

Statement on Violation of Freedom of Expression in Ethiopia

By Arid Lands Institute

Madame chair, ladies and gentlemen

Today, Ethiopia is passing through its darkest age with the prevalence of a political situation devoid of freedom of expression. For the last 20 years, the peoples of Ethiopia have been subjected to such form of rule. The illogic of the regime is to deprive the people from being informed in general and bloc all avenues of alternative sources of information. Thus, the resort to clamping down of the independent press. As such, the government in Addis Ababa has the highest record of imprisoning journalists thus becoming one of the few champions against freedom of expression.

One way of depriving the people of Ethiopia from alternative information is jailing journalists who expressed the slightest criticism of its policies and charge them with terrorism. The government has thus jailed numerous journalists for the last 20 years. This year alone, it has locked four journalists of what is left of the independent print media. The official charge? Terrorism! And what was the alleged terrorist act? Expressing a critique of government policies.

The other form of depriving people from obtaining alternative information is jamming radio and television broadcasts from abroad. In this category fall the Voice of America's Amharic service, the Deutsche Welle Amharic service (Germany) and other broadcasts by the Ethiopian Diaspora.

The third form of depriving the people of alternative information is blocking websites and blogs by the various groups of the Ethiopian Diaspora.

All these efforts to deprive people of information apparently required a huge budget by a government in one of the poorest countries in the world where funds are scarce for development.

In all these deprivations of the right to information, the main tool used is the Anti-terrorism Law that was proclaimed following the defeat of the ruling party in the 2005 elections. In the 2005 election, the ruling party lost miserably that it resorted to massive rigging and stealing of votes. In order to consolidate this state of affairs made fait accomplit to the world, a series of new law were proclaimed. These laws are the Anti-terrorism law, the NGO and press laws. The main purpose of the new press law is to deprive people of alternative information. Today, freedom of expression does not exist in Ethiopia.

The government is bent in depriving the people of alternative information on the one hand and closing all avenues for the repeat of election defeats. In 2010, the ruling party that lost the 2005

elections now claims to have won by 99.6%. To ensure this claim, they had earlier forbidden election monitoring by NGOs.

The government in Addis Ababa is not only at war with its own people but also with international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other organizations concerned with the continuous violations of human rights. The government's image internationally has been tarnished for some time now. It is for no reason that the US based Parade magazine named the prime minister of Ethiopia as the "15th worst dictator in the world".

Madame Chair,

It is a paradox of immense proportion that Ethiopia, as the seat of the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, instead of becoming a pace-setter and example for freedom and democracy, has become a symbol of unfreedom.

Madame Chair,

We strongly urge the ACHPR to send a delegation to Ethiopia and investigate the state of freedom of expression there.

Thank you.