

Woman journalist employed by state TV held in military camp

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Fathia Khaled, a presenter on state-owned Eri-TV's Arabic-language service, was arrested earlier this month and taken to one of the country's detention centres, Reporters Without Borders has learned from several Eritrean sources. One of the sources said she may have been taken to the Sawa military camp in the northwest after being in touch with one or more persons who had fled across the border into Sudan on foot.

"The information ministry, which is also the headquarters of the only news media permitted in Eritrea, has become a high-risk area where a sinister game of chance is played out," the press freedom organisation said. "How much longer will we have to continue adding names to the list of people imprisoned by President Issaias Afewerki's government?" Reporters Without Borders added: "Because of the world's indifference, we are reduced to just watching, appalled and powerless, as the authorities continue to pick off journalists who have been unable to flee the reign of terror in Asmara." Khaled was one of the nine public media journalists who were arrested at their work centres in a crackdown beginning on 12 November 2006 and were held incommunicado for several weeks. They were initially taken to "Agip," a police detention centre located near the presidential palace. They were later held in the underground prison at the No. 5 police station, where they were beaten until they gave the passwords to their e-mail accounts. After being released on bail, they were followed, their phones were tapped, they were forced to go back to work and they were expressly forbidden to leave Asmara. The security forces warned them that, on the first sign of any transgression, they would immediately be rearrested and held indefinitely. Their arrests were preceded by the defection of several prominent state media journalists, which particularly irked the government. They were arrested on suspicion of staying in contact with the defectors or planning to flee the country themselves.