ethiopia's 2009 anti-terrorism law, according to legal experts. Ethiopia's code of criminal procedure allows for preventative detention for a minimum of 14 days, they said.

Ethiopian government spokesman Bereket Simon told CPJ on Friday that he was not immediately available to comment. Local journalists said they believe Alemu's arrest could be related to her columns critical of the ruling EPRDF. Alemu's June 17 column in *Feteh* criticised the EPRDF's public fundraising methods for the Abay Dam project, and made parallels between Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, according to local journalists.

Alemu, critical of government

"We condemn the ongoing detention of Reeyot Alemu without charge," said CPJ Africa advocacy coordinator Mohamed Keita. "Since Alemu is frequently critical of the government, we are concerned about the possible use of far-reaching and vaguely worded provisions of Ethiopia's anti-terrorism law to prosecute her. We call on authorities in Addis Ababa to release Alemu immediately."

The sweeping anti-terrorism law criminalises any reporting authorities deemed to "encourage" or "provide moral support" to groups and causes the government to be labeled as "terrorists."

Alemu was picked up at a high school in Addis Ababa where she teaches English, according to local journalists. Police then searched her house, according to the same sources.

Ethiopia has six journalists currently behind bars, behind only Eritrea as the nation detaining the largest number of journalists in Africa. Eritrea holds at least 17 members of the press in its secret prisons, according to CPJ research.

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