

Stop Violating the Human Rights of Journalists!

67th Special Report

23 October, 2003

Introduction

It is to be recalled that EHRCO has issued reports at different times condemning the imprisonment and harassment of journalists by government security forces. It has also repeatedly appealed that the illegal acts committed by government security forces on journalists are in clear contravention and violation of the basic human rights of citizens.

Article 29 of the FDRE Constitution stipulates in the following Sub Articles that;

1. Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of an art, or through any media of his choice.
4. In the interest of the free flow of information, ideas and opinions that are essential to the functioning of a democratic order, the press shall, as an institution, enjoy legal protection to ensure its operational independence and its capacity to entertain diverse opinions.

Moreover, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights similarly provide those rights. Nevertheless, in utter disregard of these constitutional and international principles, government forces have recently committed an illegal act against a journalist who works for the Amharic weekly, *Ethiop.The*. The details of the human rights violation committed on the journalist are presented as follows:

Ato Araya Tesfa Mariam (the victim) is a resident of Yeka sub-municipality, kebele 06; house number 404. He is 28 years old and is father of a 9-year-old girl. He had been a reporter for The Reporter newspaper from 1996-1998. He has been working with the Ethiop newspaper and magazine since 2002.

Ato Araya told EHRCO that three men who were wearing the Federal Police uniform had made an attempt on his life. According to him, on 1 October 2003 at about 9:30 P.M. he was returning home from work when he saw a car parked at a place where there was no street light. Alerted by the strangeness of the situation, he continued walking to the direction of his home. And when he got close to the car, three men in Federal Police uniform came out of their hiding place in the dark and hit him twice on the head by a ball-pointed iron rod. When he fell to the ground, the men continued to hit him with the iron rod.

While laying on the ground, Ato Araya heard one of the men ordering in Tigrigna, to kill him and the other one responding that he was dead. Then, the attackers went to their car and, put the car's lights on and watched the situation of their victim. Then, they lifted him up, took him to the Abo Bridge and threw him into the riverbed under the bridge. He fell on a rocky ground in the river. The bridge is 5-6 meters high. Afterwards, the three men entered their car and took off. Ato Araya remained unconscious for about half an hour as a result of the injury he sustained by hitting the ground when he was thrown into the river. When he became conscious, he was too weak to be on his feet. He crawled on all fours and managed to reach and knock at the door of a house located on the riverside. The residents of the house opened the door and let Ato Araya in and called his family, as they happen to know him.

The family arrived and reported the situation to Wereda 12 Police Station. The Police reached the area right away and together with the family, took the victim to the Menilik II Hospital at 10:30 P.M. His life

was saved because of the treatment he received at the hospital. He spent the night at the hospital and was discharged at 11:00A.M.the next day after being told to follow up treatment as an out-patient as there was shortage of hospital beds for in-patients.

As a result of the assault, Ato Araya:

-Sustained two skull fractures at the front and at the back.

-He cannot move his body because of the injury in his joints.

-Two of his front teeth are broken.

-The injury on his waist he sustained from the fall has created difficulty of movement moving and sleeping on his side. He needs support to get to and get down from bed.

Some residents of the area told an EHRCO investigation team that on the night in question, they had heard a man crying and when they got out of their residences they saw a Federal Police pick up car parked near the Abo River Bridge with its lights on. The EHRCO investigation team was able to observe on the next day a magazine, a newspaper and other papers belonging to Ato Araya spread here and there under the bridge where the victim was said to have been thrown after he had been assaulted.

According to Ato Araya the cause of the attack is related to weekly articles that have been published by Eyerusalem Araya on the Ethiop newspaper under the title," From what I Gathered From the TPLF Village". Ato Araya told EHRCO that he had been subjected to threats and intimidations by government security personnel in connection with those articles. Since last three months, the security men, assuming that he was the author of the said articles, had been putting intense pressure on him to tell them his sources of the information he used to write the articles. He was requested to show up at the kebele office on 13 September2003 at 9:00 a.m.as he was wanted for questioning by people from the security department. Ato Araya did not show up on that day. The kebele chairman had told him later that the security men had waited for hum and left. The summons that requested Ato Araya to appear at the kebele office is still with him.

On 15 September2003, an unidentified man made a telephone call to Ato Araya's residence and ordered him to go to the office of the Tigray Development Association. When he presented himself at the office, he was informed that he is wanted at the security office located on Bole Road. He went there and met a man who took him to a pizzeria around Meskel Flower. Once they took their seats, the man requested Ato Araya to tell him the names of those people who provide him with information for his newspaper articles. The man also promised him that he would be provided with money and job if he stopped writing on the Ethiop newspaper, which he referred to as "our enemy". In the days that followed, there had been repeated personal and telephone messages by these security people requesting Ato Araya to work and cooperate with them. However, Ato Araya had adamantly refused to do so. Then the threats had become dangerous. Ato Araya remembers one of the security men threatening him by saying "...there are people who can make their voices heard for the free press journalists and for Tewelde et al. Who will be there for you if any harm was to be inflicted on you?"

EHRCO is still following up the situation of the journalist.



The picture above shows the Bridge Ato Araya was thrown from. The arrow on the right shows the direction.



The above two pictures show the injuries Ato Araya sustained from the beatings and the fall.

Conclusion

EHRCO has been monitoring, investigating, issuing and disseminating reports concerning illegal acts committed against freedom of expression as well as the constitutional rights of citizens to gather and disseminate information. It will continue to appeal to government officials and the international community until these attacks on journalists have stopped

Thus, EHRCO once again calls upon government bodies to show their positive stand on the freedom of the press and the rule of law by seeing to it that violations of the rights of journalists are stopped, by bringing the perpetrators to justice and by making sure that the victim gets proper medication attention and compensation. EHRCO also calls upon all those who stand for democracy, peace, the rule of law and respect for human rights to make their respective contributions by writing to the government bodies listed below to give due attention to the matter.

- House of Peoples Representatives
P.O.Box 80001, Fax (252-1) 550900, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- House of Federation
P.O.Box 80001, Fax (252-1) 550722, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Girma Wolde Giorgis, FDRE President
P.O.Box 1030, Fax (252-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Ato Meles Zenawi, FDRE Prime Minister
P.O.Box 1031, Fax, (252-1) 552020, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- H.E. Ato Harka Haroye, FDRE Minister of Justice
P.O.Box 1370, Fax (251-1) 520874, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Federal Police Commissioner
P.O.Box 199, Fax (251-1) 534253 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Addis Ababa Police Commissioner
P.O.Box 5647, Fax (251-1) 56 01 12 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia