



Ethiopia threatens journalist with solitary confinement

April 10, 2013

His Excellency Berhan Hailu
Minister of Justice
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Dear Minister Birhan Hailu,

We are writing to bring to your attention the case of Ethiopian journalist and teacher Reeyot Alemu, whose health has deteriorated since her imprisonment in June 2011 on terrorism charges and who is now being threatened with solitary confinement. The Ethiopian Ministry of Justice has publicly subscribed to a vision in which "human and democratic rights are respected," yet Reeyot's full human rights are being denied to her in Kality Prison.

The Ethiopian High Court [sentenced \(/2012/01/ethiopia-sentences-blogger-to-death-2-journalists.php\)](#) Reeyot, a columnist for the now-defunct independent weekly *Feteh*, to 14 years in prison on January 2012 under the country's [anti-terrorism \(/blog/2011/06/in-ethiopia-anti-terrorism-law-chills-reporting-on.php\)](#) law. In August 2012, the Supreme Court acquitted her on two counts, but upheld the charge against her of participation in the promotion or communication of a terrorist act, and [reduced \(/2012/08/ethiopian-appeals-court-reduces-sentence-of-reeyot.php\)](#) her sentence to five years.

Prison authorities have threatened Reeyot with solitary confinement for two months as punishment for alleged bad behavior toward them and threatening to publicize human rights violations by prison guards, according to sources close to the journalist who spoke to the International Women's Media Foundation on condition of anonymity. CPJ has independently verified the information. Reeyot has also been denied access to adequate medical treatment after she was diagnosed with a tumor in her breast, the sources said.

We would like to draw your attention to the 2011 report by Juan E. Méndez, the United Nations special rapporteur on torture, in which he urged the prohibition of "the imposition of solitary confinement as punishment--either as part of a judicially imposed sentence or a disciplinary measure." We would also remind you that Ethiopia is a signatory to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and is legally bound to uphold these principles.

As a current member of the United Nations Human Rights Council and a signatory to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Ethiopia has committed itself to upholding the human rights of all of its citizens. This includes the right to freedom of expression and speech, as well as protection from cruel and inhumane forms of punishment such as solitary confinement.

All of the charges against Reeyot were based on her journalistic activities--emails she had received from pro-opposition discussion groups and reports and photographs she had sent to opposition news sites. Reeyot, who [received](http://iwmf.org/honoring-courage/courage-in-journalism-awards/press-release-2012-courage-winners-announcement-5-3.aspx) (<http://iwmf.org/honoring-courage/courage-in-journalism-awards/press-release-2012-courage-winners-announcement-5-3.aspx>) the International Women's Media Foundation Courage in Journalism Award in 2012, has covered key developmental issues in Ethiopia such as poverty, democratic opposition, and gender equality.

The prison sentence against Reeyot for performing her duties and exercising her rights as a journalist to ask questions and express opinions calls into question Ethiopia's commitment to the democratic values and human rights the country claims to uphold.

We urge you to fulfill Ethiopia's promise to build a humane and democratic state by withdrawing the threat of solitary confinement against Reeyot and ensuring her access to adequate medical care. No journalists should face detention or imprisonment in the exercise of their duty.

Yours sincerely,

Joel Simon
Executive Director

CC List:

Shiferaw Tekle-Mariam, minister of federal affairs of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia

Girma Birru Geda, ambassador of Ethiopia to the United States

Donald Booth, ambassador of the United States to Ethiopia

Lieselore Cyrus, ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Ethiopia

Greg Dorey, ambassador of the United Kingdom to Ethiopia

Xavier Marcha, head of the European Union Delegation to Ethiopia

Juan E. Méndez, special rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, U.N. Human Rights Council

Claudio Grossman, chairperson, United Nations Committee against Torture

Firmin Edouard Matoko, UNESCO representative to Ethiopia

Pansy Tlakula, special rapporteur on freedom of expression, African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights

Med S.K. Kaggwa, special rapporteur on prisons and conditions of detention, African Commission on Human and

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Reine Alapini-Gansou, commissioner and special rapporteur of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Margaret Sekaggya, U.N. special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Arnold Tsunga, director, Africa Program, International Commission of Jurists

Antoine Bernard, chief executive officer, International Federation for Human Rights

Berhane Melka, head of Federal Prison Administration, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Alana Barton, program manager, International Women's Media Foundation, United States

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