

## **Eritrean journalist attacked at public seminar in Houston**

New York, May 27, 2010—The Committee to Protect Journalists calls for a thorough investigation into a May 9 attack on an Eritrean expatriate journalist by supporters of Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki at a public event in eastern Texas. The event was advertised locally in printed fliers, and on the pro-government [Dehai.org](http://Dehai.org) Web site as a “Public Seminar for all Eritreans in Houston and Environs.” Tedros Menghistu Wondefrash, publisher and editor of *Selam*, a Tigrinyan-language, monthly newsletter printed in Houston, was attacked when he tried to attend, he told CPJ.

The printed and online flier called for Eritreans to attend the seminar to affirm their opposition to sanctions imposed in December 2009 by the United Nations Security Council with the support of the Obama administration over accusations that Eritrea has been backing Islamist insurgents in Somalia. The event featured speaker Sophia Tesfamariam, a Washington-based Eritrean expatriate who describes herself as a “humanitarian activist” on her Facebook page, and lists one affiliation: “Eritrean Government.” An Eritrean Embassy official in Washington who did not identify herself on the phone told CPJ that Tesfamariam does not work at the embassy, but that she would pass on CPJ’s request for an interview. Tesfamariam did not return the call to CPJ.

A Houston police spokesman confirmed to CPJ that police have an open investigation into the incident. So far no arrests have been made.

“We are pleased to learn that the attack is under investigation,” said CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon. “We hope that it will be given priority because not only was Tedros Menghistu Wondefrash badly hurt, the attackers also made a direct assault on press freedom in this country.” The event in Houston was scheduled to begin at noon on May 9 in a room at the Crown Reception Hall. Before it began, the organizers saw Menghistu, who was well-known among the group for his critical reporting on the Eritrean government, and urged the crowd to force the journalist to leave the room, witnesses and Menghistu told CPJ.

Menghistu said a group of up to a dozen assailants punched and scratched him, breaking his eyeglasses and stealing his notebook and tape recorder. Menghistu said he later went to a hospital emergency room after suffering abrasions on his face and head and injuring his neck. The attackers returned his broken eyeglasses and notebook but not his tape recorder as Houston police arrived on the scene and briefly interviewed Menghistu and others, he told CPJ. Menghistu said he is still seeking medical treatment for his neck injury.