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SOMALIA: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL APPEALS TO GENERAL AIDEED FOR RELEASE OF DETAINED JOURNALIST

Amnesty International is demanding the immediate and unconditional release of Ali Mussa Abdi -- a journalist reporting for Agence France Presse (AFP) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) -- detained this month in south Mogadishu.

"Ali Mussa Abdi is a prisoner of conscience imprisoned for the peaceful exercise of the internationally-recognized rights to freedom of opinion and expression," Amnesty International said today.

Ali Mussa Abdi was detained on 5 September 1995 and has since been held under the authority of General Mohamed Farah Aideded. He was reportedly abducted with two aides of rival faction-leader, Osman Hassan Ali "Ato", both of whom were quickly released. Two days after Ali Mussa Abdi's abduction General Aideded's radio station announced that his security forces were holding him captive.

According to the radio announcement the journalist was accused of "serious crimes" (which have not been specified) and would be "tried very soon". He is apparently held on account of articles written in his professional capacity and containing comments taken as failing to give recognition to General Aideded's recently declared government.

Amnesty International is appealing to General Aideded for assurances of the safety and humane treatment of Ali Musa Abdi, who had earlier received numerous death threats. In particular, the organization is urging that he be given regular private access to his family, legal representative and medical doctor of his choice and to a representative of an appropriate international humanitarian organization. There are reports that he is ill and not being allowed to receive medical attention.

A Reuters News Agency correspondent, Aden Mohamed Ali, who was detained last month in south Mogadishu by General Aideded's militias, was released unharmed after some 17 days. He had been transferred to the Central Prison and accused of revealing national secrets but was released without being charged or brought before a court. However, the real reason for his abduction and detention also appears to have been his work as a journalist and his references to General Aideded's government as not being recognized.

Since the overthrow of President Mohamed Siad Barre's government in 1991, there has been no internationally recognized government in the collapsed state of Somalia.

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