

Horn & East Africa Amnesty Action March 2015



Country - Eritrea

Dawit Isaak

Dawit and nine other independent journalists were arrested on 18 September 2001, after protesting against the total closure of Eritrea's independent press. On the same night, 11 prominent members of the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) Party were also detained. They were among a group of 15 leading members of the PFDJ known as the G-15, who in May 2001 published an open letter to President Isaias Afewerki calling for democratic reform and human rights in Eritrea. In August 2001, the G-15 were accused by the Secretary-General of the PFDJ of attempting to destabilise the country. The fifteen responded to this accusation in a letter published in Dawit's newspaper, Setit, on 14 August. They also responded by calling on the people of Eritrea to assist in solving the country's problems.

In April 2002, the detained journalists began a hunger strike in protest against their incommunicado detention, demanding to be brought before a court and fairly tried. Shortly after the hunger strike they were separated and sent to different prisons and detention centres across Eritrea. Dawit was admitted to hospital for treatment following the hunger strike before being returned to an unknown prison. From 2005 to 2012, seven of the ten original journalists are believed to have died in custody. The locations of the surviving journalists have never been confirmed by Eritrean authorities.

Dawit was released for two days on 19 November 2005 after interventions on his behalf by the government of Sweden and others. He was re-arrested two days later while on his way to hospital.

In December 2008, he was reported to have been transferred to a maximum security prison in Embatkala, 35km outside of Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. Shortly after, on 11 January 2009, he was admitted to an Air Force hospital in Asmara. He is believed to be seriously ill, though the nature and extent of his illness remain unknown and the Government of Eritrea refuses to confirm even his hospitalization.

Write letters

Please send letters to Eritrea's President, Isaias Afewerki, and Minister of Justice, Ms Fawzia Hashim, with copies to the Ambassador in the UK, Tesfamichael Geratu.

Call for the immediate and unconditional release of Dawit Isaak and all other prisoners of conscience detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression.

Call for all prisoners suspected of a crime to be immediately charged with a recognizable criminal offence or else released. Those charged must be tried promptly in fair proceedings which meet international standards.

Call for the whereabouts and fate of Dawit Isaak and all prisoners of conscience to be revealed immediately, for them to be granted access to their families and lawyers, protected from torture and other ill-treatment, and provided with all necessary medical care.

Send letters to:

H.E. Isaias Afewerki, Office of the President, P.O.Box 257, Asmara, Eritrea.

Fawzia Hashim, Minister of Justice, PO Box 241, Asmara, Eritrea.

Ambassador Tesfamichael Geratu, Embassy of the State of Eritrea, 96 White Lion Street, London N1 9OF