

IFJ Statement on the situation of human rights in Somalia

Thank you Mr. President,

The International Federation of Journalists welcomes the report of the Independent Expert on Somalia and wishes to draw the Council's attention to recent developments which threaten press freedom in the country.

Over the past two decades, Somali journalists have played an important role in exposing human rights abuses against the Somali people and helping mobilise international support for the country.

In particular, the National Union of Somali Journalists, affiliated to my organisation, has been at the forefront of the campaign to restore peace, democracy and rule of law in Somalia. This courageous stand, in the face of intimidation and violence, has exerted a terrible price with dozens of journalists killed and scores more forced into exile to escape the same fate.

The Somali journalists and the world journalists' community placed high hopes in the Federal Government's institutions in Somalia. Unfortunately, these have now been dealt a devastating blow by recent measures against independent media, calling into question the government's commitment to democratic rule.

The government has just adopted a new, repressive media law without consultation with journalists' leaders, despite their offer for dialogue over the bill and warnings of the adverse impact of the law on independent media.

We are united in opposing the law which, for all intents and purposes, seeks the end of independent journalism in Somalia. It provides for the establishment of a National Media Council which, because of its government bias, lacks independence and credibility.

Yet, the Council is to wield wide powers, including the power to set the code of ethics for journalists, in consultation with the Ministry of Justice. The law also foresees crippling fines and criminal charges against journalists and media houses for breaches of the code.

It further allows courts to compel journalists to disclose their sources, a blatant violation of an internationally recognised norm of professional journalism. The new law falls far short of the "guarantees and protection of the right to freedom of expression, access to information and the existence of free media," which the Independent Expert had called for in his note to the Somali President.

At the same time, the government has unleashed a ruthless clampdown on independent journalists, many of them have been reportedly tortured during their detention.



**International
Federation
of Journalists**

Abdelkrim BOUMELHA
President

Elisabeth Villela da COSTA
General Secretary/Chief Executive

Three journalists of Radio Shabelle Media Network are on trial for spurious charges under the penal code, including “Attack on the integrity, independence or the unity of the Somali State – the highest treason charge punishable by death penalty, offense against the honour and prestige of the Head of State, public incitement, incitement to commit a crime, incitement to disobey the law, publication or dissemination of false, exaggerated or misleading information, likely to disturb public order.”

We call on the Council to press the Somali government on the need to promote independent media by ensuring that its legislation on media conforms with international norms and standards, re-opening closed media houses, and ending recurrent intimidations against leadership of NUSOJ for defending journalists.

We further urge the Council to support our demand for the review of the new media law as well as for the dropping of charges against all journalists and their immediate release.

Thank you, Mr. President