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Freedom of the Press 2013 - Eritrea

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2013 Scores

Press Status: Not Free

Press Freedom Score: 94

Legal Environment: 30

Political Environment: 40

Economic Environment: 24

Eritrea continued to rank among the worst media environments in the world in 2012. It has lacked any form of privately owned media since 2001, when the government banned the once-vibrant private press. Key editors and journalists were imprisoned, and the crackdown later extended to state-employed journalists.

The constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and of the press, but these rights are ignored in practice. The 1996 Press Proclamation Law mandates that all newspapers and journalists be licensed. It also stipulates that publications must be submitted for government approval prior to release, and prohibits reprinting articles from banned publications.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 28 journalists were imprisoned in Eritrea as of December 2012, the fourth largest number in the world after Iran, Turkey, and China. Nine have been in prison since 2001, and almost all are being held incommunicado. There is little information on the condition of those imprisoned, though unconfirmed reports indicate that several jailed journalists are in very poor health or have died in detention. In February and March 2011, four journalists working for the government radio and television station, Dimtsi Hafash, were arrested and imprisoned; the government has yet to disclose the charges against them. Journalist Tesfalidet Mebrahtu, also with Dimtsi Hafash, was arrested at the same time for allegedly planning to flee the country, but was released in 2012.

Most independent or critical journalists have left the country due to intimidation and arbitrary imprisonment, and those who remain engage in self-censorship. The minister of information, Ali Abdu, reportedly fled into exile in late 2012 while on a trip in Europe. Individuals who seek refuge abroad have come under continued pressure. In December 2012, Eritrean journalists Abdalal Mahmoud Hiabu and Haroun Adam of the Sudan-based Eritrean Centre for Media Services were detained without charge by Sudanese authorities. They remained in custody at year's end.

Foreign journalists are not able to freely enter the country and are generally not welcome unless they

agree to report favorably about the regime. There have been occasional reports from journalists operating undercover, and President Isaias Afwerki has granted interviews to foreign broadcasters such as Sweden's TV4 and the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera. However, it remained almost impossible for foreign journalists to report from within the country in 2012.

The three newspapers, two television stations, and three radio stations that operate in the country remain under state control. Individuals are allowed to purchase satellite dishes and subscribe to international media, though the importation of foreign publications without prior approval is not permitted. Several radio stations run by Eritreans abroad are attempting to reach listeners in Eritrea, including opposition-aligned stations broadcasting from Ethiopia and Radio Erena, which broadcasts via satellite and over the radio from Paris. In mid-2012 there were reports that Radio Erena's signal was being jammed, and as of the end of the year the station was still not accessible on satellite, although it was streaming on the internet.

The government requires all internet service providers to use state-controlled internet infrastructure. Many websites managed by Eritrean exiles are blocked, as is the video-sharing website YouTube. Authorities are believed to monitor e-mail communications, although internet use is limited, with just 0.8 percent of the population able to access the medium in 2012.

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