

Ethiopian authorities arrest journalist Mesganaw Getachew

Authorities in Ethiopia should unconditionally release journalist Mesganaw Getachew, who was arrested on August 9 after recording an interview outside a court in Addis Ababa, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



PI: Ethiopians follow the news on television at a cafe in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Sunday, June 23, 2019. Ethiopian authorities arrested journalist Mesganaw Getachew on August 9 after he filmed outside a court in Addis Ababa. Credit: CPJ/APPhoto/Mulugeta Ayene.

Mesganaw, who reports for the privately owned *Ethiopia* weekly, was arrested shortly after he interviewed a lawyer, Henok Aklilu, outside the Arada First Instance court in Addis Ababa, and is now facing allegations of contravening Ethiopia's [Anti-Terrorism Proclamation](#), Henok and Mesganaw's editor, Eskinder Nega, told CPJ.

Henok told CPJ that he had just attended a hearing in another case in which a group of people, including two media workers, are also facing anti-terror charges when Mesganaw and others approached him for updates on the case. The journalist recorded the lawyer via a camera installed in his eyeglasses, according to Eskinder and Henok. Eskinder told CPJ that Mesganaw was afraid of harassment if he filmed openly.

Eskinder told CPJ that police at the scene also arrested another person, Adam Wejera, a member of the Balderas Council, a political movement headed by Eskinder that claims to advocate for the rights of Addis Ababa residents. Eskinder said Adam was also filming. Henok said he did not witness this second arrest.

The federal police told CPJ that Mesganaw was arrested for illegally filming within the court compound, while the federal attorney general's office said Mesganaw and Adam are suspected of being part of an attempted coup in the Amhara regional state. Both the police and the attorney general's office said the arrests had nothing to do with journalism.

“The arrest of journalist Mesganaw Getachew, right after he reported on a court case, and the use of an anti-terror law that is a relic of past repression send a message that Ethiopia is reverting to old tools to silence dissent and criticism,” said CPJ Sub-Saharan Africa representative Muthoki Mumo. “We call on authorities to release Mesganaw, stop using the Anti-Terror Proclamation against journalists, and ensure that reforms to the law protect freedom of expression and access to information.”

On August 10, police brought Mesganaw and Adam, who are being tried together, to court, where they requested and were granted 28 days to investigate both on allegations of terrorism, in connection to June 2019 events that the government of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has [described as a failed coup](#) in the Amhara region, Henok, who is also Mesganaw's lawyer, told CPJ. Henok told CPJ that the state has yet to declare its evidence or to formally charge them.

Mesganaw is the latest media worker to be detained in connection to the alleged attempted coup and to face allegations of contravening the Anti-Terror Proclamation, which was under previous governments used to crackdown on political dissent and which is [going through reform](#), with ministers [recently submitting](#) a new draft law to [parliament for consideration](#), according to [CPJ research](#) and media reports.

CPJ last month [documented](#) the arrest and detention of two media workers with the privately owned Amharic language Satellite Radio and Television (ASRAT) media, Berihun Adane and Getachew Ambachew. Henok told CPJ that prior to Mesganaw's arrest, he was briefing the journalist about a hearing connected to the ASRAT media case. CPJ is also investigating whether the arrest of another journalist and Balderas movement member, Elias Gebru, also facing terrorism charges, is connected to his journalism. [Over 200 people](#) were arrested in connection to the June incident, according to [media reports](#).

In an August 19 email, Zinabu Tunu, the spokesperson for the attorney general's office, told CPJ that there was “credible suspicion that [Mesganaw and Adam] have been involved in the conspiracy to topple the regional administration of the Amhara Regional State as well as the death of the Chief of Staff the Armed Forces,” which, according to [reports](#), was one of the assassinations that the government has described as part of the attempted coup. He said the arrests had nothing to do with “opinions they might have expressed or reports that they might have published”.

However, Federal Police Spokesperson Jeylan Abdi said Mesganaw was using an eyeglass camera to film without permission in the court's compound, rousing the suspicion of the police officers who arrested him.

On May 22, police assaulted, arrested, and briefly detained Mesganaw while he was reporting on the demolition of homes in Arat Kilo, a neighbourhood in Addis Ababa, according to [CPJ reporting](#). He was released on bail.