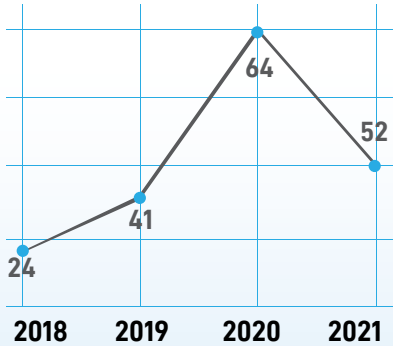




Murders, Physical Assaults & Online Harassment: Silencing Journalism in Somalia

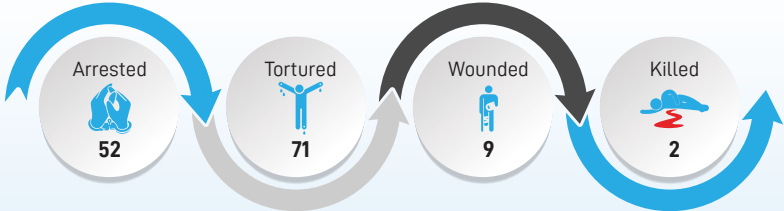
Increasing Number of Arbitrary Arrests



State of Press Freedom in Somalia

Somalia experienced a sharp deterioration in 2020/2021

Since May 2020, the number of Journalists:





FESQJ and the entire media fraternity is highly concerned about both the government and pro-opposition forces apparent lack of respect for media freedoms. Cases of journalists attacked, media outlets raided and equipment confiscated must be investigated and immediately addressed.



Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	01
Introduction.....	02
Somalia's State of Impunity – 2021.....	04
Journalists Killed in the Line of Duty.....	04
Arrests, Threats and Attacks Against Journalists.....	06
Raids and Closure of Media Outlets.....	09
Impact of COVID-19 on Somali Media.....	11
Other Notable FESQJ Programs and Initiatives.....	12
Book Launch: Somali Media Workers Rights Booklet.....	12
Conclusion.....	13
Recommendations.....	13



**MURDERS, PHYSICAL ASSAULTS AND ONLINE HARASSMENT:
SILENCING JOURNALISM IN SOMALIA**

Somalia Annual Press Freedom Report 2020 – 2021
World Press Freedom Day
Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ)



Executive Summary

Somalia has reached a crucial political crossroad. The failure of a series of political negotiations intended to lead the country into an all-inclusive and consensus-based elections, in Feb 2021 and the resultant unilateral mandate extension by the parliament, has led to an outbreak of factional violence in the city. Following days of skirmishes in the city between forces loyal to the coalition of opposition leaders and the Somali National Army (SNA), hundreds of households were displaced – the UN estimates the figure of internally displaced persons maybe as high as 100,000 persons. Journalists covering the new political violence in the city faced a dramatic increase in the levels of targeting, physical attacks, arrests and destruction of equipment, bullying and intimidation. These unfortunate attacks were intended to silence impartial and objective reporting of the fighting and most importantly, to induce media self-censorship relating to the coverage of topics such as the scale of the devastation to citizens, developments on the battlefronts, closure of roads, businesses, lack of basic utilities such as water and electricity leading to massive displacement and violence reminiscent of the 1991 civil war.

FESOJ and the entire media fraternity is highly concerned about both the government and pro-opposition forces apparent lack of respect for media freedoms. Cases of journalists attacked, media outlets raided and equipment confiscated must be investigated and immediately addressed.

Overall, the situation of press freedom in Somalia between May 2020 and May 2021 has continued to experience a sharp and unfortunate decline. In total, FESOJ recorded the murder of 2 journalists – as a resulted of targeted killing, 52 arrests, assault and injury to 9 reporters in the line of duty, as well as threats, intimidation and government influenced firing of at-least 71 journalists across the country. As the country gears for long-awaited elections, the impact of the political stalemate on the practice of journalism has been negative – with more violence and threats inflicted on media workers. In 2021, based on data collected by FESOJ, state authorities such as the police and the national intelligence service, more commonly known as NISA account for the majority of the violence, threats and arbitrary arrests against journalists.

The 2021 data shows 51% (71 cases) increase in physical attacks, threats and intimidation compared to 2020 in which FESOJ recorded violence and threats against 47 journalists and media workers.

The economic burden of Covid-19 has exacerbated the existing financial challenges faced by majority of the media outlets in Somalia. Many stations are on the verge of closing down or have severely cut down content production and coverage as they struggled to raise sufficient revenue due to dwindling revenue and drying of other income streams.

Furthermore, incidents of government instigated online harassment and attacks targeted Somali journalists through both paid and volunteer activists on social media sites has continued to rise. Journalists still faced challenges using these platforms to provide critical reports as they face unfair and coordinated manipulation, intimidation and bullying.

