

Freed journalist donates prize to Amnesty International

A former prisoner of conscience has thanked Amnesty International (AI) for helping secure her release from jail by donating a journalism award to the organization.

Serkalem Fasil was freed from an Ethiopian jail in April, following extensive campaigning by human rights NGOs including AI. Her ordeal was recognized this week when she picked up a Courage in Journalism Award from the International Women's Media Foundation.



Serkalem Fasil, baby son Nafkot, born June 2006, while she was in prison and husband Eskinder Nega who was detained separately holding a copy of their newspaper Menelik, which was shut down when they were arrested. © Private.

She has decided to give the prize money to AI and the Committee to Protect Journalists, which also campaigned for her release.

"Human rights was once demonized as alien and subversive in the West... as it is today in nations with dictatorial regimes like that of Ethiopia," said Serkalem Fasil, who attacked the notion that human rights organizations are "western institutions... muddling through non-western societies".

She described her donation as: "A rejection of the manipulation of our national, religious and cultural differences against international human rights organizations. It is also an affirmation of the importance of the work that human rights organizations are doing... I have no doubt about the importance of Amnesty International in this story."

Serkalem Fasil was seized by police in November 2005 for her role as co-publisher of Asqual, Menilik and Satenaw newspapers. AI believes she was detained solely for exercising her right to freedom of expression.

She faced the death penalty if found guilty on charges of treason, outrages against the constitution and incitement to armed conspiracy. She was pregnant at the time of her arrest and gave birth to a baby son in the police hospital, where medical care was grossly deficient.

AI Secretary General Irene Khan paid tribute to her courage in the face of grave human rights abuses.

"I am extremely touched by this strong and brave gesture of support for global human rights by a former prisoner of conscience who is still at risk. As requested, we will be allocating this unusual and selfless donation to our international work for prisoners of conscience," said Ms Khan.

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