

# HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

**HRCO****HRCO stands for democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights**

*Arrest of journalists highlights continued crackdown on independent media in Ethiopia, says the Human Rights Council of Ethiopia.*

19 November 2013, Addis Ababa: While the Human Rights Council (HRCO) welcomes the release of journalists Million Degnew and Getachew Worku, we remain deeply concerned about the arbitrary nature of their arrest and the continuing clampdown on freedom of the press in Ethiopia.

Two editors of the leading independent Amharic weekly *Ethio-Mihdar*, Million Degnew and Getachew Worku, were released on bail on 6 November 2013 after having been arrested and detained without charges for several days. The arrest occurred after the newspaper published an article in October about corruption in the town administration of Legetafo, 21 kilometers northeast of capital Addis Ababa.

“Such continued judicial harassment leveled against independent journalists from *Ethio-Mihdar* is emblematic of the government’s absolute intolerance for independent dissent. The arrests severely undermine Ethiopia’s constitutional and international obligations to protect and promote the rights to freedom of expression,” said HRCO’s Chairman, Isaac Gebremariam.

According to the journalists, on 2 November, police officers arrested Million Degnew, the general manager of the newspaper as well as the paper’s secretary Muna Amedi at their office in Addis Ababa. The arrests were carried out without a Court warrant or police summons. They were brought to the police station in Menen, northeast of Addis Ababa, where Muna Amedi was released half an hour later. Getachew Worku, who was absent from the office at the time of the arrest, was summoned by phone to go to the police station. Worku refused to comply and went by himself to the police station on Monday 4. November.

Million Degnew was held in custody for 4 days without being presented to a judge although the Federal Constitution of Ethiopia guarantees arrested persons the right to be brought to Court within 48 hours of their arrest.

On Tuesday, the two journalists were taken to a room of the police station where a judge and prosecutor addressed them in Oromia language although they are Amharic speakers. They were told that their trial would be in another 4 days. However, the next day, the two men were brought before a regular Court. The judge granted them a release on bail despite the fact that the journalists had not petitioned for bail. The highly unconventional procedures related above are further indications of the violations of their fundamental due process rights.

According to the journalists, this incident is not the first time that the authorities have harassed *Ethio-Mihdar* for its independent reporting. Degnew and Worku are facing charges of civil defamation by the public University of Hawassa over an article alleging corruption in the university’s administration. In May 2013, another editor of the newspaper, Muluken was

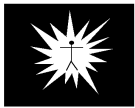
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**HRCO has an observer status in the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, is a member of World Organization Against Torture and is also a corresponding member of the International Federation of Human Rights.**



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detained for 10 days while reporting on evictions of farmers from their land in northwest Ethiopia. He was later released without charge.

“Since 2011, 12 journalists have been convicted under provisions of the country’s 2009 Anti-terrorism law. Ethiopia is on the verge of joining a distinct group of countries with no independent media ”, said Isaac Gebremariam. HRCO urges the government of Ethiopia to immediately and unconditionally release all detained journalists and refrain from further unwarranted restriction on the right to freedom of expression.

Notes to editors:

The Human Rights Council (HRCO) is Ethiopia's first non-governmental human rights organization. Since its establishment on October 10, 1991, HRCO has maintained an ambitious mandate to monitor, promote and defend human rights and the rule of law. Among HRCO's core program activities are the provision of legal aid, rights-related research, human rights education and human rights monitoring, investigating and reporting.

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