



## **A Written information report on freedom of opinion and expression in Somalia**

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### **Introduction**

Over the past four and a half years, freedoms of opinion and expression have declined dramatically in Somalia. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights has monitored no less than 80 cases of violations to the rights of journalists and media professionals and restrictions on Internet practices, which are clearly and explicitly incompatible with the free press-related provisions of the national constitution in Somalia.

This report includes written information on the continuous arrests of journalists and media professionals in recent years, especially since the State party has accepted 16 freedom of expression-related recommendations in the 2016 UPR cycle, and freedoms of speech and expression have made little progress, which can be noted in the following violations:

### **First - Detention of journalists and media professionals: continuous restrictions**

A large number of journalists and media professionals were subjected to various forms of violations and harassment. On May 31, 2016, Somaliland forces arrested journalist Muhammad Ahmed Jama, reporter of KALSAN TV in Sool region. Ten soldiers raided an office where a group of journalists were operating at around 2 p.m. and forcefully arrested Jama.<sup>1</sup>

On May 29, 2016, Mohamed Mohamud Yusuf, Editor-in-chief of privately owned Foore newspaper and Abdirashid Abdiwahab Ibrahim, reporter & manager of Foore newspaper, were arrested immediately after facing criminal persecution,

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<sup>1</sup> National Union of Somali Journalists, NUSOJ decries intimidation of journalists in Northern Somalia, 1 Julie2016, <https://bit.ly/3mDGEjV>



by Somaliland security service at Hotel Imperial.<sup>2</sup>

On August 18, 2016, the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISS) arrested two Radio Shabelle journalists, Ali Ahmed Abdulle and Mohamed Adan Ibrahim, who were arrested for their journalism work. NISA raided Radio Shabelle, briefly shut down the station that took five journalists to NISA regional headquarters for interrogations.<sup>3</sup>

On October 19, 2016 Somali security forces arrested a crew of the Qatari Al-Jazeera news channel, including a journalist, a photographer, a driver and an escort, and their detention came within a week after they raided the office of a Somali newspaper and detained its editor-in-chief for three days.<sup>4</sup>

On December 17, 2016, Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency arrested Abdul Razzaq Omar Ahmed, a journalist at the Xogmaal news website, in the Shanghani district of Mogadishu, and held him incommunicado for 20 days without presenting a shred of evidence he broke the law.<sup>5</sup>

On January 26, 2017, Hassan Ismail Isaac, was threatened with dire consequences because of his news report about sheikhs killed in the terrorist attack on the Daya Hotel. On February 5, 2017, Ahmed Mohamed Ali and Rabel Abdel Karim Mahmoud, two journalists for Radio Voice of Peace in Galkayo, were attacked and beaten up by Puntland Police. Around 8pm, on Sunday, February 5, 2017, about 30 armed police officers raided the premises of Radio Voice of Peace. The police pulled journalist, Ahmed Mohamed Ali, director of the station, out of his office, and started beating him up with guns and batons.<sup>6</sup>

On February 15, 2017, journalist Abd al-Malik Musa Oldon was sentenced to two years in prison after being arrested for a period<sup>7</sup>. Two weeks later, on

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<sup>2</sup> African Freedom of Expression, NUSOJ Denounces Judicial Harassment of Journalists and Independent Media in Somaliland, 16 August 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Z05ALC>

<sup>3</sup> Omar Nor, Somali Security Forces Shut Down Popular Radio Station, Arrest Journalists, Armed Politics, 18 August 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Emj5e8>

<sup>4</sup> مركز حماية حرية الصحفيين، الأمن الصومالي يلقي القبض على طاقم قناة الجزيرة القطرية، 19 أكتوبر 2016، <https://bit.ly/3ccQKU5>

<sup>5</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, Somalia intelligence agency detains journalist for weeks, 6 January 2016, <https://bit.ly/2EkpSVE>

<sup>6</sup> AFEX, AFEX Condemns Assault of Journalist by Police in Puntland, February 7, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3mPj1Vp>

<sup>7</sup> Apnews, Somaliland journalist sentenced to 2 years in prison, April 8, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3cnZ6Z7>



March 31, 2017, Warsame Shire Awale, a well-known comedian, actor, songwriter and playwright who worked for privately-owned Radio Kulmiye, was arrested for not properly covering the activities of Sunnis.