This report is the 19th annual press freedom report produced by the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ), since its founding in 2002, as NUSOJ. It provides an annual recap of information on the health and safety of Somali journalists, the status of press freedom in Somalia, threats to media rights and the practice of the profession of journalism. Through a detailed data inventory and analysis, the report also seeks to highlight and document some of the egregious assault and violence against reporters in the line of duty, media workers and media outlets.

In this report also, FESOJ highlights some of its work supporting independent journalism in Somalia including the launching and distribution of a printed booklet, in March 2021, on the rights of working journalists.



Introduction

This annual report compiled and released by the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ) is based on serious violations and abuses against journalists working in Somalia. In general, the trend of press freedom situation in the country between May 2020 and May 2021 has seen a dramatic deterioration, due to a spike in political violence precipitated by the collapse of election talks.

Somalia remains one of the world's most dangerous countries for journalists. Political violence, terrorist attacks, corruption, brutal assaults, and harassment of media workers continue to throttle the practice of journalism. Numerous political, state, and non-state entities including the federal government, state authorities and the terror outfit Al Shabaab carry out violence, torture and arbitrary detention of journalists. During the period under review, journalists have been

subjected to increased abuses, arbitrary arrests and more insidious intimidation tactics such as the court martialing of critical voices.

The scale of violations and their frequency continue to remain unacceptably high. At least 71 cases of attacks, beatings and violations against journalists and media workers were documented in Somalia, across all the states and regions. This translates to an average of 6 cases of violations per month, or nearly two cases every week. The violations recorded include the murder of two journalists, 52 assault and injuries, six raids, attacks and closure of media outlets.

Overall, the most dangerous state or region during the reporting period is Banadir. The region has registered over a



third of violations against journalists. The state of Puntland is the second riskiest and most dangerous place to practice journalism in Somalia, with nearly 28% of recorded violation cases. TV journalists are the most targeted – TV medium workers have been accosted, arrested and beaten while filming or covering live event and official functions. The top three types of violations are physical beatings – 36%, arrests – 33%, threats and intimidation – 28%, and killings – 3%.

The data in the report, reveals that in spite of repeated pledges to protect media freedoms, Somali authorities in various states have been tightening the lid on media in the country, through numerous means of censorship including murders, threats, harassment aimed at defeating and silencing the practice of critical watchdog journalism in Somalia.

Our analysis also shows that no region, no town, no state in Somalia is safe for journalists – physical assaults, beatings, and arrests are common place everywhere. Somali leaders are growing confident each month in their aggressive arsenal to beat independent journalism into submission.

Two issues of huge concern to media right defenders, encountered during this reporting period: first, is the increasing length of arbitrary detentions, which are getting longer and longer – just to intimidate journalists, and secondly, more state authorities are subjecting critical journalists to military tribunals, disregarding the jurisdiction of civilian courts.



Somalia's State of Impunity – 2021

Journalists Killed in the Line of Duty Cases:



Jamal Farah Aden
Journalist, Galkacyo

1. March 1, 2021 - Two armed men killed journalist Jamal Farah Aden in Galkacayo at a shop he owned in the northern part of the city. The insurgent Al Shabaab later claimed responsibility for the murder.



Said Yusuf

Journalist, Mogashu

2. May 4, 2020 – A man and woman accomplice stabbed to death journalist, Said Yusuf, who was on his way back home from work. Police are investigating the case, after detaining a man suspected of being involved in the crime.





Arrests, Threats and Attacks Against Journalists

Highlight of Some Cases:



1. May 4, 2020 – Somali police in Mogadishu assaulted female journalist Safiya Adan Osman and her cameraman while covering demonstration by displaced persons.

Safiya Adan Osman
Journalist, Mogadishu



2. May 21, 2020 – Journalist Abdullahi Sheikhdoon and other reporters based in Mogadishu were physically assaulted and harassed by the Somali police for their coverage of COVID-19 and related awareness campaigns organized by the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism.

Abdullahi Sheikhdoon
Journalist, Mogadishu



3. June 6, 2020 – Somali Parliament's branch, the House of the People, forcefully barred and threatened journalists who had arrived the parliament building to cover the official opening of the 7th session of the Somali parliament.

Somali Parliaments
Somali journalists barred from covering events

4. June 8, 2020 – Somaliland Police detained journalist Ali Fahad Jama over a benign content posted to Facebook regarding an accident involving a pedestrian hit by a car. The police termed the report as fake news.

Ali Fahad Jama
Journalist, Somaliland



5. July 29, 2020 – Banadir Regional Court convicted journalist Abdiyaziz Ahmed Gurbiye, the deputy director of Goobjoog Media Group, for violation of article 328 and 269 of the punitive and outdated Siad Bare era Penal Code – which carries a six-month jail sentence.

