

FESOJ Annual Press Freedom Report
May, 2023 - May, 2024

Somalia: Government Violated Media Law it Previously Endorsed, Undermining Press Freedom



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Somalia: Government Violated Media Law It Previously Endorsed, Undermining Press Freedom.

Remarks from the Secretary General of FESQJ



As we celebrate 31 years of honoring press freedom worldwide, Unfortunately, media professionals in Somalia are still grappling with significant challenges. They live in fear, which restricts their ability to report freely on the country's affairs. Threats, arrests, and violence persist, creating an environment of intimidation and censorship. Sadly, Somalia remains one of the worst-hit countries when it comes to violence against the press.

In our annual report, the FESQJ Office highlights the most critical issues of the year, offering analyses of current and past situations and suggesting actions that align with constitutional and media laws.

At this moment, FESQJ wants to thank the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSO), the European Union, and Somali Media Stakeholders, both locally and internationally, for their support in advancing press freedom and ensuring the safety of journalists and media workers in Somalia.

Let's join forces to break free from this cycle of confusion and uncertainty.

**Best Regards,
Farah Omar Nur
Secretary General, FESQJ**

INTRODUCTION.

This annual report issued by the Somali Journalists Association (FESQJ) is based on recorded violations against journalists working in Somalia and the overall change in the state of press freedom in the country between May 2023 and May 2024.

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous environments for journalists to work in. They face intimidation, unlawful arrests, and even killings despite persistent calls for press freedom.

The latest report of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) in December 2023 indicated that Somalia ranked second among the worst countries in the world where journalists are harassed, moving down from the top spot it held for the previous five years.

The state of press freedom in Somalia over the past year is a matter of great concern, with real fears about the safety and ability of journalists and media workers to operate effectively.

Although the number of killings is lower than in previous years, illegal arrests, constant intimidation, and threats to journalists and media workers have become persistent obstacles to the work of the media in Somalia. The Media law signed by two presidents has not been fully implemented, with the government interpreting and applying it in a manner that undermines its intent.

Executive Summary

From May 2023 to May 2024, the FESQJ office recorded 28 cases of violations against Somali journalists. These included three incidents of killings, with one targeting a journalist in Abudwaq District, Galmudug, another in a suicide bombing in Mogadishu, and the third due to long-term injuries caused by a bomb attached to a journalist's car years ago.

Furthermore, 20 journalists were detained, 1 journalist tortured, 1 kidnapped, 1 journalist fled his area due to threats, and 1 radio, 1 tv station was attacked and closed.

These repeated violations demonstrate an ongoing concern for press freedom in Somalia. Journalists continue to be arrested for short periods without justification, only to be released later. Such detentions have become commonplace, even as the courts remain operational. All these challenges are aimed at threatening and silencing journalists and the media, compelling them to accept the status quo.

The media organizations and associations in Somalia are alarmed by the federal and regional government's failure to respect the country's constitution and the media law, which are meant to guarantee the rights of the press and freedom of expression.

Media Council

The media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and developing democracy. The Somali media is at a critical juncture, with many challenges, including a lack of professional skills, censorship, and safety concerns. Journalists still need a process to modify the prevailing oversights. The establishment of the Somali Media Council could address the current concerns.

A time has passed since two Presidents have signed the Media Law, and that has caused to raising debate and discussion and call for some of the articles in the Media Law need to be reviewed and amended. Some of the commonly accepted legal provisions by the Federal Government and the Regional States have not yet been implemented, and there is still concerns among the journalists and the mass media.

To overcome the existing challenges, it is necessary to work on the media council establishment process to amend the controversy and the existing debate.

This year, all the media stakeholders will be able to find common ground to establish the Media Council carefully and open-mindedly.

The Federation of Somali Journalists (FESQJ), the Somali Media Association (SOMA) and their affiliate organizations under the umbrella of Somali Mechanism for Safety of Journalists (SMSJ) believes that the time has come when the Somali press should have Somali Media Council in place in accordance with the Article 14 of the Somali Media Law .At this stage, FESQJ and SOMA has seen as significant point for the need to speed up the efforts for the establishment of an independent Somali Media Council on the bases of Article 14 of the Media Law whose members have knowledge of the Media and the laws of the country.

