



Somalia: Protect Journalists from Attack

Amnesty International Statement to the Human Rights Council.

Seven journalists have been killed in Somalia since December 2011. Amnesty International is alarmed and concerned that their deaths mark a renewal of the pattern of targeted killings of journalists and civil societies, which previously peaked in the country in 2007-8.

At least 29 journalists have been killed since January 2007 in Somalia. To date, no one has been brought to account before the law for killing a journalist, media worker or civil society actor in the country.

Five of the journalists killed since December 2011 were killed in areas under the control of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG): four in Mogadishu and one in Beletweyne.

In Mogadishu, Abdisalan Sheikh Hassan was shot in the head by a man wearing a TFG military uniform in December 2011. In January 2012, Hassan Osman Abdi, known as “Hassan Fantastic”, Director of the Shabelle Media Network, was shot dead outside his home. Abukar Hasan Mohamud Kadaf was killed by unidentified gunmen in February. Ahmed Adow Anshur was shot dead by gunmen on 24 May.

Mahad Salad Aden, a correspondent for Shabelle Media Network was killed in Beletweyne in April 2012.

In Galkayo, controlled by the Puntland authorities, two journalists have been killed in 2012. In March, Ali Ahmed Abdi, a journalist with Radio Galkayo, was shot dead and on 2 May, the eve of World Press Freedom Day, Farhan Jemiis Abdulle was killed by unidentified gunmen.

While the Somali authorities announced that they would investigate all seven cases, these promises have not resulted in credible investigations or criminal prosecutions. The TFG announced they had shot dead the person responsible for the death of Mahad Salad Aden in Beletweyne. It was reported that the TFG briefly held suspects in the killings of Abdisalan Skeikh Hassan and Hassan Osman Abdi. Amnesty International is not aware of any efforts to act on promises to investigate the other cases.

Perpetrators of attacks on journalists in Somalia effectively enjoy impunity. They are not dissuaded from the commission of human rights abuses, and others are encouraged to commit them. Persons other than journalists are also reported to have been subject to unlawful targeted killings, and no one has been held accountable for those killings.

The Somali authorities must be pressed by the international community to pursue prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into the killings of journalists, and into other human rights abuses. The international community must insist that perpetrators are brought to justice in fair trials conducted in full conformity with international standards and without recourse to the death penalty.

During Somalia’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in May 2011, some states made recommendations to the Somali authorities to investigate the killings of journalists and bring those responsible to justice. They also recommended measures to respect and protect the freedom of expression, particularly the freedom of the press. These recommendations were fully accepted in October 2011 by the TFG. During the London conference on Somalia on 23 February 2012 and at the Istanbul II conference from 31

May-1 June 2012, the international community condemned violence against civilians, including journalists, “emphasised that journalists must be able to operate freely and without fear” and called on the Somali authorities to end the culture of impunity.

Yet no steps have been taken to implement these recommendations. Far from improving, the situation for journalists has since dramatically deteriorated. States must do more to help the Somali authorities to live up to their commitments, notably by providing substantial technical and financial assistance to establish the rule of law and rebuild the justice system. Particular attention must be paid to creating an effective, accountable police force.

The international community must call for increased human rights monitoring and the adoption of effective measures to adequately investigate and document human rights violations and abuses. Substantial additional resources must be provided to the UN Human Rights Unit of the UN Political Office for Somalia to enable it to increase its human rights monitoring, documenting and reporting on Somalia. The signing in May 2012 of a technical cooperation agreement between the TFG, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Political Office for Somalia is a welcome development

The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (the Commission) has expressed serious concern about the situation of journalists in Somalia. At its 51st Ordinary Session held in The Gambia from 18 April to 2 May 2012, the Commission passed a resolution condemning the killings of journalists in Somalia and urging the TFG and other Somali authorities to investigate violations committed against journalists. Amnesty International urges the Human Rights Council and its member and observer states to follow the example of the Commission in giving focussed attention to the dire situation for journalists and other civilians in Somalia.

Amnesty International calls on the Human Rights Council and its member and observer states:

- to press all Somali authorities to investigate the killings of journalists, and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials conducted in full conformity with international standards and without recourse to the death penalty;
- to call on all Somali authorities to create an enabling environment for journalists to undertake their legitimate work in safety;
- to provide technical and financial assistance to the Somali authorities to establish the rule of law and rebuild the justice system to address the culture of impunity, and to fulfil the commitments made by Somali authorities during the UPR;
- to rapidly increase the resources available for human rights monitoring, documenting and reporting by the UN Human Rights Unit working on Somalia;
- to give effect to the outcome of the London and Istanbul conferences by taking concrete measures to support journalists and civil society activists at risk in Somalia, in consultation with affected individuals and groups;
- to support the establishment of an international Commission of Inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate the human rights violations, war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law committed in Somalia, including attacks and killings of journalist.

