

PEN CANADA

for FREEDOM of EXPRESSION

Yusuf MOHAMED ALI, (editor-in-chief, Tsigenay) Mattewos HABTEAB (editor-in-chief, Meqaleh), Dawit HABTEMICHAEL (reporter, Meqaleh), Medhanie HAILE (editor-in-chief, Keste Debena), Emanuel ASRAT (Zemen), Temesken GHEBREYESUS (Keste Debena), Dawit ISAAC (co-owner of *Setit*, writer), Fesshaye YOHANNES "Joshua" (publisher, *Setit*, playwright and poet), Said ABDELKADER (writer and editor, *Admas*, and owner of the press that printed most of the independent newspapers)

They were arrested in the days following September 23, 2001. They have yet to be sentenced. The detentions came in the wake of the closing down of all eight independent newspapers by the authorities on 18 September 2001 (these include the weeklies *Meqaleh*, *Setit*, *Tsigenay*, *Zemen*, *Wintana* and *Admas*). Since then, only the state newspaper, *Hadas Eritrea*, has been published.



Fesshaye Yohannes

The authorities have either denied that a clampdown has taken place, claiming instead that the journalists have merely been sent to carry out their national service; or that the closures and mass arrests were necessary for the sake of national unity; or were effected because of the failure of the newspapers to comply with laws covering media licences. However, a more likely explanation is that the crackdown was an attempt to stamp out criticism of the Eritrean government's treatment of students and political dissenters, and its prosecution of the war against Ethiopia.

On October 31, 2001, it was reported that most of the above-named journalists had been held incommunicado at a police station in the capital, Asmara, since their arrest. They had

not apparently been charged or taken to court. Eritrean law states that this must take place within 48 hours of an arrest. On December 3, 2001, a separate report confirmed that all but two of the above were in detention. All those detained have had their bank accounts frozen and assets confiscated. Their relatives have not been allowed to visit them. In September 2006, a report circulated on-line claimed that three of the journalists—Ali, Haile and Abdelkader—had died in prison. In early February 2007, another credible report surfaced that Fesshaye Yohannes had also died in prison.

PEN Canada is deeply disturbed at the Eritrean authorities' practice of detaining independent journalists under the spurious guise of national security. It calls on the Eritrean authorities to confirm or deny with evidence the fate of Yusuf Ali, Medhanie Haile, Said Abdelkader and Fesshaye Yohannes; and to release all imprisoned journalists as a matter of urgency and to desist from all measures that hamper freedom of expression in the country.

Please send appeals to:

Consulate of the State of Eritrea
75 Albert Street, Suite 610
Ottawa ON K1P 5E7
Fax: +1 613 234 6213

Embassy of the State of Eritrea
1708 New Hampshire Ave., NW
Washington DC USA
Fax: +1 202 319 1304

Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the United Nations
800 Second Avenue, 18th Floor
New York NY 10017 USA
Fax: +1 212 687 3138
E-mail: Eritrea@un.int