

Press Freedom in Somalia in a downward spiral

Somalia Annual Press Freedom Report – 2022/2023
by the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ)

fesoj.org

info@fesoj.org
Mogadishu, Somalia

FESOJ ISUTAGGA
SUXUUFYINTA
SOOMALYEED
Federation
of Somali
Journalists



30th Anniversary

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY
3 May 2023

SHAPING A FUTURE OF RIGHTS

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AS
A DRIVER FOR ALL OTHER
HUMAN RIGHTS

Let us stand for freedom
of expression

Without freedom of speech,
there is no modern World.

Media should also
understand its
responsibility

FESOJ ISUTAGGA
SUXUUFYINTA
SOOMALYEED
Federation
of Somali
Journalists



In the 2022/2023 Journalists in Somalia have been facing perilous situation, with three reporters have been killed and the country still remains one of the most dangerous environments for journalists in the world. This annual report delivers climax of cases, analysis of trends, and recommendations to improve the plight of the part being ruined by endless, and unalleviated attacks. There has been no cooperation between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Federal Member States towards the protection of freedom of the press, and there is no proper strategy to deal with it in Somalia. so, confusion has arisen for every state to make its own decisions concerning the press freedom which resulted many media workers to be treated harshly and subjected to draconian and outdated penal codes that were set in the sixties.

The government was making a big excuse to pressurize the journalists for its war with Al-Shabaab and therefore it insisted that press cannot be neutral which had prompted a great burden on the security of the journalists. The journalists also did not have access to reports from the war zones and areas liberated from Al-Shabaab, where sometimes serious acts were against human rights.

Farah Omar

Secretary General, FESQJ

Contents

Introduction.....04

Executive Summary.....05

Proposition of cases.....07

Journalists Killed, attacks, threats, Arrests &
harassments.....08-17

Conclusion.....18

Recommendations.....18-19

Introduction

Somalia is ranked at 140 out of 180 countries by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF). Somalia's media environment is labeled as one of the worst in the world and "extremely hostile and unsafe for journalists to work in it."

Despite that the Somali Journalists work and carry out their duties day in day out in the most precarious media scene around the world. Armed groups, Militia clans and political actors target journalists and media workers with assassinations, brutal tortures, arrests and harassment all the time.

Tight political deadlines around the delayed electoral process in 2022, along with the armed conflict with Al-Shabab in many parts of south and central Somalia have all increased the importance of access to information and political control of news content. Hopes that the new authorities, who came to office in Mogadishu in 2022, would bring respite to journalists have been dashed. The government, the regional administrations, and Al-Shabab have all sought to manipulate the media to shape public opinion and enhance their power at a heavy cost to media freedom and the safety and security of journalists.

The government uses old-fashioned laws, like the country's outdated 1964 penal code to lawfully prosecute journalists rather than those who harm them.

While Alshabab, has been waging an insurgency war against Government for about 15 years, treats journalists as spies in some worst scenarios and still continue to harm the Media Practitioners in the area they rule. The group has used threats and violence against journalists to coerce according to their ideology.

This, in turn, encourages individuals to operate outside the framework of international humanitarian law and local laws and the judicial system are weak to safeguard the basic human rights of all citizens including journalist and sometimes they are alleged to be accomplices. Faith in Somali judicial system is close to zero and it needs a serious reform in order to stop once for all the harassment, the torture and attacks against journalists without due process.

Free and fully functional media is necessary for Somalia to provide access to information including access to security, governance, and developmental information. Informed citizens, with the right knowledge and tools, will effectively and willingly participate in rebuilding Somalia, and for this to happen, all relevant stakeholders need to ensure the citizens right to free flow of information - which includes the media's ability to investigate, shine light on corruption and hold the powerful to account.

