



Martin Schibbye: Tal under rättegången i Addis Abeba

Talare
Martin Schibbye
Journalist

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Plats
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Your Honor

5 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.

15 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.

25 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
35 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
40 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
45 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 OLNf 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
50 and meant that we could sell it to a higher price. The first question we asked ourselves was that why does OLNf want to stop development in the region? That question led us to London.

In London OLNf has a spokesperson who handles media enquires. In March I
55 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 OLNf”, as it says in the charge. I threw hardballs and direct questions require direct contact.

60 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
65 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

70 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.

75 In Nairobi we also met a contact person from OLNf who explained how we
could enter Ethiopia illegally and meet ONFL 25-30 km inside the country as is
showed in the video.

80 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
85 important for me 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
90 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 ONLF-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
95 "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 kath.

100 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
105 weapon-training it is just "another day at the office" for a foreign correspondent
on assignment in Somalia.

110 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 ONLF
group and started to walk.
115 The ONLF where 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 ONLF 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
120 “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
125 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.

130 After our arrest we where 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.

135 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.

140 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
145 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.

150 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
155 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.

160 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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