Seven journalists detained in Ethiopia over broadcast of rape allegation

Date: 2025-04-10

Source: https://punchng.com/seven-journalists-detained-in-ethiopia-over-broadcast-of-rape-allegation/

At least seven journalists have been detained on terrorism allegations, an international journalism monitor said, after they aired a story accusing men in military uniforms of raping a woman in 2020.  
  
The east African giant of some 130 million people is regularly criticised by human rights NGOs for the repression of dissenting voices.  
  
The country ranks 141st out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders 2024 press freedom index, which cites “widespread self-censorship”.  
  
The Committee to Protect Journalists said late on Wednesday that seven people were detained in late March after the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service broadcast a woman’s claims “to have been abducted and raped by men in military uniform while she was a student in 2020”.  
  
The woman later retracted her statements on a state-owned channel.  
  
EBS’s founder apologised, saying the station “discovered that the allegations were fabricated after the programme aired”, according to the CPJ.  
  
According to court documents reviewed by the CPJ, police allege that the journalists “sought to incite conflict, threaten the constitutional order, and overthrow the government in coordination with ‘extremist’ groups” in the Amhara region.  
  
The journalists, along with the woman who made the accusations, were remanded in custody pending a 14-day investigation.  
  
“Arresting journalists on terrorism allegations is a disproportionate response to concerns over lapses in journalistic ethics,” said CPJ Africa programme coordinator Muthoki Mumo.  
  
Amhara, the country’s second-most populated region, has recently seen a surge in violence.  
  
In April 2023, a local group called the Fano went from being allies of the federal government to launching an armed rebellion.  
  
Despite the government placing the region under a state of emergency from August 2023 to June 2024, the unrest did not stop, and authorities sent in military reinforcements in September.  
  
Today, a large part of Amhara is beyond the control of the federal authorities, and fighting has intensified in recent weeks.  
  
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