Despite the media's significance for Somalia's critical national pursuits, Somali journalists struggle with violence and insecurity in their daily duties. State and non-state actors continue to wield violent approaches to suppress the truth and stifle independent critical stories. Journalists and

media workers who try to speak truth to power find themselves routinely subjected to arbitrary attacks, assassinations, arrests, physical assaults and verbal attacks, threats and harassment - and increasingly disaffected officials raid media outlets, temporarily closing the facility until their anti-press demands are met. These types of serious violations against free press occurs every other week - and FESOJ, alongside other media rights defenders' fight brutal running battles against powerful institutions and individuals who resort to archaic laws there are inimical to freedom of expression.

On top of brutal violations, which is a major concern for the media fraternity, is the obstruction on security matters reporting. The governments repeatedly deny the access of first-hand information at the incident scenes, as well as requests to information concerning the federal elections. Government officials and institutions across federal states in Somalia have used National security agenda as an excuse to block press, deny access to officials, or ignore submitted requests for information.

This annual report released by the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ) is based on recorded serious violations and abuses against journalists working in Somalia and in general the trend of press freedom situation in the country between May 2022 and May 2023.

Executive Summary

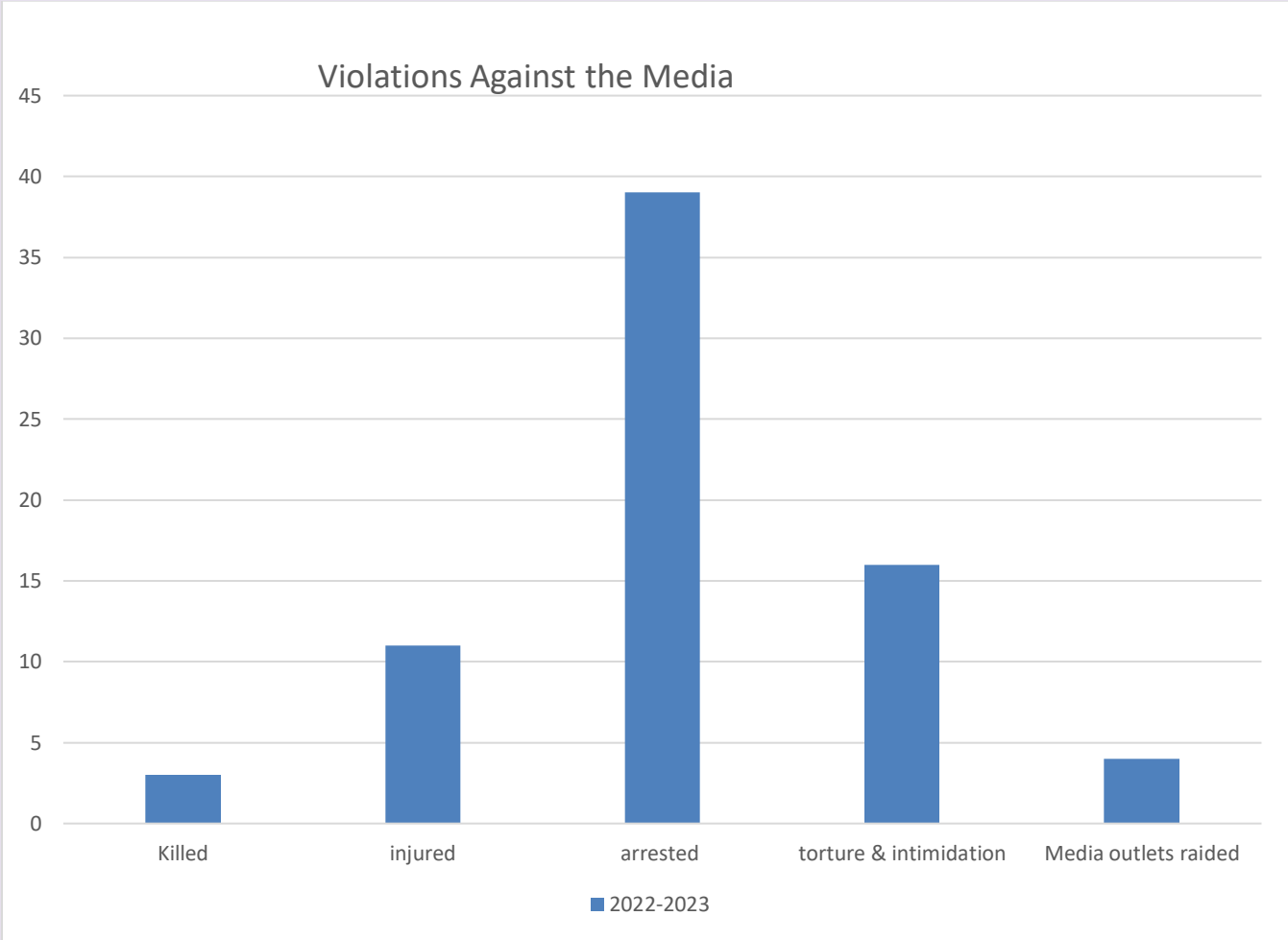
As part of its mandate, the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ) carries out regular research, monitoring and documentation of incidents and trends of violations against journalists, media workers, media outlets, and other members of the media fraternity carry out their vital daily duties internally, and in collaboration with our partners - local media rights defenders and development partners which aim to promote the safety and protection of Somali journalists. This annual report presents a summary of key incidents and trends of violations, responsible perpetrators, analysis by region, and recommendations to improve the safety and welfare of journalists. Although FESOJ is unable to list all incidents of violations for both logistical and contextual challenges, this report, therefore, serves to provide an overall, rich picture of the situation of press freedom in Somalia during the reporting period.

