

Bloggers and journalists held without charge beyond 80-day deadline

The six Zone9 bloggers and three journalists held arbitrarily since 25 and 26 April have not been formally charged within the 80-day limit allowed by Ethiopia's draconian terrorism law. The hearings that should have been held on 12 and 14 July to charge them were simply cancelled.



Reporters Without Borders was disappointed but not really surprised to learn that the six bloggers and three journalists were not brought before a judge by the deadline for the completion of the police investigation.

Instead, the police presented the findings of their investigation to the prosecutor behind closed doors, without the defendants or their lawyers being present.

As no official charge has been brought against them, these nine news providers are now being held illegally, even under the terms of the terrorism law, whose tough provisions are designed to suppress all forms of criticism, as journalists have learned to their cost ever since it took effect.

"Coming from the Ethiopian government, this latest affront to due process is sadly no longer a surprise," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"The six Zone9 bloggers and the three journalists arrested with them are now being held in a completely illegal manner, even under Ethiopia's terrorism law, which gives the prosecution every advantage possible to the detriment of the defence. They still have not been charged after nearly three months. Their detention is clearly an act of political intimidation designed to suppress all dissent."

The investigation into the six bloggers and three journalists that the police began after their arrests on suspicion of "working with foreign organizations claiming to defend human rights" has been extended for 28 days twice, on 17 May and 14 June, at the request of the police.

The maximum period under which detainees may be held under the terrorism law without being formally charged is 80 days. For those arrested on 25 April, the deadline expired on Saturday, 12 July. For those arrested on 26 April, it expired on 14 July..

The lawyers representing the bloggers and journalists plan to file a submission alleging violation of the rules governing defence rights. They have kept on demanding the release of their clients on the grounds that they are being held illegally and that there is clearly no evidence against them.

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