

PUBLIC

AI Index: AFR 23/09/99

26 October 1999

Further information on UA 254/99 (AFR 23/07/99, 28 September, and follow-up AFR 23/08/99, 18 October) - Unfair trials / Prisoners of Conscience

DJIBOUTI Ali Meidal Wais, journalist

Daher Ahmed Farah, journalist, opposition leader

Moussa Ahmed Idriss, journalist, opposition leader and member of parliament

On 20 October 1999 a court of appeal upheld the convictions of Ali Meidal Wais and Daher Ahmed Farah for 'spreading false news' (*diffusion de fausses nouvelles*) and sentenced both men to six months' imprisonment. The six-month suspension of the two newspapers for which they work remains in force, meaning that there is no opposition newspaper currently being published in Djibouti.

The two men had initially been sentenced on 2 September to prison terms of eight months and one year respectively and each fined one million Djibouti francs after an unfair trial at which they were refused legal representation of their choice. A lawyer from *Avocats sans frontières*, Lawyers without borders, was allowed to represent them at the appeal hearing.

Their convictions followed articles which appeared in *Le Temps*, the Times, and *Le Renouveau*, The Renewal, about an explosion which destroyed an army helicopter. Ali Meidal Wais is a co-director of *Le Temps* and Daher Ahmed Farah, the president of the opposition *Parti du renouveau démocratique* (PRD), Party of Democratic Renewal, is the editor-in-chief of *Le Renouveau*, the journal of the PRD.

A third journalist, Moussa Ahmed Idriss, also a co-director of *Le Temps*, remains in prison having been found guilty of violently resisting arrest after an unfair trial on 6 October (see AFR 23/08/99). Amnesty International is calling for him and the 19 others convicted on the same charge to be immediately retried in conformity with international standards for fair trial. Further charges of 'spreading false news' are also outstanding against Moussa Ahmed Idriss, but no date has yet been set for the trial.

Amnesty International considers Ali Meidal Wais and Daher Ahmed Farah to be prisoners of conscience, convicted after an unfair trial and imprisoned contrary to international standards for the freedom of the press. Amnesty International would also consider Moussa Ahmed Idriss to be a prisoner of conscience if he is convicted on charges of 'spreading false news'.

FURTHER RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/faxes/express/airmail letters in French, English or in your own language:

- expressing your concern at the sentencing on 20 October of Daher Ahmed Farah and Ali Meidal Wais to six months' imprisonment for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- stating your view that their imprisonment violates international standards on the freedom of the press;
- expressing concern that Ali Meidal Wais and Daher Ahmed Farah did not receive a fair trial, particularly as they were prevented from having legal representation at the original hearing;
- appealing for their immediate and unconditional release as prisoners of conscience;

- calling for the immediate withdrawal of the charges of spreading false news against Moussa Ahmed Idriss and for an immediate re-trial, conforming to international standards of fairness, of Moussa Ahmed Idriss and another 19 individuals convicted after an unfair trial on 6 October of violently resisting arrest.

APPEALS TO:

President

Son Excellence Monsieur Ismael Omar Guelleh
Président de la République
La Présidence
BP 6

Djibouti, République de Djibouti

Telegrams: Président, Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 350174

Salutation: Monsieur le Président de la République / Dear President

Minister of Justice

Monsieur Mohamed Dini Farah
Ministre de la Justice
Ministère de la Justice
BP 12

Djibouti, République de Djibouti

Telegrams: Ministre Justice, Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 355420

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre / Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Prime Minister

Monsieur Barkat Gourad Hamadou
Premier Ministre
BP 2086

Djibouti, République de Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 351208

Minister of Foreign Affairs

Monsieur Mohamed Moussa Chehem
Ministre des affaires étrangères
Ministère des affaires étrangères
BP 1863

Djibouti, République de Djibouti

Faxes: + 253 353840

and to diplomatic representatives of DJIBOUTI accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 7 December 1999.