



Committee to Protect Journalists

**Dawit Kebede**

***Awramba Times, Ethiopia***

**Acceptance Speech**

**CPJ 2010 International Press Freedom Awards Dinner**

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**Waldorf Astoria, New York**

I accept this award on behalf of the staff of our weekly newspaper *Awramba Times* as well as the scores of Ethiopian journalists who have been jailed or forced into exile and the many others still struggling to make the promise of press freedom in our constitution a reality.

It is a great honor for me to come to America to receive this award. My country receives millions of American taxpayer dollars to fight terrorism in the Horn of Africa, but under our anti-terrorism law, I risk 25 years in prison if I interview certain opposition politicians. We cannot even access certain websites because they are blocked. Security officials regularly call our newsroom to question our editorial decisions. I have often wondered how it feels to be a journalist and report without constant fear of arrest. Sometimes I wonder how it feels to express your opinions without being labeled an enemy of the state or hounded like a criminal.

I always wanted to be a journalist. I always wanted answers to things I didn't understand and liked asking questions. In journalism school, I had the choice of an easier career in public relations or sports and entertainment reporting, but for me having my own newspaper was the only way I could express myself.

In 2005, Ethiopia saw its most contested election and protests followed disputed results. Because I wrote an editorial asking why close to 200 people lost their lives in the brutal repression that ensued, I was accused of treason and spent 21 months in prison. I drew strength from the resilience of prisoners on death row, reading writings by some of you, including Fareed Zakaria and Joe Klein, and hearing about international solidarity after CPJ representatives visited my prison. To get my freedom, I had to sign a statement accepting full responsibility for the election violence.

After prison, I could not give up. My sister advised me to leave the country and do something else with my life, but I was already applying for a new newspaper license. Even obtaining a license was a struggle that I won only with CPJ's intervention.

The easiest thing for us would be to print government press releases. But that would make us false witnesses. I am committed to continue to ask questions. I see this award as a message to those who vilify and persecute us every day that we are not alone, but are a link in an unbreakable chain of committed journalists that span the globe.

Thank you very much.