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Ethiopia: Surge in Arrests of Journalists, Media Workers

Clampdown Stifles Independent Voices Ahead of Anticipated National Elections

(Nairobi) – [Ethiopian](#) security forces have arbitrarily arrested several journalists and media professionals since August 2025, Human Rights Watch said today. The authorities should end their harassment of independent journalists and immediately release all those detained for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and opinion.

“The Ethiopian authorities’ renewed efforts to muzzle independent reporting are all about preventing public scrutiny of the government,” said [Laetitia Bader](#), deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The authorities should stop targeting journalists and media workers and immediately release those unjustly detained for their work.”

Most recently, on September 3, [federal police and plainclothes security officers](#) in Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa, arrested Tigist Zerihun, Mintamir Tsegaw, and Eshete Assefa, who work for [Sheger FM 102.1](#), a private radio station. The arrests followed their August 29 broadcast of a [report](#) on Ethiopian health care workers.

The Ethiopian Media Authority, a regulatory body authorized to issue sanctions and revoke licenses of news outlets, [had ordered the station](#) to remove the broadcast, accusing it of bias and inciting violence, [a media report said](#). On August 30, the station complied, but the security forces still arrested the journalists.

Eshete was released the same day, while Tigist and Mintamer remain in detention in the Federal Police Crime Investigation Bureau. At their

September 8 court hearing, the police requested additional time to investigate. The court granted them bail on September 17, but they are not known to have been released. Police [appealed](#) the lower court's decision to the Federal Supreme Court, with the appeal hearing scheduled for September 22.

On August 13, masked gunmen, some allegedly in military uniform, [abducted](#) Yonas Amare, a senior editor working for the privately owned newspaper The Reporter, at his home in Koye Fiche town, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. The media reported that a witness saw masked men confiscate cell phones and order other residents to go indoors before taking Yonas away. The Addis Ababa Police Commission denied he was in their custody, as did the Federal Police Commission, [The Reporter said](#). His whereabouts remained unknown for eight days until his release on August 22.

Under Ethiopian and international law, the arrest or detention of someone by the authorities followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealing their fate or whereabouts is an enforced disappearance. The authorities should carry out an effective, independent, and transparent investigation into the apparent enforced disappearance of Yonas Amare, Human Rights Watch said.

On August 5, regional police in Ethiopia's Somali region [arbitrarily detained](#) Khadar Mohamed Ismail, a reporter with Somali Regional Television, a government-owned station, after he published a video showing people complaining about the regional government on the station's social media page. Khadar was brought before a court on August 9, but more than one month later he has not reappeared. A relative said he remains in detention without charge.

On August 11, security forces detained Abdulsemed Mohammed, a radio host in Addis Ababa. They held him incommunicado until his release on August 22.

The arbitrary detention of at least six media professionals, including holding them incommunicado or in prolonged detention without charge, renews concerns about media freedom in Ethiopia, Human Rights Watch said. Everyone's right to a free and vibrant media is even more critical in advance of national elections slated for 2026.

Government threats to journalists and news outlets have been increasing since early 2025. In March, seven journalists from the privately owned Ethiopian Broadcasting Service (EBS) [were detained](#) on terrorism allegations after the station aired an episode in which a woman said Ethiopian soldiers had raped her in 2020, according to [media reports](#).

The woman later withdrew her allegations on a state-owned channel, and the EBS founder reportedly apologized. Though all the journalists were

later released, [two are awaiting trial for disseminating hateful information](#). The country's media regulatory body [suspended](#) the program for broadcasting false information that could mislead the public, the Committee to Protect Journalists [reported](#).

In April, Addis Ababa police [raided](#) the offices of Addis Standard, a popular private news outlet based at an employee's home. During the office raid, police [took](#) two employees in for questioning and confiscated several electronic devices, which the outlet alleged were implanted with "sophisticated surveillance malware" upon their return.

In June, a plainclothes intelligence officer [detained](#) Tesfalem Woldeyes, a prominent journalist and editor-in-chief of the independent outlet Ethiopia Insider on allegations of "disseminating false information." He was [released on bail](#) on June 13.

The latest crackdown on independent media followed parliament's approval of [widely criticized amendments](#) to the country's [2021 media law](#) on [April 17](#).

The new law increases opportunities for political interference, including by shifting major responsibilities previously handled by the board of the media regulatory body to the body's director general, whom the prime minister appoints. The law also removes a ban on political party affiliation for board members and eliminates participation of civil society and media groups to the board.

Government officials have contributed to a hostile media atmosphere. In a [June interview](#), Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed accused the media of serving their own interests over the nation's and contended that there was no such thing as independent media in the world.

The police have also [relied on overly broad definitions](#) under the [2020 Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation](#) to investigate journalists on vague allegations and charges and suppress critical reporting. In recent years, the government deported two foreign correspondents, while dozens of Ethiopian journalists [have fled](#) the country.

Nongovernmental organizations that openly advocate for the safety of journalists have also come under attack. The authorities [have suspended](#) prominent human rights groups, [intimidated and surveilled](#) human rights defenders, and [have been considering](#) sweeping amendments to the 2019 civil society law, which would be a further blow to the country's increasingly limited civic space.

The government's recent amendments to the media law, and potentially the civil society law, indicate a return to authoritarian practices that would

chill freedom of speech and opinion, Human Rights Watch said.

On World Press Freedom Day in May, 14 diplomatic missions [issued a statement](#) raising concerns about shrinking press freedoms in the country. Ethiopia's regional and international partners should be more regularly outspoken in condemning the government's assault on independent media and civil society groups.

"Ethiopia's media and civil society should be contributing to the upcoming elections so that they are free and fair, not be fearing arrest and engaging in self-censorship," Bader said. "The authorities still have the time to change course and end their all-out assault against journalists and independent voices."

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