

# In Ethiopia, driver for news crew dies from injuries after attack

Authorities in Ethiopia should investigate an attack on a news crew from the state-owned Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency that led to the death of the crew's driver, Suleiman Mahamed, and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, left, and Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki celebrate the reopening of the Embassy of Eritrea in Addis Ababa on July 16. An Ethiopian news crew was attacked and their driver killed while traveling to the capital to cover the visit. Credit: AFP/Michael Tewelde.

The news crew was attacked in Meiso, in Oromia State, on July 13, while travelling to the capital, Addis Ababa, to cover [a visit by](#) Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki, according to [an article](#) by the privately owned paper *The Reporter*. The crew's driver was beaten again in a separate attack, after leaving a police station where the crew was taken after the first assault, according to reports. Suleiman was left in a coma and died in hospital on July 19, from head and rib injuries sustained in the attacks, according to [The Reporter](#).

"The gains that Ethiopia has made in recent months, improving the media freedom environment under the leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, will vanish if journalists are violently attacked with impunity," said CPJ Africa program coordinator Angela Quintal in Durban. "It is the duty of the government to ensure that the attack on the Dire Dawa Mass Media Agency crew is rigorously and credibly investigated. Those who killed media worker Suleiman Mahamed must face justice in court."



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The media crew included producer Amero Tesfaye, cameraman Amin Sherif, broadcast reporters Biftu Yusuf and Muse Omer, and driver Suleiman, according to *The Reporter* and journalists who are familiar with the case and who spoke with CPJ on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

When the news crew, who are based in Dire Dawa, reached Meiso, a group of people stopped their car, started to question them, accused them of being spies, and then hit them with sticks and their fists, according to reports and the

journalists with whom CPJ spoke. The crew identified themselves as journalists, showed their identification papers, and explained the reason for their travel, according to *The Reporter* and the journalists with whom CPJ spoke.

## Tension

The assault came during a period of tension in the region, in the wake of a [recent clash](#) between local communities in Meiso, which is part of [a longer history of conflict](#) in the [Oromia and Somali](#) regions of Ethiopia, Deressa Terese, the deputy head of the state communication bureau in Oromia, told CPJ. The journalists with whom CPJ spoke said that they believe the attackers associated the news crew with the Somali region. Suleiman was of Somali ethnicity, the journalists told CPJ.

Following the initial assault, the attackers took the journalists to a local police station, according to Deressa and the journalists with whom CPJ spoke. Suleiman later left the station without the journalists and was found badly beaten in the city, they said. Deressa said he believes the same group who attacked the crew earlier was likely responsible.

Deressa and one other person with whom CPJ spoke said the attackers took the crew to the police because they wanted authorities to investigate whether they were spies. The other people with whom CPJ spoke said some of the attackers took the crew to the police for their own protection. CPJ was unable to verify why the crew was taken to the police.

Deressa said that the police in Meiso were investigating the attack. An [article](#) in *The Reporter* on July 21 said that investigations were yet to commence. CPJ's calls and a text message sent to Dire Dawa city mayor, Ibrahim Usman, went unanswered.

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