

Joint Oral Statement on, Interactive Dialogue with Independent Expert on situation of human rights in Somalia at 30th session of the Human Rights Council

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its Somalia affiliate, the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) welcome the report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia, Mr Bahame Nyanduga, and express their continued serious concerns over endless attacks on journalists and violations of press freedom in the country.

Murder, arrest, threats and judiciary harassment of journalists have become “routine” in Somalia. Four journalists were killed in this year in Mogadishu & Baidoa, according to NUSOJ. 9 journalists were arrested and three media houses were closed down, while 2 other news media organisations were banned from operating in southeast (Jubaland) and northeast (Puntland). Journalists are gagged and persecuted under Somalia’s old and draconian penal code because of their media work.

Almost all authorities in Somalia, including the Federal Government as well as administrations in Jubaland, Puntland, Somaliland and other armed groups like Al-shabab and Ahlu Sunah Waljama, stand accused for contributing to this repressive and hostile environment for press freedom. To make the situation even worse, the Cabinet of the Federal Government of Somalia approved an obnoxious draft media law, which clearly suppresses media freedom and blatantly curtails freedom of expression. That draft Law is now in parliament waiting for adoption into Law.

IFJ and NUSOJ believe that the state’s failure to protect journalists has resulted in de facto impunity for most crimes against them. Somali journalists who reported threats and attacks described cursory police investigations that rarely lead to identifying perpetrators; downplaying of violent attacks and threats against journalists; and investigations. Instead, they continue to experience physical violence and abuse after their initial attack, often with impunity for their assailants.

Political interference on media outlets and journalists, both at a national and local level, is a seriously increasing problem in Somalia. In a number of cases, politicians pressure media owners and editors to drop critical stories, undermining free media space. Moreover, there are efforts by public officials to muzzle free media through government operatives within the media.

The inadequate state response to attacks and threats against journalists and media outlets, resulting in rampant culture of impunity, political interference including through the courts and curbs on editorial freedom, and smear campaigns targeting critical media and journalists, indicate that the Somali Government has failed to meet international and regional human rights obligations.

We urge the UN Human Rights Council and the Independent Expert on Human Rights Situation on Somalia to urge and press the Federal Government and other relevant regional authorities on the need for immediate steps to ensure that journalists can do their job safely and without improper government or third party interference. To this end, they should conduct prompt and effective investigations into crimes against journalists and bring those responsible to justice. High-ranking government officials should also refrain from interfering with the media and instead publicly condemn crimes against journalists. Finally, the media law should be drastically reviewed again to respect and protect media freedom.