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Three more sites unaccessible, government denies being involved

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Three more websites (Ethiome.com, Freeourleaders.org and Nazret.com) have become inaccessible within Ethiopia. Information minister Hailu Berhan insisted that his government was not involved but he failed to explain why almost all of the opposition websites suddenly cannot be accessed.

Reporters Without Borders wrote to the minister on 23 May requesting an explanation for the blocking of all these sites but has not yet received a reply.

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Opposition websites and blogs go down but is it censorship or a technical glitch ?

Reporters Without Borders has called on Ethiopia's information and culture minister to explain why several websites critical of the government have been inaccessible in the country since 17 May 2006.

Ethiopians have also seen all publications hosted by blogspot disappear from the Internet.

Even though the authorities have made no announcement it is likely that the disappearance of the sites is the result of political censorship and not technical problems.

"We would like to know if your government has deliberately blocked access to online publications, a list of which we enclose, thus taking the course of filtering the Internet," the press freedom organisation asked Hailu Berhan in a letter.

"The Ethiopian Internet is dynamic and has seen the development of an extremely active blogging community. It is your responsibility to ensure that all opinions can be expressed online, even when some Internet-users directly criticise government action."

"Preventing debate and controlling news and information circulating online will only aggravate an already very tense political climate," it said.

"We also wish to draw to your attention the consequences of filtering a blog tool such as blogspot, which is currently inaccessible in Ethiopia. Blocking access to this service has the effect of censoring all publications which it hosts, the vast majority of which do not deal with politics or with Ethiopia."

A non exhaustive list of websites and blogs inaccessible in Ethiopia:

- ▶ cyberethiopia.com
- ▶ ethiopianreview.com
- ▶ tensae.net
- ▶ quatero.net
- ▶ ethioforum.org
- ▶ ethiopianpolitics.blogspot.com
- ▶ enset.blogspot.com
- ▶ ethiopundit.blogspot.com
- ▶ seminawork.blogspot.com
- ▶ weichegud.blogspot.com

Technical ways to get around censorship ? See our "[Guide for bloggers and cyberdissidents](#)".

21 journalists behind bars

Some 15 newspaper editors and the leadership of the main opposition coalition were arrested in November 2005, after protest demonstrations against the results of contested legislative elections on 15 May.

They have been charged with “high treason” and “genocide” and accused of taking part in an “armed uprising.” Several journalists working for the independent press were also arrested and sentenced at the start of 2006 for defamation cases going back to the end of the 1990s.

To date, 21 journalists are currently in prison in the country, making Ethiopia Africa’s biggest prison for journalists.

Reporters Without Borders defends imprisoned journalists and press freedom throughout the world. It has nine national sections (Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland). It has representatives in Abidjan, Bangkok, London, Moscow, New York, Tokyo and Washington. And it has more than 120 correspondents worldwide.

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