



Yonatan Tesfaye

Ethiopia

Yonatan Tesfaye is an Ethiopian opposition politician who was sentenced to six years and a half years in prison on terrorism related charges. He was one of many opposition politicians caught in the Ethiopian government's crackdown on civil society following the Oromo protests that began in November 2015.

Tesfaye is the official spokesperson and the youth affairs head for the Blue Party, an opposition political party which promotes nonviolent social and political change and unity among ethnic, religious, regional and linguistic lines. In 2015, he was one of the party's candidates for a seat in parliament. During his campaign he was interviewed by NPR for an article where he is quoted as saying that the Blue Party's goal is to become an "umbrella for people to voice their discontent."

Tesfaye was arrested in December 2015, however he was not officially charged until March 2016. During his pre-trial detention he was kept incommunicado, abused, beaten, and kept in solitary confinement. Tesfaye was forced to sign a false confession during this time.

The eventual charge against Tesfaye, which came under the controversial Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP), was for inciting terrorism. The prosecution's evidence was eleven pages of Facebook posts Tesfaye made dating back to 2008 in which he commented on a number of topics, including condemnations of the killing of Oromo students by the Ethiopian authorities, and calls for the protests to lead to a transitional government. The evidence presented to the court was summaries of these posts, not direct quotations.

In May 2016, Tesfaye was convicted under a different article in the ATP – "encouragement of terrorism." He was sentenced to six years and six months. In November 2017, an appeals court reduced Mr. Tesfaye's sentence to three years and six months.

Tesfaye was released from prison on March 5, 2018.