

AI INDEX: AFR 25/09/98

EMBARGOED UNTIL 0001 HRS GMT 23 APRIL

MEDIA ADVISORY

ETHIOPIA

Five years on – repression of journalists unrelenting

Amnesty International is launching today a new report on the detention of journalists in Ethiopia. The report highlights the Ethiopian Government's recently intensified attacks against the private press which have put it at the forefront of repression of the media in Africa, despite its claim to welcome a free and critical press.

More than 200 editors and reporters from the new independent private press have been arrested at various times since 1993 just for writing or publishing articles critical of the government. They were detained under the 1992 Press Law which, with its vaguely-defined criminal offences, has paved the way to harsh government-supported action by police and courts.

There are currently 16 journalists in prison in Addis Ababa. Most have been detained for some months but without being formally charged. Dozens more journalists arrested in the past year were provisionally released but could still face prosecution and imprisonment. In 1998 alone there have been at least 14 new arrests, including an unprecedented attack on *Tobia* newspaper.

While there is no open ban on newspapers or journalists in Ethiopia, Amnesty International's report documents a deliberate pattern of suppression -- and the government's refusal to change this to meet consistent international criticism. The report details:

- How the Press Law -- heralded as a "Proclamation to provide for the Freedom of the Press" -- has been used as a weapon against press criticism and contravenes international standards relating to press freedom.
- Cases of journalists imprisoned on account of articles criticizing the government.
- Other violations against detained journalists. Not only are journalists often detained unlawfully after their arrest, serious questions arise over their treatment in custody and the fairness of the court hearings and trials.

The report concludes with recommendations and calls on the Ethiopian authorities to immediately release all journalists who are prisoners of conscience, ensure that journalists can practise their profession without fear of arbitrary detention, and revise the Press Law to conform to the Constitution and international standards of freedom of expression. ENDS.../

For a copy of the 16-page report, "*Ethiopia: Journalists in prison - press freedom under attack*" (AI Index: AFR 25/10/98) or to arrange an interview, please contact the Eastern Africa Research Team: +44 171 413 5611/5625 or the Press Office: +44 171 413 5566. *ISDN line available.*