On April 2, 2017, TV journalist Hanad Ali Guled, who works Hanad Ali Guled, was abducted from her home in Mogadishu.<sup>8</sup>

On July 23, 2017, Mukhtar Muhammad Atouch, a journalist working in Voice of America Radio, was threatened with arrest and deportation by Colonel Mahd Abdel Rahman, the police chief of the Southwestern Departments. On April 11, 2017, Abd al-Rahman Arab Da'ud, a journalist for Hangool News, Hargeisa, was arrested, and on April 13, 2017, 3 journalists were arrested for covering demonstrations.<sup>9</sup>

On April 15, 2017, the journalist Ibrahim Osman Ahmed Shankul, editor of Hangool News, was arrested and held in custody in Hargeisa Central Police Station after publishing a critical report on the Somaliland police chief.<sup>10</sup>

On July 3, 2017, Mohamed Shaqal Anshur, from the Somali Cable TV, and Mawlid Ismail, from Diged Somali News, were arrested in Las Anod after interviewing people against the Somaliland administration. On July 8, 2017 Omar Ali Hassan (Omar Serbia), from Goobjoog Hargeisa, was arrested for his work in a media house in Mogadishu.<sup>11</sup>

On August 6, 2017, Omar Saeed Muhammad (Omar Diri), an independent journalist, has been arrested for criticizing the Presidency of Puntland and the leadership of its Parliament.<sup>12</sup> On October 8, 2017, the journalist Mohamed Adan Dirir, from Horseed News, was arrested on charges of criminal defamation and

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<sup>8</sup> VOICE OF AMERICA, Somali Journalist Manages to Escape from Abductors, April 02, 2017, <https://bit.ly/32ULXU4>

<sup>9</sup> Op.cit

<sup>10</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, Somaliland editor detained after trading himself for colleague's freedom, April 20, 2017, <https://bit.ly/3kFV0OQ>

<sup>11</sup> Reporters without borders, Journalist arrested in Somaliland on return from Mogadishu released this morning, July 11, 2017, <https://bit.ly/35Y4Ilh>

<sup>12</sup> Garoweonline, Somalia: Journlist Omar Dhere released from Prison on bail, 17 August 2017, <https://bit.ly/2FNZCDU>



publishing false news.<sup>13</sup>

On October 9, 2017, the journalist Mohamed Abdisias Salad, from SBC TV, was threatened by security forces because of his journalistic activities.

On November 28, 2017, Abdul Rashid Suleiman Musa, a journalist for SBC TV Gabiley, was arrested and accused of attacking the mayor of Gabili.

On December 28, 2017, the journalist Abd al-Shakour Abdullah Ahmad, from CityFM + RTN TV, was arrested in Jowhar, the capital city of Hirshabelle, and accused of reporting false news.

On January 13, 2018, intelligence officers reportedly beat and harassed two journalists at an airport in Galkayo during President Farmajo's visit<sup>14</sup> while on February 17, 2018, Somaliland police arrested the head of the London-based Universal TV bureau in response to a news report broadcasted earlier in February.<sup>15</sup>

On May 14, 2018, police arrested Adam Gamma from his home in Las Anoud, the administrative capital of the Seoul region in Somaliland.<sup>16</sup> In July 2018, Puntland Police arrested a civil society activist in Garowe after he posted a Facebook post criticizing the Puntland government.