In 2022/2023, cases of violations against the media rose sharply. Most violations targeted journalists engaged in the day-to-day reporting activities in the field, this includes coverage of election-related activities such as;

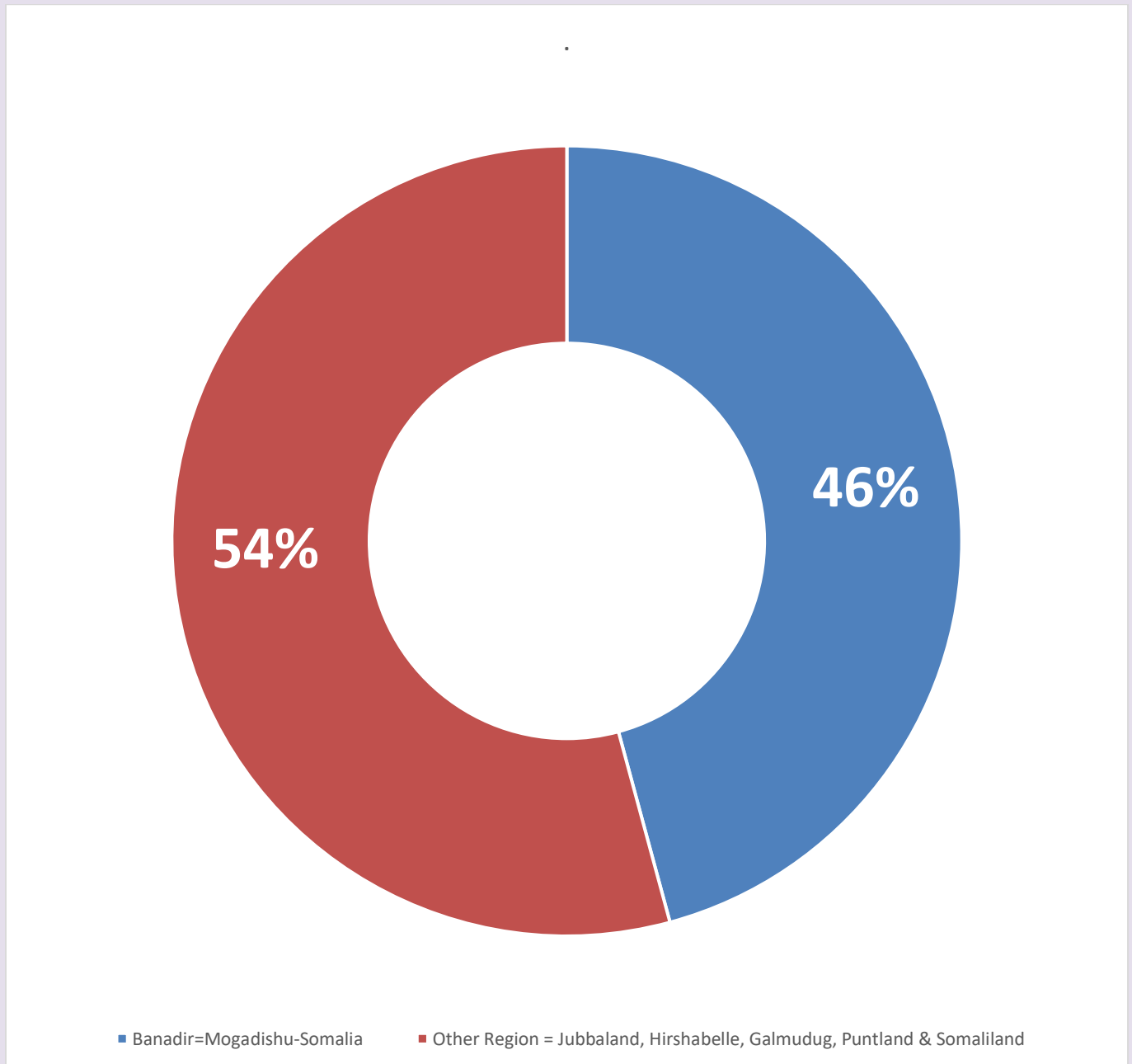
Constituent gatherings, protests, candidate press events, and finally reporting on security incidents that have heightened during the volatile election period. In all these situations, the Federation of Somali journalists (FESOJ) recorded numerous uncalled-for, heavy-handed responses from various local law enforcement agencies. Police and other security agencies such as NISA carried out brutal clampdowns on press freedom, including physical assaults against reporters, violent raids on media outlets, arbitrary detentions, inflicting damage on press equipment, frequent harassment, and intimidation aimed at silencing the free press. Since 2017,

18 Somali journalists were killed, and according to CPJ, Somalia’s fatalities represent more than half of all journalists murdered in Africa.

In the period between May 2022 to May, 2023 - FESOJ recorded a total of 107 violations - and out of these, 3 journalists were killed, 11 Journalists were injured, 39 were arrested, 16 suffered violent beatings, restriction or harassment, 4 media outlets were affected by raids, temporary closure, and damage to property, and 34 journalists and media workers, in various regions, had reported to FESOJ about direct threats to their lives, including regular harassment by local authority officials - in most cases, these were reprisals related to their journalistic reporting.



**Proposition of Cases:
Banadir VS All Other Regions Combined 2022-2023**



Journalists Killed, attacks, threats, Arrests & harassments



On May 9, 2022: The Parliamentary Committee on Presidential Election released a memo restricting independent journalists from accessing the presidential election venue. on 15 May 2022, the day of the elections. The memo stated that journalists could follow the process through the TV screens installed outside the hall.



May 19, 2023: Hassan Kulmiye , a videographer for KGS Media and Abdirashid Ismail Abukar of Radio Baidoa has been arrested in Baidoa city. The journalists have been accused of posting allegations on the social media about alleged corruption in Baidoa city.



On May 23, 2022: A Somaliland court in Hargeisa, sentenced the director of MM Somali TV, Mohamed Abdi Ilig and Abdijabar Mohamed Hussein, a reporter of Horn Cable television to 16 months in prison. Both were accused of spreading fake news, after they reported the shooting that took place in the central prison in Hargeisa. The journalists were later released after paying a fine of \$10,000 (Ten Thousand Dollars).



