

# In Ethiopia, Zone 9 bloggers acquitted of terrorism charges

The Committee to Protect Journalists welcomes the acquittal by an Ethiopian court of four Zone 9 bloggers charged with terrorism.



Abel Wabella, Atnaf Berhane, and Natnail Feleke, jailed since April 2014, are scheduled to be released today, while exiled blogger Soleyana S. Gebremichael was acquitted in absentia, news reports said. A fifth Zone 9 blogger, Befekadu Hailu, was acquitted of terrorism charges but is being held on charges of inciting violence, the reports said. His bail hearing is set for Wednesday.

"We are elated that the terrorism charges against the Zone 9 bloggers are dropped and urge the court to dismiss the criminal charges against Befekadu Hailu," said CPJ's East Africa representative, Tom Rhodes. "Ethiopia should be listening to critical voices to strengthen democracy and development, not jailing them. We call on authorities to immediately release all other journalists imprisoned in relation to their work."

In July, five other journalists and Zone 9 bloggers who were jailed in the same case--editor Asmamaw Hailegiorgis; freelancers Edom Kassaye and Tesfalem Waldyes; and Zone 9 bloggers Mahlet Fantahum and Zelalem Kibret--were released from prison. In late 2014, Ethiopian authorities were holding at least 17 journalists in prison, including the Zone 9 bloggers, in relation to their work, according to CPJ's prison census. Many have been released. Ethiopia is ranked fourth on CPJ's list of the 10 Most Censored countries.

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