

Ethiopian journalist jailed for talking to dissident

ADDIS ABABA - Ethiopian journalist Getachew Shiferaw was sentenced to 18 months in prison Friday for speaking to a dissident, capping a case that rights groups have called an assault on press freedom.



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Getachew has been in jail since his arrest in December 2015, meaning he could be released from custody as soon as next week, his lawyer Ameha Mekonnen told AFP. "He shouldn't be convicted at all," Ameha said.

Getachew was found guilty earlier this week of encouraging revolt for sending a Facebook message to an Ethiopian dissident who had been convicted in absentia of being involved with Ginbot 7, an Eritrea-linked opposition group which has called for the violent overthrow of the ruling party.

Ethiopia's government considers the outlawed group a terrorist organisation.

Rights groups Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch said the charges were groundless and merely an excuse to put Getachew, who edited a newspaper linked to the opposition Blue Party, in jail.

"He was just exercising his constitutional right to freedom of expression," Belay Manaye, his deputy editor at the publication, said after the sentencing.

The decision by a court in the capital Addis Ababa comes the same week as a former spokesman for the Blue Party Yonatan Tesfaye was sentenced to more than six years in prison for encouraging terrorism.

Both men were arrested shortly after anti-government protests began in 2015, which raged on for months until the government imposed a nationwide state of emergency last October.

The emergency declaration is scheduled to expire in July.

Source: AFP.

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