On September 23, 2018, Journalist Mohamed Ali Siad, deputy director of Radio Galkayo, was attacked by police officers in the Somali city of Galkayo at the police station.<sup>17</sup> On December 4, 2018, veteran Somali journalist and media rights activist Ismail Sheikh Khalifa was critically wounded when a bomb planted in his car exploded in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, Journalists Imprisoned in 2017 - Mohamed Adan Dirir, 31 December 2017, <https://bit.ly/3iYyUGW>

<sup>14</sup> SOMALIA 2018 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT, <https://bit.ly/3mLCBBT>

<sup>15</sup> Civicus, Somaliland poet's three-year prison sentence a shameful attack on free expression, 18 April 2018, <https://bit.ly/305iWTM>

<sup>16</sup> Reporters Without Borders, Two TV channels shut down, journalists arrested in Somaliland, 29 May 2018,

<sup>17</sup> International Federation of Journalists, Somalia: Journalist assaulted by police in Galkayo, 24 September 2018, <https://bit.ly/2HpktOc>

<sup>18</sup> Human Rights Watch, Somali Journalist Critically Hurt in Car Bombing, December 7, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2RM7rMG>



On February 18, 2019, the soldiers Ali Adan Abdi Gaab and Sakariye Hassan Ibaar of Somali National Army (SNA) tortured and threatened journalists Abdullahi Dahir Abdi and Said Warsame Sabriye of Dhanbaal.<sup>19</sup>

On May 19, 2019, Abd al-Shakour Muhammad Hasan, who works for s for SAAB TV and Star radio, was arrested by the security forces, and according to Abd al-Shakour himself, himself his arrest was ordered from the office of Hiiraan Province Governor Yusuf Ahmed Hagar Dabageed.<sup>20</sup> On May 22, 2019, Journalist Abdullah Hussein Anshur and cameraman Mohamed Abdulkadir Jirow, who are working for Radio Kulmiye, were subjected to intimidation, beatings and shooting by the Federal Police in Mogadishu.<sup>21</sup>

On June 15, 2019, a group of reporters from international newsgroups, including Jama Nur Ahmed and Mohamed Abdel Hakim Ismail from Al-Jazeera Media Network, Abdel-Razzaq Hussein Farah from Agence France-Presse AFP, and Sadiq Muhammad Mahmoud from Turkey's Anadolu news agency were subjected to intimidation and shooting by the Federal Police in Mogadishu.<sup>22</sup> On June 25, 2019, Abd al-Qadir Muallim Muhammad, from Banadir Mogadishu Radio, was physically assaulted by the Somali National Army.

On July 30, 2019, four TV journalists, from the privately-owned Eryal TV channel, were arrested by Somaliland police in Hargeisa, after they interviewed individuals who complained against a new government-initiated employment campaign.<sup>23</sup>

On July 13, 2019, members of the Jubbaland security forces physically assaulted four journalists who were at the funeral of colleague journalists. Before journalists started filming the funeral proceedings, members of the security forces

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<sup>19</sup> International Federation of Journalists, Somalia: Arrests of soldiers over torturing two journalists deal a major blow to impunity, 26 March 2019, <https://bit.ly/32ReBp7>

<sup>20</sup> The Federation of Somali Journalists, FESoj welcomes the unconditional release of a journalist in Beledweyne, Mar 20, 2019, <https://bit.ly/35XYvMv>

<sup>21</sup> Somali Journalists Syndicate, Somali Police shoot at, beat up and briefly detain journalists in reporting mission in Mogadishu, May 22, 2019, <https://bit.ly/35YkMJX>

<sup>22</sup> Al Arabiya Network, Somali journalists' group slams police 'threats', 16 June 2019, <https://bit.ly/2HpJwRe>

<sup>23</sup> Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), Somaliland Police arrest four TV Journalists in Hargeisa, July 30, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3cu2ktZ>



instructed to stop filming, and started beating the journalists with sticks, punches and kicks, injuring four of them.<sup>24</sup>

On August 22, 2019, armed police stopped Burhan Muhammad Abdi, correspondent for state-owned Puntland Television, and Abd al-Wali Jameh Kajaran, reporter for SBC TV, and briefly arrested them.<sup>25</sup>

On September 10, 2019, police arrested Abdikani Abdullahi Ahmed and Abdirisak Gooth Nur from HadhwanaagNews on allegations of publishing false news, anti-national propaganda, and insulting a public officer, but no formal charges have been filed against them.<sup>26</sup>

On 19 September 2019, Somaliland Security forces arrested the journalist Abdul Rahman Sheikh Hassan in Hargeisa, Somaliland,<sup>27</sup> and on September 14, 2019, the General Director, Hassan Heikal, of Radio Daljir Bossaso, Puntland was arrested.<sup>28</sup>

