

**Ethiopia UPR: States must not ignore reality for free expression in**

**Ethiopia**

**Oral Statement**

***Check Against Delivery***

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Delivered by Andrew Smith, ARTICLE 19

Mr. President,

ARTICLE 19 notes with appreciation that Ethiopia has accepted recommendations to implement fully its Constitutional protections for freedoms of expression, assembly and association, as well as to encourage political debate ahead of the 2015 elections.

However, this apparent openness to cooperation is in stark contrast to the reality on the ground in Ethiopia, where an unprecedented crackdown on freedom of expression continues to escalate in advance of the coming elections.

During its UPR, Ethiopia denied that any journalists are in prison. This is not true. ARTICLE 19 has documented that the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation has been used since its enactment in 2009 to prosecute 22 journalists and bloggers. The Proclamation defines "terrorism" so broadly that it encompasses any exercise of legitimate dissent that the Government wishes to crush. The Zone 9 Bloggers, Soliana Shimelis (charged in absentia), Atnaf Berahane, Mahlet Fantahun, Natnael Feleke, Befeqadu Hailu, Zelalem Kiberet, Abel Wabela, together with 3 journalists, Edom Kassaye, Tesfalem Weldeyes and Asmamaw Hailegorgis of Addis Guday magazine, are the latest victims in this regard, charged with "terrorism" for exercising their rights to freedom of expression.

The apparatus of censorship in Ethiopia is vast, and freedom of expression cannot be guaranteed in Ethiopia until substantial reforms are made to the Criminal Code and the Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2009. Defamation must be decriminalised, provisions to shield public officials from criticism repealed, and restrictions to supposedly protect national security must be brought in line with international standards on freedom of expression.

The media are also stifled; there is no independence or pluralism. The Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority is appointed by and financially dependent upon the government as a consequence of the Broadcasting Service Proclamation of 2007. The Freedom of the Mass Media and Access to Information Proclamation of 2009 requires printed media to be

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licensed, all print media to be registered, and broad powers to impound periodicals and books. The Internet is not a safe haven; blocking websites to shut down debate is routine.

Mr President,

Civil society organisations are crucial change agents, essential for scrutinising the actions of the Ethiopian government against the international human rights commitments it has made, including here. ARTICLE 19 is therefore profoundly disappointed at the rejection of Mexico's recommendation to eliminate all obstacles to the development of non-governmental organisations, in particular their freedom to access financial resources.

In the absence of progress to protect freedom of expression in Ethiopia since its first UPR, we call on Member States to increase international scrutiny. The rejection by Ethiopia, as a Human Rights Council Member State, of a recommendation to issue a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures to visit the country, must be condemned and seen as emblematic of its disdain for accountability for human rights violations. There must be costs and consequences for this.

Thank you.