Abdiyaziz Ahmed Gurbiye
Journalist, Mogadishu

6. August 5, 2020– Journalist Mohamed Abdiwahab Nur (Abuuja) was acquitted following long arbitrary incommunicado detainment by NISA and military court marshalling by the Somali National on unfounded allegations of terror related murder charges.

Somali Parliaments
Somali journalists barred from covering events



7. August 16, 2020, - August 16, 2020, Journalist Mohamed Abdi Hussein (Araye) was critically injured following a powerful suicide bomb attack that targeted Elite Hotel in Mogadishu. FESJO visited Araye in hospital where he was being attended to for shrapnel wounds sustained in the attack and donated an emergency assistance of \$2000 from the Free Press Unlimited Emergency Response.

Mohamed Abdi Hussein
Journalist, Mogadishu

8. September 14, 2020 – Somaliland’s government arrested journalist Ilyas Abdi Ali, reporter for the humanitarian station – Radio Ergo, in Hargeisa. He was remanded by the police in Maroodi-Jeex regional police for days without trial.

Ilyas Abdi Ali

Journalist, Somaliland



9. December 27, 2020 – Puntland forces detained journalist Kilwe Aadan Farax, at undisclosed location for more than two weeks. He was later arraigned in military court and charged with the “distribution of subversive and destabilizing content.” On March 18, 2021 – Puntland’s Military Court sentenced Kilwe to a 3-year jail term, conducted in a closed-door session without his lawyer and family members.

Kilwe Adan Farah

journalists, Puntland



10. January 16, 2021 - Police in Boorame, Somaliland arrested four journalists, namely: Hussein Gaafane of Universal TV, Abdillahi Daahir of SAAB TV, Ahmed Diiriye SBC TV, and Shuayb Maxamed – Bulsho TV for airing an ongoing investigation by the Auditor General concerning the district commissioner, Saleeban Hassan.

Mohamed Abdi Hussein

Journalist, Mogadishu

11. January 20, 2021 – Police in Galmudug following orders from the states’ ministry of information arrested 2 journalists: Mohamed Toohow – Universal TV and Abdullahi Warsame – SNTV, for covering Al Shabaab attacks in the region.

Universal TV & SNTV

Journalists, Mogadishu

12. February 21, 2021 – Security officials in Mogadishu had beaten and threatened the director of Radio Bandhiga, to delete his footage Four TV journalists arrested in Boorame for reporting on ongoing Auditor General investigations into the district

Director of Radio Bandhiga

journalists, Mogadishu

13. February 22, 2021 – Police in Bari region, Puntland, arrested journalist Ahmed Bootaan for capturing and disseminating vox pop videos of residents responding to President Deni's speech on the election fallout with the federal government.

Ahmed Botan

Journalist, Puntland

14. March 24, 2021 – Following border skirmishes between Somali and Kenyan forces, authorities in Beled Hawo, Gedo region arrested and injured scores of journalists. Videos recorded on these incidents show security forces badly wound radio journalist, Abdirizak Sheikh Ismail (Africa).

Abdiaziz Sheikh Ismail

Journalists, Mogadishu



Raids and Closure of Media Outlets

Highlight of Some Cases:



1. June 27, 2020 – Local authorities in Somaliland raided and closed the offices and studios of the privately owned Universal TV in Hargeisa. The unexplained arbitrary action resulted in the shutdown of the TV and expulsion of the reporters from the station.

Universal TV
Hargeisa, Somaliland



2. January 5, 2021 – South West State Police in Baraawe district raided and shutdown the popular Radio Baraawe and arrested its lead radio journalist Aweys Aweys Bahar based on "orders from above", however, the outlet resumed programming following days of advocacy and pressure.

Radio Baraawe
Lower Shabelle, Somalia



3. January 20, 2021 – Soldiers loyal to the Deputy President of Hirshabelle state, Mr. Yusuf Ahmed Hajar, attacked and threatened the journalists and media workers of HiiraanWeyn Radio station. The soldiers also arrested reporter Omar Khamiidti for Facebook posts that criticized Mr. Yussuf.

Hiiraan Weyn Radio
Hirshabelle, Somalia



4. February 8, 2021 – Two NISA officers armed with pistols attacked Somali Cable TV offices in Mogadishu and arrested photographer Sayid Ali and driver Ali Malaq for unfounded allegations. The officers claimed that Sayid Ali has recorded videos of Godka Jilacow jail and its vicinity.