On 17 October 2019, Ahmed Sheikh Mohamed Tallman, former director of Radio Daljir, was taken to Garowe central prison this morning, two days after security forces arrested him.<sup>29</sup>

On November 18, 2019, Somaliland police also arrested Abdulkadir Sulaiman Asayr, editor in chief of Horn Cable TV.<sup>30</sup>

On December 19, 2019 Police arrested seven media workers and shut down the FM Private Radio station.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Inner City Press, n Somalia Journalists Beaten As Mourn Colleagues In Kismayo UN Guterres Silent He Too Roughs Up Press, July 13, 2019, <http://www.innercitypress.com/somalia1funcaguterresensors071319.html>

<sup>25</sup> Somali Affairs, 2 TV journalists briefly detained in Somalia's Puntland, August 22, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3iVHlx5>

<sup>26</sup> Committee to Protect Journalists, Somaliland authorities block HadhwanaagNews website, arrest 2 employees, September 18, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2FV56wm>

<sup>27</sup> Somali dispatch ,The third Hadhwanaag journalist detained by the Somaliland army last night, 20 September 2019, <https://bit.ly/3ckZRIF>

<sup>28</sup> The International Federation of Journalists, Somalia: Police search two prominent radio stations in Puntland, 16 September 2019, <https://bit.ly/301i2Yz>

<sup>29</sup> Somali dispatch, Puntland arrests the director of Radio Daljir , OCTOBER 19, 2019, <https://bit.ly/301i1Un>

<sup>30</sup> AllAfrica, Somalia: NUSOJ Strongly Condemns Suspension of Leading Independent TV Station and Arrest of Editor-in-Chief in Somaliland, 18 NOVEMBER 2019, <https://bit.ly/2FIJXpn>

<sup>31</sup> National Union of Somali Journalists, Private radio station shutdown, journalists briefly detained, 19 December 2019, <https://bit.ly/2G5AMyM>



On December 29, 2019, armed police officers raided the radio station and suspended on-air program while ordering the closure of the radio, and journalist Abdiqani Sheikh Mohamed was detained one hour later.<sup>32</sup>

On December 11, 2019, the journalist Abdul Shakur Abdullah Ahmed, Director of CITY FM, was harassed, and five reporters were chosen after their car was parked near Jowhar airport, to prevent him and others from covering the arrival of a delegation headed by the United Nations envoy to Somalia, Mr. James Swan.

On February 20, 2020, Ahmed Muhammad Ali and Abd al-Wali Jumah Hassan, both of whom work for Voice of Peace Radio, and Saeed Abdullah Kalmyia (Nadara) from Kasmaal Media were arrested.<sup>33</sup>

On April 14, 2020, the journalist Abdiasis Ahmed Gurbiye, who is the Deputy Director of Goobjoog Media Group, was arrested.<sup>34</sup> On April 21, 2020, Journalist Mukhtar Mohamed Atosh, reporter for Voice of America (VOA), was today arrested in Baidoa by Southwest State police and taken to Crimes Investigation Department (CID).<sup>35</sup> On September 6, 2020, the police arrested Radio Daljir director Khadar Awl Ismail and reporter Abdiqani Ahmed Mohamed.<sup>36</sup>

## **Second - Killing journalists and media professionals: the word for life**

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights is concerned about restrictions on the freedoms of journalists and media professionals, which have amounted to a violation of the right to life. The following are just few cases. On June 5, 2016 in Mogadishu, the female journalist Sagal Salad Osman was shot dead at Banadir Junction in Hodan district.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Horn Observer, Somali authorities raid an independent radio station, briefly arrest journalist in Jowhar, December 29, 2019, <https://bit.ly/3crx9PV>

<sup>33</sup> National Union of Somali Journalists, Police target and brutalise journalists covering public protest, February 20, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2HirksA>

<sup>34</sup> NUSOJ, NUSOJ laments broadcast journalist's arrest, demands de-criminalisation of free expression, April 14, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3mNoa06>

<sup>35</sup> NUSOJ, Prominent journalist arrested for reporting on rape case, April 20, 2020, <https://bit.ly/33XUJQK>