On June 1, 2022, South West State police officers in the city of Barawe raided the only media house in the old city, arresting two journalists, Fu'ad Shooble, the founder of the radio Barawe and Osman Aweys Bahar, who also covers for Universal TV. Both were released without charge.



June 5, 2022: Omar Sebrie , a journalist who travelled from Mogadishu to Hargeisa has been arrested. As journalism is not a crime, the Somaliland authorities was requested to release the journalist.



June 13, 2022: Four journalists were illegally detained upon their arrival in Ergavo city of Sanaag region of Somaliland. Their arrival in the city has come a day after Muse Bihi, Somaliland President reached the city for talks with the traditional elders.



On June 13, 2022: Representatives from the Villa Somalia communications department barred and intimidated journalists in Mogadishu reporting on the visit of Victoria Nuland, the U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. The presidential staff allegedly locked journalists in a small room for an hour to prevent them from accessing the venue. Similarly, on 15th June 2022, Villa Somalia security guards prohibited journalists from covering the appointment of the new prime minister, Hamze Abdi Barre, despite the fact that all the journalists had invitations and press accreditation to cover the event.



On June 27, 2022: Abdikarin Mohamed Siyad and Khalid Mohamud Osman of Hirshabelle State-run media; were wounded after a landmine hit with the vehicle on board at Qabno in Hiiraan region. The attack also resulted the death of Abdirahman Adow, the driver of the journalists' vehicle.



On July 4, 2022: Hawl-wadaag district police force briefly detained two journalists from Risaala Media, Kasim Ibrahim Adan and Abdukadir Hussein Anshur, while they were conducting interviews on armed robbery incident in the neighborhood. Police confiscated their equipment. The journalists were freed afterwards without putting on a trial.



On July 4, 2022: Military personnel stopped two journalists at gunpoint while they were conducting interviews with fishermen at Liido beach. The military officers confiscated equipment and threatened to shoot Risaala Media Corporation journalist Abduqadir Osman Indhoy and his cameraman Mohamed Said Nur.



On July 5, 2022: Police officers detained RTN television reporter Mohamed Abdirahin Mohamed. Mohamed claims he was pursued after his interview with South West State Assembly opposition members. The political opposition member and six others had protested the revocation of their immunity and membership in the state assembly. Mohammed was warned against publishing the interview or criticizing President Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed (Laftagareen).

On July 5, 2022: The Jubbaland president's office banned independent media from covering the inaugural session of the Jubbaland Assembly's fourth session in Kismayo. President Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Madobe) addressed the regional lawmakers on 6th July 2022.



On July 15, 2022: National Intelligence and Security Agency forces raided the house of Hassan Ali Da'ud, a reporter for Arlaadi Media Network (AMN) and taken to unknown location. According to colleagues, the detention follows his coverage about a complaint made by members of South West State (SWS) opposition lawmakers in Baidoa on 6 July. The news was disseminated on AMN. He was held at the intelligence prison in Baidoa for 19 days when he was freed without charges.



On July 18, 2022: Police and military officers in Mogadishu's Wadajir district targeted and wounded two Arlaadi Media Network (AMN) journalists Mohamed Nur Mohamed and Munasar Abdirahman during their coverage the impact of roads blocked by the ongoing rains due to lack of maintenance in Wadajir neighborhood.



On July 19, 2022: Suleyman Yusuf Ali, the Minister of Information for Somaliland, announced at a press conference that the government would suspend all BBC activities. It was unclear whether the suspension would apply to all the outlet's reporting and broadcasting activities in Somaliland. Suleyman accused BBC Somali of losing its objectivity and was "undermining the integrity of the Somaliland state." According to a BBC spokesperson, the suspension was not formally communicated.



