

# Pen International

Promoting Literature, Defending Freedom of Expression

## **News: ETHIOPIA: Swedish journalists Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson released**

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The Writers in Prison Committee (WiPC) of PEN International welcomes the release (11 September 2012) of the Swedish journalists Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson; Schibbye and Persson had been in the Ethiopian prison system since July 2011. We also call on the Ethiopian authorities to free the blogger Eskinder Nega and the journalists Woubshet Taye and Reeyot Alemu.

Martin Schibbye and Johan Persson were arrested on 1 July 2011 in Ethiopia's Ogaden region, following a battle between Ethiopian forces and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The journalists had entered the country illegally on an assignment and were investigating allegations of human rights violations linked to the activities of the Swedish oil company Lundin Oil. However, the ONLF is regarded by Ethiopia as a terrorist organization and Persson and Schibbye were charged using anti-terror legislation. Both denied any involvement in terrorism.

On 26 December 2011. The two journalists were found guilty of entering the country illegally and of 'supporting terrorism.' Both were sentenced to 11 years in prison. The journalists chose to forego an appeal and instead submitted an application to the Ministry of Justice Pardon Board. They received a pardon on 10 September and were released from Kality Prison in Addis Ababa the following day.

The WiPC and other free expression organizations campaigned for the release of Schibbye and Persson, arguing that there were serious concerns about the fairness of the trial, which saw both political interference by the Prime Minister, and the use of fabricated evidence in court. For a full account of the case, please see [Ethiopia: Persson and Schibbye](#)

Ethiopia's anti-terror legislation is draconian. Actions classified as 'terrorist' would often not even be considered crimes outside of Ethiopia. Since November 2011, at least 11 journalists have been charged with dubious terrorism-related offences. Those still in prison include:

- Journalist and blogger, Eskinder Nega, convicted on terrorism-related charges on 27 June 2012 and sentenced to 18 years in prison.
- Journalist Reeyot Alemu, a contributor to the independent weekly Fetehe, convicted on terror-related charges and sentenced to 14 years in prison on 19 January 2012.
- Journalist for the now-defunct Awramba Times, Woubshet Taye, convicted on terror-charges and sentenced to 14 years in prison on 19 January 2012.

Please Write:

Welcoming the release of the Swedish journalists Johan Persson and Martin Schibbye;

Calling for the immediate release of Eskinder Nega, Reeyot Alemu and Woubshet Taye, expressing concern that they have been convicted and sentenced purely in relation to their peaceful journalistic activity, in violation of the right to freedom of expression protected under international human rights treaties to which Ethiopia is a party, including the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

Appeals to:

Minister of Justice  
 Berhanu Hailu  
 Ministry of Justice  
 P.O. Box 1370  
 Addis Ababa  
 Ethiopia  
 Fax: +251 11 551 7775/ 7755  
 Email: [justice@telecom.net.et](mailto:justice@telecom.net.et), [ministry-justice@telecom.net.et](mailto:ministry-justice@telecom.net.et)  
 Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs  
 Mr Seyoum Mesfin  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
 PO Box 393  
 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
 Fax: +251 11 551 43 00  
 Email: [mfa.addis@telecom.net.et](mailto:mfa.addis@telecom.net.et)  
 Salutation: Dear Minister

Please also send a copy of your letter to your nearest Ethiopian diplomatic representative (the contact details for some Ethiopian embassies are listed here: <http://www.embassyworld.com/embassy/Ethiopia/Ethiopia1.html>).

\*\*\*Please send appeals immediately. Check with International PEN if sending appeals after 13 November 2012\*\*\*

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