<sup>36</sup> IFEX, Deception used to arrest Khadar Awl Ismail and Abdiqani Ahmed Mohamed of Somalia's Radio Daljir, 9 September 2020, <https://bit.ly/2G5ZgrJ>

<sup>37</sup> IFEX, Sagal Salad Osman, producer of a children's programme, murdered in Somalia, 7 June 2016, <https://bit.ly/3mLEr62>





On September 27, 2016, Abdul Aziz Muhammad Ali, the news anchor for Radio Shabelle, was shot dead by unknown persons in Mogadishu in the Jiro Karoub neighborhood in the Yakshid region north of Mogadishu, after he was arrested several times by the police and the National Intelligence and Security Agency.<sup>38</sup>

On 13 September 2017, Abdullah Osman Moallim of Jubaland TV succumbed to serious head wounds sustained from a suicide blast in Beledweyne town on 10 September 2017.<sup>39</sup> On December 11, 2017, Journalist Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed, nicknamed Gabow, died after improvised explosive device fitted to a car he was to drive went off, causing the journalist to die on the spot.<sup>40</sup>

On September 18, 2018, reporter Abdirizak Said Osman, who works for Radio Voice of peace, was stabbed to death by unknown attackers.<sup>41</sup>

On July 26, 2018, journalist Abdirisaq Qasim was shot dead by a policeman at a security checkpoint in in the country's capital city, Mogadishu.<sup>42</sup>

On July 12, 2019, Somalia's inspirational journalist, Hodan Nalayeh of Kismayo TV was killed in the Al-Shabab suicide bombing.<sup>43</sup> On February 16, 2020, Abdul-Wali Ali Hassan was killed by gunmen.<sup>44</sup>

On May 4, 2020, journalist Said Yusuf Ali, of privately-owned Kalsan TV in Mogadishu, Somalia was attacked and murdered by unknown figure in in Mogadishu's Hodan district.<sup>45</sup>

## Recommendations:

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<sup>38</sup> UNESCO, Director-General condemns murder of journalist Abdiaziz Mohamed Ali in Somalia, 29 June 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Hd9ZBj>

<sup>39</sup> African freedom of expression, Journalist Dies of Wounds from Bomb Attack in Central Somalia, 13 September 2017, <https://bit.ly/2ZS81wQ>

<sup>40</sup> African freedom of expression, TV Journalist Killed in Somalia, 12 December 2017, <https://bit.ly/3mBalfL>

<sup>41</sup> Reporters Without Borders, Radio reporter stabbed to death in central Somalia, September 20, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2FPPWZi>

<sup>42</sup> International Federation of Journalists, Somalia: Policeman condemned to five-year jail term for killing a journalist, 10 July 2019, <https://bit.ly/2HoNSrP>

<sup>43</sup> BBC, Hodan Nalayeh: Somalia's 'inspirational' journalist, killed in Kismayo, 13 July 2019, <https://bbc.in/2RPfAzN>

<sup>44</sup> National Union of Somali Journalists, NUSOJ strongly condemns killing of journalist, demands justice, february 17, 2020, <https://bit.ly/32ZdlLv>

<sup>45</sup> Africafex, AFEX Condemns Murder of Journalist in Somalia, May 4, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2FKr3yt>





Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights recommends the following:

- 1- The need to ensure conducting a prompt and impartial investigation into all attacks against journalists, to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable, brought to justice, and that remedies are provided to victims of journalists and their families.
- 2- The need to amend the Somali Penal Code of 1970 by adding an article on the protection of journalists by establishing special penalties for attackers against journalists, to ensure that journalists practice their professions without fear of being attacked.
- 3- The need to stop abusing the legal framework to harass, intimidate and arbitrarily detain journalists and media professionals, and release all those currently detained.
- 4- The federal parliament should establish a specialized, functional and independent human rights committee to effectively monitor the Somali government's compliance with human rights, to promote human rights and to operate as an alternative mechanism for providing redress for victims of human rights violations.
- 5- Putting an end to illegal arrests, arbitrary arrests, intimidation and harassment against journalists and media workers, and creating a safe environment for media professionals.