



FREEDOM NOW

Honorary Chair  
The Most Reverend Desmond M. Tutu

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**Media Release**

**Five Ethiopian Bloggers, Journalists Released from Prison**

Washington, D.C.: Freedom Now and the Ethiopia Human Rights Project are very happy to announce that five individuals associated with the Zone 9 blogger group have been released from prison in Ethiopia. After detaining them for more than one year, authorities dropped all charges and released journalists Tesfalem Waldeyes, Asmamaw Hailegiorgis, and Edom Kassaye as well as bloggers Zelalem Kibret, and Mahlet Fantahun. These releases over the last two days come weeks before U.S. President Barack Obama's historic trip to Ethiopia, the first by a sitting U.S. president. Four bloggers with the Zone 9 group remain in detention and on trial.

"It's a relief to know that the charges have been dropped and my colleagues are able to be with their families once again," said Ethiopia Human Right Project's Coordinator and Zone 9 member Soliyana Gebremichael. "We hope that President Obama will press for the immediate and unconditional release of the remaining bloggers when he visits Ethiopia this month."

"The release of these five individuals is welcome news given the conditions of detention and the mistreatment they suffered during pre-trial detention," said Freedom Now's Executive Director Maran Turner. "Ethiopia's use of national security laws to silence peaceful activists and journalists must stop. We join the international community in calling for the release of all prisoners of conscience in Ethiopia, including those such as journalist Eskinder Nega, who have spent years behind bars."

Founded in May 2012, the Zone 9 blog sought to establish a forum for independent reporting at a time when the space for non-government sanctioned reporting in Ethiopia had become stifled and unwelcome. Articles on the Zone 9 blog website examined topics such as government respect for constitutional norms and the citizens' rights to free expression and freedom of assembly. The blog ceased operating in the fall of 2013 after escalating harassment by government officials. Shortly before the blog was scheduled to resume in April 2014, the Ethiopian government arrested six Zone 9 bloggers and three journalists.

All nine detainees were held in pre-trial detention until July 2014 when they were charged under the widely criticized 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation for "working with foreign organizations that claim to be human rights activists and agreeing in getting financial and intellectual assistance to incite public violence through social media." Since that time, trial proceedings were delayed 29 times and tellingly were even suspended during the recent national election. Four of the Zone 9 bloggers remain in detention and on trial: Atnaf Berhane, Natnail Feleke, Befekadu Hailu, and Abel Wabella. Charges are still pending against Zone 9 member Soliyana Gebremichael.

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*Our mission is to free prisoners of conscience through focused legal, political and public relations advocacy efforts.*

Freedom Now and the Ethiopia Human Rights Project have partnered together to advocate for the release of the Zone 9 bloggers and journalists. We will continue to do so until all of these individuals have been released.