FESQJ and SOMA want the other affiliate media organizations, the government and civil society to work jointly so that the establishment of this Council will be a consultative one since the process has been dragging on for a long time; no single party can build the Media Council alone.

The Federation of Somali Journalists (FESQJ) has recently been closely following the establishment of the East African Media Council, which paved the way for its formation. FESQJ has been part of the foundation meetings, while Somalia does not have a functional Media Council.

Somalia, which has become part of the East African community, is important to be a part of the East African Media Council, which FESQJ has been consulted with a lot during its foundation.

The establishment of the Somali Media Council that is required to be formed is defined in Article 14 of the country's Media Law which its parts contain: 14.1, 14. 2, 14.3, 14.4., 14.5, 14.6, 14.7, 14.8 and 14. 9.

The important provisions are: Article 14.1 indicating the Media Council will be consisting of 9 members.

14.1. B) Government 3 members with one female

T) Private Media 3 members

J) The Civil Society Organizations (CSO) 3 members (Human Rights Commission, Women Associations and Somali Lawyers Association)

14.2. The members that could join the Media Council will be members from the academics, media experts selected for their experiences, talents, honesty and integrity

14.3. This important clause indicates that in order for the Council to fulfill its duties, it is to be independent from politics and government interference, institutional interests and special groups and conflict of interests that may come to the person who becomes a member and the work of the council.

14.4. The formation of the Somali Media Council could come through consultation with the Minister of Information, Media Associations and the Chairman of the Civil Society Organizations (CSO).

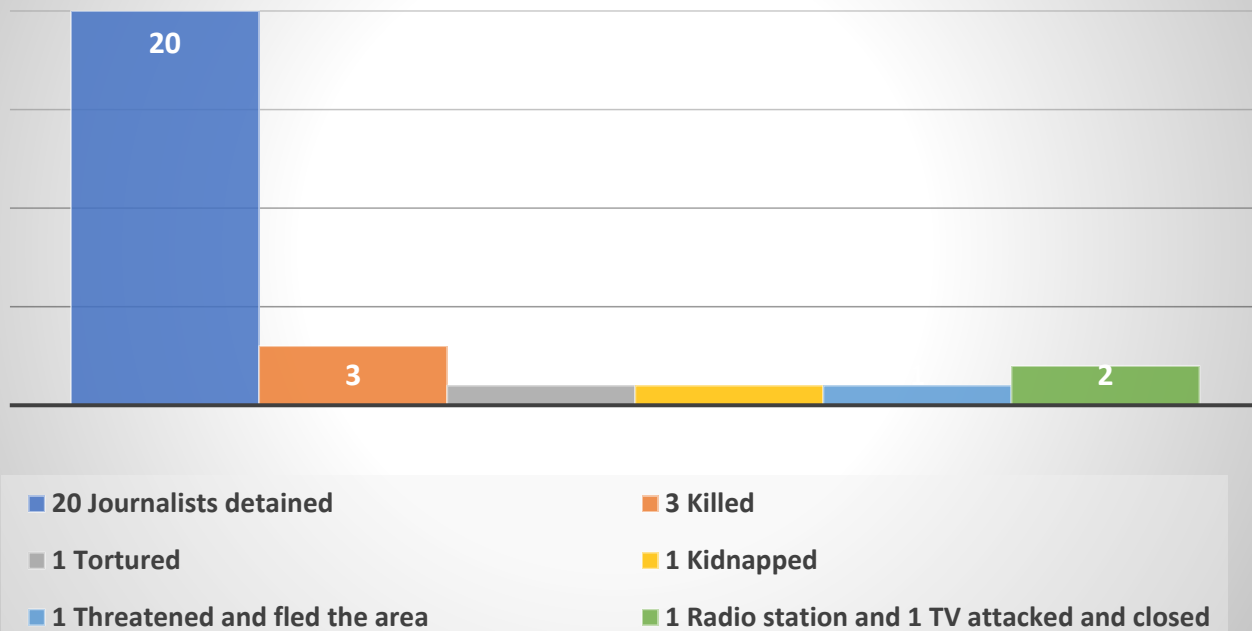
14.5. The appointment of the Somali Media Council will be valid with the decision of the Cabinet of Ministries after proposal of the Minister of Information, and signed by the President and issued in the Official Gazette.

