**Ethiopia slaps prison terms on three journalists**

**By Aaron Maasho, Reuters**

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Ethiopia sentenced two Ethiopian journalists to 14 years in jail and an exiled blogger to life imprisonment on Thursday on charges of conspiring with rebel groups against the government, the second case in a month targeting the media.

In December, two Swedish journalists were sentenced to 11 years in jail for entering the country illegally and aiding a rebel group, prompting anger among rights groups and concern over media freedom in the east African country.

Woubishet Taye and Reyot Alemu were found guilty last week of conspiring to participate in terrorist acts and laundering money from rebel groups and Ethiopian arch-foe Eritrea. The pair had been arrested in July.

"I didn't expect this sentencing, she didn't commit terrorist crimes," said Reyot's lawyer, Mola Zegeye, adding that the two will appeal the sentence.

U.S.-based Elias Kifle, whose pro-opposition website www.EthiopianReview.com often criticizes the government, was tried in absentia and sentenced to life on similar charges.

Addis Ababa has been accused by watchdogs of clamping down on its media under the guise of national security, a charge the government denies.

Critics point to an anti-terrorism law passed after several blasts in 2009 and stating that anyone caught publishing information that could induce readers into acts of terrorism could be jailed for between 10 to 20 years.

More than 10 journalists have been charged under the law, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists. The group also says Ethiopia is close to replacing Eritrea as the African country with the highest number of journalists behind bars.

The Ethiopian government denies targeting journalists because of their reporting or political affiliations.

Woubshet and Reyot were found to have links to Ginbot 7, one of five groups the government has banned as terrorist organizations. Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of backing these groups.

Terrorism charges have not been limited to journalists - more than 150 opposition politicians and supporters have been detained since last year, according to rights watchdogs.

In Thursday's ruling, an opposition party official and another opposition-linked individual were sentenced to 17 and 19 years, respectively.

Woubshet, an editor for the now-defunct Awramba Times, and Reyot, of the Feteh newspaper, were also fined $2,100 each. Eskinder Nega, another opposition blogger, faces the death penalty and will appear in court in March on terrorism-linked charges. (Editing by Yara Bayoumy and Alessandra Rizzo)

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