



During the 2005 crackdown, an Ethiopian officer prevents a photographer from taking pictures of a police sweep.

Ethiopian High Court acquits eight journalists on antistate crimes

New York, April 9, 2007-Ethiopia's High Court today acquitted and set free eight editors and publishers of Amharic-language newspapers who have been jailed

on antistate charges since a massive [November 2005 government crackdown](#), according to local journalists and media reports.

“We welcome the verdict of the High Court and the long overdue release of these journalists,” said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon. “We urge the High Court to dismiss all remaining charges against the other journalists still detained.”

Publisher Sisay Agena of *Ethiop* and *Abay*; publisher Serkalem Fasil and columnist Eskinder Nega of *Menilik*, *Asqual*, and *Satanaw*; editor-in-chief Nardos Meaza of *Satanaw*; publisher Zekarias Tesfaye and deputy editor Dereje Habtewold of *Netsanet*; deputy editor Feleke Tibebu of *Hadar*; and publisher Fasil Yenealem of *Addis Zena* were acquitted of three criminal charges and ordered released from Kality prison on the outskirts of the capital, Addis Ababa, according to local sources. The publications have been banned since the crackdown.

The journalists had been on trial with dozens of opposition leaders and other journalists on antistate charges linked to their coverage of deadly unrest in the aftermath of May 2005 parliamentary elections. The High Court also tossed out genocide charges, rejecting the government's claim that press coverage had harmed the Tigrayan ethnic group, which forms the base of the ruling EPRDF party, according to the same sources. The charges carried a possible death penalty.

Today's ruling followed Thursday's acquittal of Kifle Mulat, the exiled president of the banned Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association, of the single charge of “outrage to the constitution and the constitutional order” over his organization's criticism of the government crackdown, according to local media reports.

At least nine other journalists remain behind bars on similar charges, according to CPJ research. Ethiopia remains Africa's second leading jailer of journalists, behind only Eritrea.

The acquitted journalists had been charged with “outrages against the constitution or constitutional order,” “impairment of the defensive power of the state,” and “attempted genocide,” after the publications of [editorials critical of the government's conduct](#) surrounding the May 2005 parliamentary elections, according to CPJ research. More than 190 people were killed when the government crushed post-election protests after the opposition contested the victory of the ruling party, according to international news reports.

Fassil gave birth to a child while in prison. Her husband, Nega, was also acquitted on three additional charges connected to his alleged political activism.