On August 4, 2022: Baidoa police summoned and at that moment haphazardly arrested two journalists from Radio Warsan, Mohamed Abdirahman Abdulle 'Malele' and Farah Hussein Haji 'Weerow'. Police held the journalists at the criminal investigation department in a week before they were freed later without charges.



On August 11, 2022: Police in Hargeisa detained two Horyaal 24 TV journalists, Abdinasir Abdi Haji Nur and Ahmed-Zaki Ibrahim Mohamud after covering violent protests over the postponed elections in the capital city and other towns that day. FESJ learned that police initially held journalists at the criminal investigation department before transferring them to the Mandhera prison on 15 August. They were released by the Hargeisa court without charges.

ion department in a week before they were freed later without charges.



On September 6, 2022: Suleyman Yusuf Ali, Minister for Information of self-declared republic, banned CBA TV from operating in Somaliland. He claimed that their licence had expired and alleged that the broadcaster was airing content that "threatened the peace in the region." In his letter Suleyman accused CBA TV of breaching Article 45 of Somaliland's press law, which he said prohibits media from propagating content harmful to the stability of Somaliland. CBA TV noted that permits issued in 2018 by the Ministry of Information and the Attorney General's offices do not expire. They also claimed that their reporting was balanced.



October 3, 2022: Yusuf Mohamed Adam, journalist with the Arlaadii Media Network (AMIN) has been detained and held by the Ethiopian contingent under the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in Burhakaba town, Bay region,



On October 17, 2022: Somaliland police in Erigabo, detained two journalists, Abdurahman Mohamed Adani of Horyaal24 TV and SomNews TV reporter Jabir Said Duale were after they covered a story that exposed a Somaliland military officer who forcibly closed down the only available mother and child health centre in Fiqifuliye, a rural village in the southern Sanaag region which allegedly led to the death of a young expectant mother days earlier. They were freed on bail on the same day with their case pending at the Sanaag Regional Court.



On August 21, 2022: Haramacad officer, specially trained police forces unit, shot M24 TV photo journalist, Ahmed Omar Nur. The cameraman was among a group of local journalists who set out to cover the Hayat hotel attack at the KM4 junction. He was rushed to the hospital where doctors treated him.



On September 30, 2022: Somali National TV journalist Ahmed Mohamed Shukur was killed in a bomb attack while covering security operations against Al-Shabaab in Basra neighborhood.



Photo of Liban Abdi

On October 4, 2022: NISA member in Bakaro market, Mogadishu attacked two Goobjoog journalists injuring one of them. Television reporter Liban Abdi Warsame and cameraman Najib Farah Mohamed were attacked while conducting interviews in Bakaro market when the armed NISA officers attacked them and beat in juring Liban Abdi Warsame on the mouth and lips.



On October 11, 2022: Somali intelligence personnel arrested Abdalla Ahmed Mumin from Mogadishu's Aden Adde International Airport. Abdalla is the secretary general of the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS). At the time of his arrest, he was travelling to Nairobi. Abdalla was then transferred to the CID investigation centre where he was detained for several days.



On October 22, 2022: Galmudug police in Southern Galkayo detained journalist Sadaq Said Nur after reporting a news story about armed militia, who obstructed at the Qaboobe displaced camp, on the outskirts of Galkayo, ahead of the visit by UNHCR delegation at the camp. The story was published on Mudug Journalist Facebook page. However, according to Sadaq Said Nur, he was freed on the same day without charges but was forced to remove the story from the page.



On October 22, 2022: Somaliland police in Gabiley haphazardly arrested, Horn Cable TV reporter Farhan Abdi Isse on the orders of Gabiley Mayor. The journalist’s arrest follows after covering a news conference by Waddani opposition party members, who called for the Somaliland authorities to recognize Gabiley as a region instead of a town.



On October 23, 2022: Jubbaland intelligence authorities haphazardly detained Horn Cable TV reporter, Abdullahi Hussein Kilas, in Kismayo after covering an attack on a hotel in the heart of interim capital of Jubaland. Kilas was freed later in the day after authorities enforced Horn Cable TV to remove the news report.



