



Martin Schibbye: Tal under rättegången i Addis Abeba

Talare
Martin Schibbye
Journalist

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Plats
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Your Honor Amesgnaleh.

First of all I would like to thank the court for this opportunity to speak. The serious allegations against me make these words of defense to some of the most important of my life. I am therefore glad to see so many international media colleagues, family, friends and members of the diplomatic corps present. To defend oneself and tell the truth when the world is watching is a privilege. I will start with a short presentation of myself. Then I will explain the ideas behind this story and step by step how we implemented it.

I am a known and established Swedish journalist, member of the SJF (The Swedish Union of Journalists) and IFJ (International Federation of Journalists). As a journalist it is my job and duty to follow stories, ask questions and gather news interesting to Swedish readers, wherever in the world my curiosity brings me. Last year I traveled abroad for 199 days covering conflicts, human rights issues and social stories in 16 different countries, working for the major Dailies in Scandinavia, NGO-magazines published by for example Amnesty Press and Save the Children together with a variety of international magazines which the certificates show. To give my readers unique stories I really make an effort. Last year I sailed with drunk Pirates in the Strait of Malacca working on a story about piracy, I roamed with human traffickers in the Redlight District of Philippines working on a story about trafficking and I followed foreign pedophiles grooming children on deserted beaches in Cambodia. I didn't do this because I support piracy, trafficking or pedophilias, on the contrary I do this because it is my job to explain to readers back home how piracy and slavery can be a problem in the 21st century. Other journalists satisfy with interviewing coastguards, police and NGO:s. I don't. I think that in order to do my job, to

cover all sides and to bring home a unique piece of journalism it is necessary to talk to the good guys – and the bad guys.

The particular story that brought me to Ethiopia (did not start with “bad intentions”) it started with a bold journalistic ambition, to go where no other Swedish journalist had ever gone before. To do my job and write a story about Africa Oil, a Swedish linked oil company with plans to drill in the Ogaden region. These plans had already caused a debate in Sweden about what consequences oil development would have on the civil population. Books were published. Articles written. But nobody had been in the area. So we decided to find out on the spot if the company was doing what it is supposed to do. This story had all the ingredients to become big and hit the front pages: An oil company, linked to Sweden, civilians and a group OLF who had threatened the company from exploring oil. Apart from the actors at play the area was closed for foreign journalists. That made the story risky, but also more unique and meant that we could sell it to a higher price. The first question we asked ourselves was that why does OLF want to stop development in the region? That question led us to London.

In London OLF has a spokesperson who handles media enquires. In March I did an interview with him about why they attack foreign oil companies, why they did not sign the peace treaty and about their relation to Eritrea. Basically I did my job as a journalist. I did not “in direct contact with leaders agree to support OLF”, as it says in the charge. I threw hardballs and direct questions require direct contact.

After that I went for two months of assignments in South-East Asia. On June 6 I met up with my colleague Johan Persson in Nairobi. He is just back from interviewing refugees around Dadaab in NE-Kenya. We continue to interview refugees from Ogaden in Nairobi to get more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the region. Stories from refugees are a bit tricky, as a journalist it is difficult to find impartial sources to verify their testimonies. There is a risk refugees are political biased and exaggerate their stories. To avoid this dilemma we tried to talk to many refugees in many different countries and places. We were also interested to talk to former oil workers and through our BBC-colleague we tried to find people who had worked for Africa Oil or its sub-contractors. This request is used by the prosecutor against us. I would like to use it in our favor. This is pure old fashioned journalistic research. As a Swedish

reporter it is my job to investigate the company by talking to former employees. In Nairobi we also met a contact person from OLNFL who explained how we could enter Ethiopia illegally and meet ONFL 25-30 km inside the country as is showed in the video.

