Addis Ababa, January 22, 2013 (WIC) - More than 100 dissident soldiers stormed the Ministry of Information in the small East African nation of Eritrea on Monday and read a statement on state TV saying the country's 1997 constitution would be put into force, two Eritrea experts said.

The soldiers held all of the ministry workers — including the daughter of the president — in a single room, said Leonard Vincent, author of the book "The Eritreans" and co-founder of a Paris-based Eritrean radio station. The soldiers' broadcast on state TV said the country's 1997 constitution would be reinstated and all political prisoners freed, but the broadcast was cut off after only two sentences were read and the signal has been off air the rest of the day, Vincent said.

By late afternoon there were indications the soldiers' attempt would fail. A military tank sat in front of the Ministry of Information but the streets of the capital, Asmara, were quiet, and no shots had been fired, said a Western diplomat in Eritrea who wasn't authorized to be identified by name.

Vincent stopped short of calling it a coup d'etat and said it wasn't immediately clear if the action was a well-organized coup attempt or what he called a "kamikaze crash."

Later Monday government soldiers surrounded the ministry, an indication the action by the dissident soldiers had failed, said Martin Plaut, a fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in Britain.

"It looks like it's an isolated attempt by some soldiers who are completely frustrated by what is going on. But it wasn't done in a coordinated manner," Plaut said. "They did seize the television station, they did manage to put this broadcast out, but the government is still functioning calmly. There is nothing on the streets."

Eritrea is an oppressive and politically isolated neighbor of Ethiopia and Sudan situated on the Red Sea that broke off from Ethiopia in the 1990s. The U.S. government's relations with Eritrea became strained in 2001 as a result of a government crackdown against political dissidents, the closing of the independent press and limits on civil liberties, conditions that the State Department says have "persisted to this day." (BBC)