Somali Cable TV
Mogadishu, Somalia



5. April 27, 2021 – Harmacad Police Unit raided Mustaqbal Media building in Mogadishu, forcefully attacked and tortured reporters including Bashir Mohamed Yussuf and confiscated their equipment's such as office computers and camera. The reason for the attack is unknown.

Mustaqbal Radio
Mogadishu, Somalia



Impact of COVID-19

Somali Media

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented Somalia, which was already grappling with protracted problems of conflict, displacement and drought, with new and unique challenges. So far, the Federal Ministry of Health has registered a total of 698 deaths and 13,670 laboratory confirmed infections.

As part of pandemic control measures, the government has for the second time, ordered shutdowns, curfews, and closure of schools and other facilities including businesses, on top of masking and social distancing measures already in place.

The media sector was forced to adapt to the new challenges posed by the virus, FESOJ, as part of the media fraternity, supported and advised media outlets on new guidelines and standards for field operations such as the use of masks and personal protective equipment (PPE), training on use of digital tools to shift most work to online and to support journalists working from home.

Somali media workers are often disproportionately exposed to the virus.

In the light of the electioneering period, journalists in Mogadishu and Hargeisa have been covering political rallies, protests and religious gatherings and other national events where the exposure to coronavirus is higher than normal. FESOJ has been providing support to journalists affected by the pandemic.

So far, at-least 21 journalists have contracted the virus – including TV broadcasters, radio journalists and other frontline media workers.

The economic effects of COVID-19 on media outlets have been more widespread. As businesses closed and advertising revenue has collapsed, most media owners have put in place layoffs and in other cases, employee's salary was reduced to as high as more than half.

Even so, the sustainability of the media is at huge risk, with many on the brink of collapse.





Other Notable FESQ Programs and Initiative

Book Launch: Somali Media Workers Rights Booklet

In a bid to improve the poor working conditions of Somali journalists, FESQ in partnership with media outlets across the country, has trained more than 150 journalists on media and labor rights. As part of the ongoing capacity building, FESQ produced and printed media workers right guideline booklet entitled “Journalist Know Your Rights” through funding and support from the Finish Foundation for Media and Development (VIKES), EU Mission in Somalia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland.

The booklet aims to improve Somali journalists’ awareness and understanding of their media labor rights and to inculcate the significance of labor unions.

In March 28, 2021, FESQ held a launching event at the Mogadishu office and hosted 15 journalists from partner outlets to distribute copies of the book. Speaking at the event, Secretary General, Farah Omar Nur said: “The booklet serves as a handbook and summarizes the recommendations you have made during the Somali journalist attends FESQ training in Mogadishu.

labor advocacy campaigns and training for the trusted persons, such as awarding contracts to the working journalists to protect their employment rights.”

Journalist Know Your Rights – is mainly focused on key contents: facts about the state of the media in Somalia, what is a trade union, collective bargaining, what is a trusted person, the major challenges facing the Somali media staff and how to solve problems at the workplace.



Conclusion

In 2021, Somali journalists continue to grapple the twin challenges of COVID-19 and deepening media repression across the country. New waves of violence, assault, and murder of journalists, precipitated by the tense political and electioneering period risks eroding hard gains of press freedom in Somalia. Threats to journalist's safety and wellbeing will increase the already burdensome media self-censorship and thereby negatively affect the production of important public interest reporting that serves the information needs of the community. Government authorities in Somalia must take adequate measures to protect the life and professional independence of journalists, urgent action is also needed to apprehend and bring to justice those who kill, attack and abuse journalists, regardless of rank or affiliation.

Equally, the increased production of misinformation and propaganda by the government and opposition parties has negatively affected the credibility and role of the media in Somalia. Given that most outlets regurgitate information shared by these sources, without verifying and fact-checking, due to their lack of resources and know-how to deal with these new phenomena.

Furthermore, the financial difficulties such as the loss of revenue imposed by COVID-19 has significantly impacted media operations in Somalia, with many media outlets teetering on the brink of collapse. As a result of these burdens, a number of journalists have lost their jobs and livelihood.

Recommendations

FESOJ Calls upon:

A. The federal government and state authorities to:

- (1) Take immediate measures to establish the Special Prosecutor for Crimes against the Media, hold security officers who had assaulted journalists responsible for their misconducts and bring to court, to face the law.
- (2) Urgently pursue and investigate the murder of journalists and media workers and put in place measures to protect the safety of the media fraternity.
- (3) Put in place measures to eliminate the widespread intimidation, harassment and threats against journalists by government officials.

B. Media Owners

- (1) Given the understandable financial burdens faced by journalists, editors and media owners should pursue strategies to retain journalists and avoid any unnecessary lay-offs.
- (2) Media owners should coordinate with media rights supporters and government institutions to provide journalists covering high exposure environments with personal protective equipment's.