14.6. The term of this Somali Media Council will be three years and can be renewed only once if necessary.

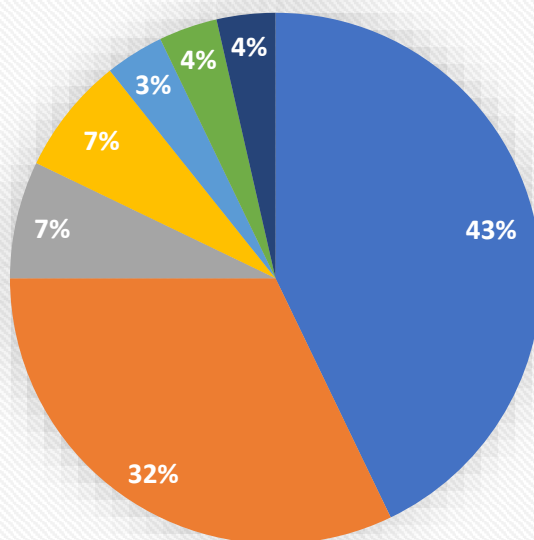
We are expecting to achieve a Media Council implemented in Somalia established through consultation approach to solve the prolonged challenges faced by the Somali media. Somalia is aiming to pave the way for free, democratic, responsible and active media.

FESQ and SOMA and their affiliated SMSJ members is confirming to be standing for leading that process of forming the Somali Media Council.

Number of Violations Against the Somali Media May, 2023 – May, 2024

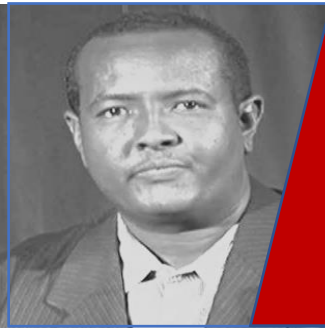


Proportion of cases: Banadir VS Other Regions Combined – 2023/2024



■ 12 Banadir ■ 9 Somaliland ■ 2 Jubaland ■ 2 Southwest ■ 1 Puntland ■ 1 Galmudug ■ 1 Hirshabelle

Journalists Killed, attacks, threats, Arrests & harassments



On 10 May 2023, experienced journalist Ismail Sheikh Khalifa died in Mogadishu, Ismail was also an active member of the Somali Civil Society. The death of the Journalist is believed to relate injuries sustained in a car bomb attack on December 4, 2018 in Mogadishu. Journalist Ismail Sheikh Khalifa has been in media house for long time and he served as the Secretary General of the Somali Media Association during his time.



15th May 2023, Bishara Bandey was detained in Hargeisa for a statement she made about the Somaliland government. She served three months in jail before receiving a one-year sentence from the court. Subsequently, she paid a fine equal to the one-year sentence.



On 25th May 2023, Farhan Baraale and Mohamed (Dulmi diid), working with the 5TV station, were detained after reporting the protests of the Bajaj three-wheeled motorcycle drivers against the taxation increase. The reporters were



7th June 2023 Mohamed Kafi UK was arrested in Luuq for the reports he sent about the conflict between the authorities of Jubbaland State in the Gedo region. He was released a few days later



On 14 June 2023, Abdirashid Abdiwahab, director of Universal in Hargeisa, was arrested in Hargeisa for reports released by the TV channel. A few days later, he was released.

On 27th June 2023, - Journalist Abdiqani Hussein Abokor (Baylood) from Horyaal24 TV was arrested in Hargeisa town, The arrest of the journalist was followed by the Somaliland Electoral Commission, which was angered by a report recently published by the journalist, which revealed errors seen in the voting cards that were recently distributed in areas of Somaliland



30th July 2023 , Shuaib Mohamed Dahir was detained while drafting a report about people the security forces were evicting out of Casa – Italia , Mogadishu who they said weren't permitted residents.



