

RSF launches probe over jamming of exiled Eritrean Radio Station

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November 9, 2012 (PARIS) - An international press freedom advocacy group, said on Thursday that it has launched investigation over the acts of piracy perpetrated against an independent Eritrean satellite Radio broadcaster, ERINA.

The Paris-based Reporters Without Borders in a statement said that it has filed a complaint with the public prosecutor in Paris on 6 November to probe the repeated sabotage that put the station off air for months.

“Radio Erena’s programmes can no longer be heard by Eritreans living in Eritrea because its satellite broadcasting has been paralyzed for more than three months,” Reporters Without Borders said.

The group’s complaint alleged “disruption of over-the-air broadcasting by an authorized service” and “disruption of an automated data processing system”.

Being based in Paris, RSF argued that Radio Erena operates under a convention ratified by France’s Higher Council for Broadcasting (CSA) and accordingly a judicial investigation has to be launched in France to hunt down those behind the conspiracy.

“We have done this because we want to shed light on all the circumstances surrounding this piracy, including where the jamming is coming from and who ordered it” it further said.

The first jamming against ERINA radio followed the station broadcasting an interview last August with an Ethiopian communication minister, Bereket Simon that covered a number of sensitive political and economic issues including development of the Ethiopian economy and on relations between rivals Ethiopia and Eritrea who fought a border war between 1998-2000 and who since remain at loggerheads over their unresolved border dispute.

After the interview went on air, the Eritrean government in Asmara immediately accused the Paris-based radio station of “inciting its listeners to acts of violence hostile to Eritrean government representatives”.

The radio station however dismissed the allegations and argued the program did not intend to make calls for violence or disorder.

According to RSF, preliminary investigations against the piracy directly targeting the Radio Erena signal has both times come from inside Eritrea.

“Geolocation indicates that the pirate transmission jamming the signal originates from within Eritrea. The government must be doing this in order to gag an independent broadcaster it clearly finds very irritating” the group said adding “But President Issaias Afewerki’s government will not get away with it. The complaint that we have filed points out that this piracy is completely illegal”.

Currently Radio Erena is forced to broadcasting on the Internet, but only the Eritrean Diaspora can access the web broadcasts because there is limited access and less developed service of Internet in Eritrean.

ERINA which was launched by Reporters Without Borders in 2009, is the only source of independent news in the common language of citizens inside Eritrea and overseas.

With at least 30 Eritrean journalists held locked up behind bars without charge, international press and human right groups have long labeled the secretive Red Sea nation as one of the world's top press freedom violators and Africa's leading jailer for journalists.

The country is ranked even lower than North Korea in the Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

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