

Ethiopia tightens crackdown over news and information sites

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June 10, 2012 (PARIS) - Reporters Without Borders has accused Ethiopia of further intensifying press and internet censorship using sophisticated technology used to selectively block websites.

According to Reporters Without Borders, the state owned Ethiopian Telecommunication Corporation, the country's only internet service provider, during past few weeks has begun blocking access to the Tor network, an online system that allows users to anonymously browse blocked websites.

The so called Deep Packet Inspection (DPI), is an advanced network filtering method mainly used by countries which have bad press freedom records commonly known as "Enemies of the Internet" such as China and Iran.

"We fear that DPI will be misused for surveillance purposes by a government that already subjects the political opposition and privately-owned media to a great deal of harassment" said the group.

Reporters Without Borders urged Ethiopian authorities to refrain from installing and exercising this filtering tool.

Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) was originally developed to block access to porn sites, however some countries abuse the system and instead use it for blocking politically sensitive websites and to quickly gag expression or views of government opponents.

Reporters Without Borders further accused Ethiopia's giant state printer, Berhanena Selam, and other state owned printers, of trying to impose political censorship on media content prior to publication.

The proposed "standard contract for printing" recently circulated by state printers, allows them the right to vet and reject articles prior to printing.

"This new law and the possibility that a Deep Packet Inspection system has been installed could drag Ethiopia back more than two decades as regards to media freedom, to the time of Mengistu's brutal dictatorship in pre 1991 Ethiopia".

"If this standard contract is adopted, we fear it could lead to widespread self-censorship, which is already very common, and to media subservience towards the government. Criticism, independence and media diversity would all suffer, and the vitality of Ethiopian democracy would suffer as well."

According to Reporters Without Borders' Press freedom Index 2011-2012 Ethiopia is listed 127 of 179 countries. Eritrea and North Korea have the most restrictive press environments.

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