

#Ethiopia: The Second Online Campaign press release

Freedom of Expression for all-NOW!

Zone 9 is an informal group of collective bloggers and activists who are working to promote free and independent discourse on the sociopolitical issues of Ethiopia. Our aim is to contribute our share to cultivate and develop a culture of civil discussion for the emergence of ideas and citizens who care to proactively engage for the betterment of the country.

In line with the above stated objective we have embarked on new form of cyber activism on critical and timely sociopolitical issues of the country. According to our plan we have held our first online campaign under the motto of respect the Constitution from December 5-8, 2012. The respect the constitution campaign was very successful in provoking a wider public discourse on the holistic constitutional rights and related legal provisions in Ethiopia.

Taking lessons from our first online campaign, we are now ready to announce the upcoming second online campaign under the motto of Freedom of Expression to all-Now! The campaign will be held from February 23-25, 2013 mainly focusing on article 29 of the Ethiopian constitutions on the Rights of thought, Opinion and expression.

We choose the theme of this campaign taking into consideration the growing human rights violations on freedom of speech and expression particularly taking stock on the unwritten enforcement of censorship on online Medias like the illegal closing of our blog and Facebook page.

The core purpose of this campaign is to reflect on the ever growing sanction on freedom for the press and expression in the form of Censorship. Censorship has many faces. On the one hand citizens are indirectly made to self-censor their own thoughts, opinions and believes in fear of dismaying a government and its illegal consequences. The other form of censorship is the direct tampering of the government on the free press including the blocking of dissident news websites and blogs. Such visible tendency of censorship is greatly hindering the flourishing of ideas and kills dissident voices. That is why we crafted this campaign to create a platform for an in-depth discussion and scrutiny of the implementation of article 29 of the constitution in the hope of sparking an insight on its enhanced enforcement.

Hence, this campaign will help voice our demand for the respect of article 29 of the Ethiopian Constitution stated below:

1. Everyone has the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression without any interference. This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any media of his choice.
3. Freedom of the press and other mass media and freedom of artistic creativity is guaranteed.

Freedom of the press shall specifically include the following elements:

- (a) Prohibition of any form of censorship.
- (b) Access to information of public interest.

4. In the interest of the free flow of information, ideas and opinions which are essential to the functioning of a democratic order, the press shall, as an institution, enjoy legal protection to ensure its operational independence and its capacity to entertain diverse opinions.

5. Any media financed by or under the control of the State shall be operated in a manner ensuring its capacity to entertain diversity in the expression of opinion.

6. These rights can be limited only through laws which are guided by the principle that freedom of expression and information cannot be limited on account of the content or effect of the point of view expressed. Legal limitations can be laid down in order to protect the well-being of the youth, and the honor and reputation of individuals. Any propaganda for war as well as the public expression of opinion intended to injure human dignity shall be prohibited by law.

7. Any citizen who violates any legal limitations on the exercise of these rights may be held liable under the law.

Facebook and twitter will be used as the main medium for this campaign. All campaigners are requested to use #StopCensorship hashtag. We will also be releasing exclusive articles related with this campaign on zone-9 blog and our Facebook pages. Moreover, all campaigners are kindly requested to flexibly and creatively engage on the campaign using the status updates and profile pictures designed for this campaign.

We Blog because we care!

Zone9