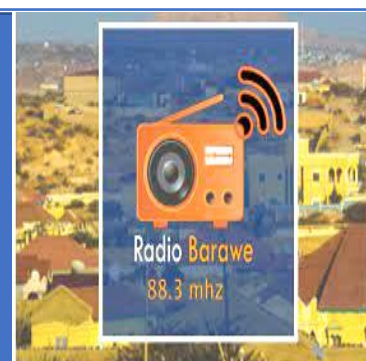
On 30th July 2023, Police detained Ali Somali, a reporter for the SYL television channel, while he was recording individuals who were protesting over their removal from Casa – Italia compound in Mogadishu by the Somali police.



9th August 2023, Idris Altesa was arrested in Hargeisa over writing in his social media about Somaliland issues while he was in Mogadishu, consequently he was deported from Hargeisa



On 12th August 2023, The authorities in the Barawe district in the lower Shabelle region ordered the shutdown of Radio Barawe. Gunmen believed to be loyal to the Mayor of Barawe district had attacked and opened gunfire at the Independent Radio Barawe, which was cut off the air for nearly 3 months. The Radio disseminates its programs and news in a local language, as confirmed by the director of the Radio,





On 14th August, 2023. Osman Aweys Bahar, who was the Radio Barawe director and was present at the Radio Station, had escaped for his life when the radio was shut down and after receiving threats that made him leave the city of Barawe.

15th August 2023, Abdirashid Dhore, a journalist working with international humanitarian organization was kidnapped by militants in Beledweyne city, later , the issue has been solved and he was released.



On August 17, 2023, the forces of the National Security & Intelligence Agency (NISA) arrested Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul, a journalist working with Cable Online TV and the Somali Journalists Association (SJS). He was accused of being involved in broadcasting a film of police officers undergoing training, in which he said that the authorities had corrupted the training. The police argued that the film was not intended for broadcast. Mohamed Bulbul was released without a court decision

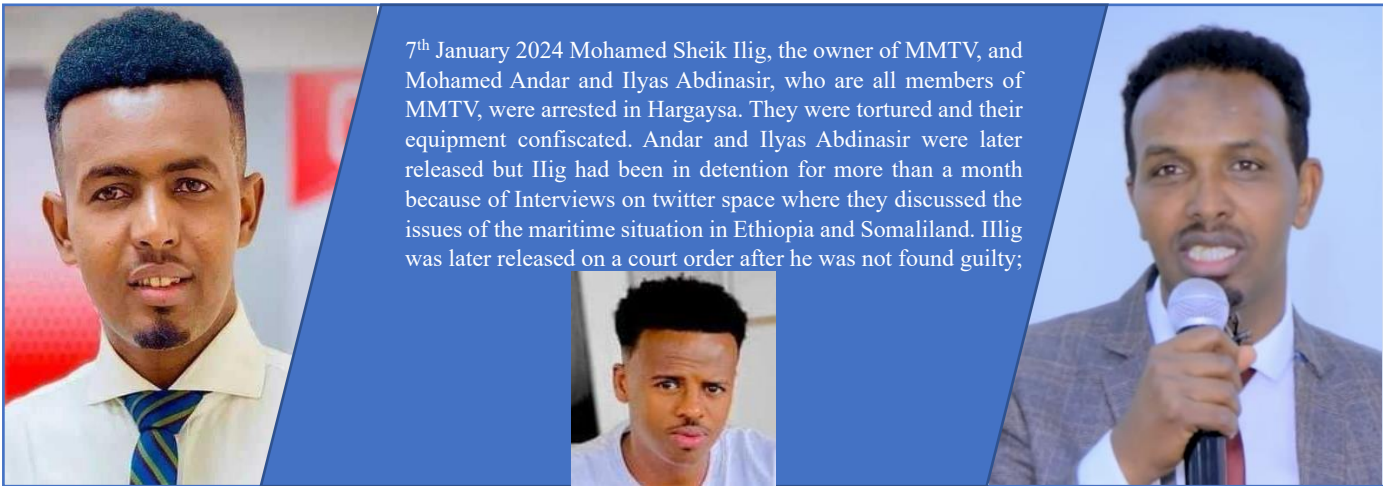
On 23rd August 2023. Sakariya Mohamed salad working with 5 TV station was arrested in kahda district after trying to report about an attack that took place in Kahda area. He was released hours later.




