

Ethiopia: CPJ calls for end to crack down on Muslim press

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August 10, 2012 (NAIROBI) - The authorities in Ethiopia must stop their crackdown on press coverage of Muslim protests in the capital Addis Ababa and allow Muslim news outlets freely report without fear, a press freedom advocacy group has said.

The New York based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said the recent harassment of Muslim journalists and newspapers are part of an attempt by Ethiopian authorities to quell coverage of the ongoing protests in the capital.

The group urged on Ethiopian authorities releases the recently jailed journalist and allow three banned Muslim news outlets to resume publishing immediately.

"Ethiopia has reached a high level of harassment of the press by attempting to censor coverage of the protests," said CPJ East Africa Consultant Tom Rhodes.

"The harassment of journalists and news outlets covering protests must stop, and Yusuf Getachew should be released immediately."

On July 20, security forces raided the home of Yusuf Getachew, editor of YeMuslimoch Guday (Muslim Affairs), and confiscated his personal belongings including four of his mobile phones, his wife's digital camera and 6,000 birr (US\$334), according to CPJ sources.

Yusuf remains Jailed at Maekelawi Federal Detention Center three weeks now, and is charged with treason and incitement to violence.

Addis Ababa has for months been a scene of Muslim protests who complain government interference in religious affairs. An allegation Addis Ababa denies.

Ethiopian authorities say the Muslim protesters are inspired by extremists' thoughts and wish to turn nation into an Islamic state.

Following clashes with police during the first days of Ramadan, the federal police accused the group of having hidden political mission.

Police said the group of protesters are using the question of religion as a cover to meet own political agenda.

Dozens of protesters were arrested after demonstration during the Africa union Summit held in Addis last month. They were accused of deliberately inciting violence to disrupt the AU Assembly.

Ethiopian Muslims are estimated to represent around 40 percent of the country's 81 million dominantly-Christian population.

International press freedom groups have long been accusing the horn of African nation of intensifying censorship on press freedom and political dissidents by using vague and broadly defined Anti-terrorism proclamation and other "legal weapons" to silence critical reporting.

Recently Ethiopian authorities blocked the publication of some 30,000 copies of a prominent independent newspaper, Fetehe, after the weekly paper had contents covering the health situations of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who had been receiving treatment in Europe over unspecified illness.

Ethiopia officials said publication of the weekly paper was blocked on grounds of "inciting national insecurity and endangering the government and the public,"

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