

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ADVISORY

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Amnesty International report on growing repression in Ethiopia

“The scale of arrests and prosecutions are indicative of a new level of repression and send a chilling message to opposition politicians and journalists in Ethiopia – self censor or risk incarceration,” Claire Beston, Amnesty International’s Ethiopia researcher.

At least 114 Ethiopian opposition politicians and journalists have been arrested in the course of their legitimate activities since March 2011. By November, 107 of these detainees were charged on the basis of alleged involvement with terrorist groups.

The sheer numbers involved in this wave of arrests represents the most far-reaching crackdown on freedom of expression seen in many years in Ethiopia.

On **16 December at 00.01** GMT Amnesty International will release the report **Dismantling Dissent: Intensified crackdown on free speech in Ethiopia** which provides a comprehensive analysis of the arrests, charges and pre-trial proceedings.

- Amnesty International believes that all the journalists and opposition members cited in this report were arrested primarily because of their legitimate and peaceful criticism of the government.
- Much of the evidence listed against the defendants in the charge sheets involves activities that do not appear to amount to terrorism or criminal wrongdoing, rather that calls for peaceful protest are being interpreted as acts of terrorism.
- Many of the detainees complained, including in court, that they experienced torture in detention and interrogation. Many were reportedly forced to sign confessions or incriminating evidence. Almost all the detainees were denied access to lawyers and family members in the initial stages of detention.
- The trials have become deeply politicized owing to the interest of senior government officials including the Prime Minister who declared in the national parliament that all the defendants are guilty.
- Amnesty International believes the individuals will not receive a fair trial and will be convicted for exercising their right to freedom of expression. Therefore, systematic trial monitoring is essential.
- The Prime Minister has publicly threatened to carry out further arrests.

Amnesty International experts are available for interview live or pre-recorded at any point during the ongoing mass trials.

For further information, a copy of the report or to arrange an interview please contact Katy Pownall on +44 (0)207 413 5729 or email on katy.pownall@amnesty.org