On October 25, 2022: Police in Dhusamareb of Galmudug detained Dalsan TV correspondent Mowlid Mo’alim Hassan, following his coverage on a protest by a group of local women in the city. He was held at Dhusamareb police station and was not yet charged. However, he was freed later after the intervention of clan elders in Dhusamareb.



On October 29, 2022: Reuters photographer, Feisal Omar, Abdukadir Mohamed Abdulle of Voice of America and Isse Abdi Isse freelancer journalist, were injured in an Al-shabab suicide car bombings attack that targeted a government premise, ministry of higher education located at Mogadishu’s KM5 junction.



On October 29, 2022: Mohamed Isse Hassan, known as Koonaa who worked for the online television channel M24 TV, has lost his life in twin bombings targeted a government building at KM5 junction in Mogadishu.



On October 29, 2022: Abdullahi Jama, a journalist who recently returned from abroad has died in the tragic attacks targeted the ministry of higher education premise at KM5 junction in Mogadishu.



On December 18, 2022: Somali National Intelligence (NISA) members apprehended the UK-based Channel 4 News

correspondent, Jamal Muhumed Osman at the Mogadishu's Aden Adde Airport shortly after arriving at the airport from London.

The multi-award-winning journalist was held at an airport hotel overnight and his movement restricted until the next day when he was deported from the country with the intervention of members of the parliament.



On December 22, 2022: Police in Beledweyne briefly arrested four journalists from Hiraanweyn radio; Abdimajid Abdirahman Adan, Mustaf Ali Adow, Abdullahi Osman Idow and Abdirahman Moalim Muse. And forced the radio station off-air, after the radio reported an al-Shabaab attack on the rural villages on the south of Beledweyne following pulling out of the local Militias forces who protested about lack of salaries. The four journalists were later released without charges and the radio resumed operation the following day.



On December 25, 2022: Galmudug police detained two reporters Sadaq Abdi Shidane and Mubarak Mohamud Adan in Adado district after they interviewed clan elders who had supposedly accused to have met with al- Shabaab members in central Somalia. The two journalists were freed on the same day without charges.



On December 28, 2022: Somali police in Mogadishu’s Hamar-weyne district haphazardly detained three Risaala Media Corporation journalists, Sayid Ahmed Abdullaahi, Ilyas Daud Hassan, and their cameraman Ali Hassan Gure, who were covering Hamarweyne community members complaining about the closure of city roads following the visit of Djiboutian president Ismail Omar Guelleh in Mogadishu.



On January 11, 2023: Abdifatah Omar Gedi, a journalist in Garowe, was tortured by the Puntland president's security guards.

During the attack against him, the journalist's property, including his own car, also got damaged.

This heinous action has raised outrage in the independent media sector.



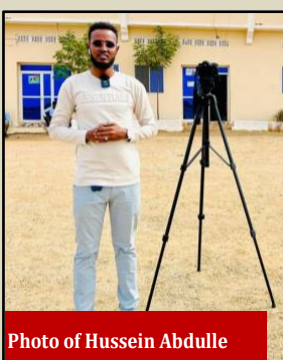
On the February 7, 2023: Security personnel led by NISA's agent chief of Karan district, Ismail Ali Yare, have taken Mahad Mumin Dhicisow a cameraman from Astan TV to an unknown location. The journalist was to film a launching event at a sports center in the Karan neighborhood when he was taken into custody. He was later freed after interference with district authorities.



On the February 12, 2023: Karan district commissioner security guards raided and detained briefly two journalists from Risala Media Corporation, reporter Kasim Ibrahim Adan (Karama) and a photographer Abdikarin Mohamud Mohamed (Jokar). The two journalists were reporting on a protest by angry motorists who were blocking on roads. They were at the Sana'a intersection when they were arrested. They were released after the police confiscated and deleted footage from cameras recordings.