Before we enter Ethiopia we worked for two weeks in Galcayo, Somalia. We worked on other stories and we covered the deadly cocktail of draught, political instability and al-Shabaab, that has forced millions of people to become refugees in this modern day mass exodus. We interviewed Internally Displaced People outside the city, in the camps. Some of these families reach Sweden and it was important for med to describe their reality to Swedish readers. Working in Somalia, as a journalist or NGO-worker, is utterly important but tricky. It is necessary to hire armed guards to protect yourself from kidnappers. At the hotel we stayed at, also used by UN:s WFP, NRC and Save the Children we had six guards around the clock. When we left for interviews we had additional 20 guards. The armed people you see with us in Galcayo are our body guards, not ONFL-soldiers. In fact armed ONFL presence in Galcayo is political impossible since the area is controlled by al-Sunna, a force loyal to Ethiopia guards in the fight against al-Shabaab. The prosecutor says we “prepared as fighters” in Galcayo. As evidence he showed a film sequence where I hold a gun. The gun belongs to one of the hotel guards sitting in a plastic chair in the parking-lot next to the hotel. I wanted to interview him about his experiences fighting al-Shabaab and from journalistic experience I knew that a good ice-breaker with this kind of people is to talk guns and katha. If he was a pirate I would share a bottle and talk about ransom, if he was a trafficker I would talk about girls. As a journalist to get people to relax, laugh and tell their stories it’s necessary to do these kinds of things. This is parts of the story you never publish – but without them there would be no story. This is no weapon-training it is just “another day at the office” for a foreign correspondent on assignment in Somalia.

There is one Ethiopian saying “Better seeing than hearing”, so after two weeks on June 27 we enter Ethiopia following our story. There is no sign along the long porous border that says “Welcome to Ethiopia – drive carefully”, but we crossed at night alone in a car with a driver as was seen in the video shown by the prosecutor. In the Shilado region we got off the car and met with an ONFL group and started to walk. The ONFL were very skeptical towards us and complained we walked too slowly, drank too much water and too little camel milk. The plan was first to walk then to work. Apart from interviewing ONFL

we were also interested in the overall humanitarian situation, the consequences of the draught and if the food aid reached the villages. But before we could start working we were “interrupted”. On the afternoon on the 30th of June we were sitting and drinking tea among the dense bushes beside a small fire. Suddenly we hear one gunshot and seconds later there are bullets everywhere. We are in the middle of a clash between ONLF and Ethiopian soldiers. We escape the bullets into an open area and when the Ethiopian soldiers see us foreigners they stop shooting at ONLF. I would like to thank the professionalism among the armed forces of Ethiopia for still being alive.

After our arrest we were interviewed about why we came to Ethiopia. We told the army and the film crew the same thing as I have told you here today. From our arrest we told the truth to army, Local police in Jijiga, Federal police in Addis and judges at the Magistrate and now High Court. We have from day one fully cooperated and have nothing to hide. Two days after our arrest we were taken to a place close to Warder and participated in some kind of film. We are here put in the same frame as defendant 1 and 2, who we had never seen before our arrest. Additional two days later we are handed over to the Federal police in Jijiga and taken to Addis.

Your Honor. I came to Ethiopia with one sole objective to gather news, which is my job and duty as a Swedish journalist. Following this unique story about a Swedish-linked company I made one grave and serious miscalculation and took a huge risk entering Ethiopia without a visa. BUT taking these kinds of risks is a part of my profession as a foreign correspondent. Every year colleagues to me get shot, arrested and injured following stories in conflict zones and across borders. Me and my colleagues take these kinds of risks, and follow stories, not to support any particular group, not to harm the national sovereignty of the country or because I support the political ideas of the people I interview. I do this because I believe in journalism. I believe in journalism as a positive force that can highlight and solve issues. My job is not to judge who is right or wrong but to tell a story. I took this risk, to do my job, to cover all sides and to bring home a unique story.

Your Honor. Once again thank you for this opportunity to speak in your courtroom. I hope you understand now why I am here and I ask you kindly to drop the charges against me so that I can return home to my wife in Sweden. Amesgnaleh.

Taggar

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