

CPJ: Ethiopia briefly detains VOA correspondent

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October 6, 2012 (ADDIS ABABA) – Police in Ethiopia on Friday briefly detained voice of America correspondent while she was covering demonstrations by the Muslim community in the capital, a press freedom advocacy group, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said on Saturday.

Hundreds of Ethiopian Muslims on Friday protested at Addis Ababa's Anwar Mosque - following their noon prayer - against what they said were in protest to alleged government interference in Islamic Council elections scheduled for Sunday.

VOA reporter, Marthe Van Der Wolf, was grabbed by police and was taken to police station where the journalist was ordered to delete her recorded interviews, and then she was released without charge; CPJ said referring to sources from local journalists.

The New York based press freedom group called on Ethiopian authorities to stop their harassment of journalists covering Muslim related issues and intimidation against citizens who give interview to reporters about sensitive religious, ethnic, and political issues.

"We urge the government's leadership to set a new tone of tolerance and halt the bullying tactics of the past," said CPJ East Africa Consultant Tom Rhodes.

"Citizens should be allowed to voice their opinions to journalists without fearing arrest or intimidation, and reporters should be allowed to cover even those events the government dislikes."

Former VOA correspondent Peter Heinlein was similarly detained last May, while he was covering Muslim protest. He was then accused of "illegal reporting".

Following the latest incident, VOA released a statement condemning the harassment and obstruction and said the incident was "designed to prevent journalists from doing their job."

Ethiopia which prides itself as a symbol of religious tolerance, has for over a year been a scene of unprecedented Muslim protests who complain government interference in religious affairs.

Ethiopian authorities deny the allegations and instead accuse the Muslim protesters of trying to turn the nation into an Islamic state being inspired by some extremists' thoughts.

Police on July 19 arrested some Muslim leaders in accusation of attempts to incite violent demonstrations in the capital. News outlets reporting on the protests of the Muslims were also banned, according to CPJ research.

CPJ has in August expresses its concern on attempts of Ethiopian authorities to quell coverage of the ongoing Muslim protests in the capital and called for a halt to the crackdown.

According to CPJ research, with six journalists in jail, Ethiopia is the second leading jailer of journalists in Africa, next to neighboring Eritrea,

Ethiopian Muslims make up around 35 percent of the country's 81 million dominantly-Christian population.

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