February 13, 2023: The Banadir regional court sentenced Abdelle Ahmed Muumin to 2 months in prison; he was sent to the central prison. On the same day, Central Prison officials released Abdullah. **On February 23, 2023:** Security forces re-arrested Abdalle Mumin, SJS Secretary General, at the Jazeera Hotel in Mogadishu. Mumin was detained while he was attending a meeting. He was in prison until he served his sentence.



On the March 13, 2023: Military personnel raided and tortured Mohamed Ali Abdi, a photographer, and Hussein Abdulle Mohamed, the editor-in-chief and the founder of SYL Somali TV, an online television channel that reports on corruption and abuse of state power. The targeted journalists who luckily escaped physical damage suffered material loss after one of the legs of the camera (Tripod) broke. The journalists who were targeted were reporting a protest by citizens who said that they had been looted their land by one of the banks in Mogadishu. The occurrence took place in Dharkeynley neighborhood.

Photo of Hussein Abdulle



On April 19, 2023: Osman Adan state-run media journalist, was injured in a fight between Al-Shabaab and government forces in Bud-bud of Galgaduud Region. He was wounded in the head. Photographer A/llahi Qoryooley who went missing in the battle, was later found safe.



Separately on April 19, 2023:

A journalist Abdiweli Bile of Sonna News Agency was injured and tortured by government forces while in the Hamar Jajab neighborhood in Mogadishu.

The reporter was later taken to a hospital and treated for a head injury.



On May 1, 2023, four journalists were beaten and tortured in the Fagax area of Mogadishu, where they were filming people who suffered from the recent rain in Mogadishu. An army led by an official from the local government injured the journalists. As a result, Sakarieh Ahmed Muse and Mahad Hassan Abdi Tawakal from Shabelle TV and Abdirisaaq Mohamud Jama (Maqosle) and Sadde Abdi Tahleel from Universal Somali TV were denied interviewing the residents about the problem caused by the rainwater.

The news about the journalists' complaint that went out on TV was later removed from the line.



Conclusion

During the fourth quarter of 2022, Somali journalists saw the worst violations recorded in recent times. Among the most gruesome attacks include Ahmed Mohamed Shukur who was killed in a bomb attack on September 30, 2022 while covering security operations against Al-Shabaab in Basra neighborhood. And the loss of two other senior reporters; Mohamed Isse Hassan, known as 'Koonaa' and Abdullahi Jama killed in twin bombings targeted a government building at KM5 junction in Mogadishu, on 29 October 2022.

Recommendation

In 2022/23, the Somali media witnessed the violations still continue unrelenting attacks - that requires doubling efforts and the close collaboration between all relevant stakeholders and international partners.

To the Federal Government of Somalia

- Publicly condemn and investigate all attacks on journalists and media organizations.
- Instruct the Ministry of Security to urgently and thoroughly investigate all attacks on journalists, and ensure all those involved to be prosecuted including law enforcement officers and military officials.
- National Intelligence Security Agency (NISA), and any other entity found responsible for violence against journalists and media workers are immediately suspended and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.
- We call on the Somali government to work with media rights defenders, civil society organizations, and media outlets to put in place an effective mechanism to guarantee access to information for the media and the general public.
- To accelerate the national media council body to end censorship.

To other Armed Actors

- Cease and desist from all attacks against journalists, media workers, media outlets and civilians.
- Stop all threats, intimidation, and harassment of members of the media.
- Respect freedom of expression and freedom of speech.

To Media Friends and Development Partners

- Condemn all actors who have made a habit of carrying out brutal violations against the media with impunity.
- We call on our friends and partners to encourage the government to guarantee the protection and safety of Somali journalists.
- We urge development partners to provide support for the training and capacity building of security agencies on how to protect and work with the media including observing respect for media freedoms, human rights conventions and demanding justice for missing Nationals