On 16th Oct 2023, Abdifitah Ma'alin Qays, Director of Somali Cable TV was killed as a result of suicide bomber attack that took place in a popular restaurant in Mogadishu. Several other people also died at Blue-Sky restaurant. SMSJ network team have sent condolence to late Qeys and visited his family and children after the incident.



On 11th December 2023, Police forces of Somaliland have detained a freelancer reporter Mohamed Aden jiglan in Hargeisa city for allegedly airing news article that demonstrated the expelling of Somaliland representative from Djibouti. However, details were not made on causes of the incident. He was released on bail from Hargeisa Prison, and the police had threatened him to avoid in disseminating such news.




7th January 2024 Mohamed Sheik Ilig, the owner of MMTV, and Mohamed Andar and Ilyas Abdinasir, who are all members of MMTV, were arrested in Hargaysa. They were tortured and their equipment confiscated. Andar and Ilyas Abdinasir were later released but Ilig had been in detention for more than a month because of Interviews on twitter space where they discussed the issues of the maritime situation in Ethiopia and Somaliland. Ilig was later released on a court order after he was not found guilty;





On 13 January 2024 Journalist Osman Mohamud Farah, who works for the State-owned Radio Mogadishu, was arrested by government security forces from 13 January 2024 to 25 March 2024, accusing him of security-related issues. After 2 months and more, Osman was released without any charges

20th February 2024 Jamal Osman was arrested and deported from Garowe, Puntland, because he had previously met with the AL-Shabab.



On 2nd March, 2024, the police forces killed Ali wasir who was a photo journalist in Mogadishu while he was taking pictures of people who were protesting against their eviction from residential land which were destroyed by the police in Wartanabadda district, Banadir region.

14th March 2024, Abdikarim Ahmed Bulahn, a journalist was killed in Abudwak city while working with an orphanage charity center, he has founded.

15 March 2024 Abdullahi Warsame Roble, who was one of the journalists working with the military and reporting from SNTV in Galmudug, was brutally beaten up in Mogadishu, and his equipment was taken away. His issue is likely related to the political issue in Galmudug.



On 2nd April 2024, Luuq authorities arrested a journalist, Mohamud Abdirashid Abdi (Boodbood), who was accused of travelling to Al-Shabaab-controlled territory. He was working for Radio Ergo. He was released after a week without being found guilty.



On April 18, 2024, journalist Hussein Abdulle was arrested by the National Security & Intelligence Agency (NISA). He was accused of releasing a report about the National Security Agency. Hussein regained his freedom a day later.



Recommendation

In 2023/24, the Somali journalists and media have seen relentless abuses that needs strengthening efforts and the close cooperation between all the significant stakeholders and international partners.

To the Federal Government of Somalia

- To establish an inclusive National Media Council through legal process and in accordance with article 14 of the signed Somali media law to protect and enforce the media law and media ethics.
- The Somali government is called upon to work jointly with media rights defenders, civil society organizations, and media outlets to establish an effective mechanism to guarantee access to information for the media and the general public.

- Every section of the Somali government security forces responsible for abuse against journalists and media workers is to be accused to the full extent of the law.
- To completely investigate all abuses against the journalists and the media and ensure all involved including law enforcement officers and military officials to be prosecuted.
- To openly condemn and investigate all attacks on journalists and media organizations.

To other Armed Actors

- Respect press freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of speech
- End all threats, intimidation, and harassment against members of the media.
- End and stop all form of attacks against journalists, media workers, media outlets and civilians.

To the Media Partners

- The international partners are urged 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
- The international partners are called upon to encourage the government to guarantee the protection and safety of Somalia journalists.
- The international partners are called upon to condemn all actors who routinely carrying out ruthless abuses against the journalists and the media with impunity

A Press for the Planet:

Journalism in the face of the Environmental Crisis