

8 March

2007

Further Information on UA 26/07 (AFR 52/002/2007, 02 February 2007 and update (AFR 52/003/2007, 19 February 2007) - Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of ill-treatment/legal concern

SOMALILAND Yusuf Abdi Gabobe (m), aged in his late 50s] Journalists for the *Haatuf*
 Ali Abdi Dini (m)] Media Network
 Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim (m)]
 Bo'aud (m), former leader of the Somali National Movement
 Four students (names not known)

Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, the *Haatuf* (Messenger) publisher, was sentenced on 4 March to two years' imprisonment for obstruction of a police officer. The newspaper's editor, Ali Abdi Dini, and journalist Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim, were each sentenced to 29 months' imprisonment for "reporting false information about the government, discrediting the president and his family and creating inter-communal tension." Amnesty International considers them prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

The trial was observed by the Uganda-based East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project. Yusuf Abdi Gabobe had taken part in their November 2006 conference on "Journalists as Human Rights Defenders". Following the widespread expression of concern about the case within Somaliland and internationally, the President was reported in local newspapers as saying he would pardon the men if they were convicted.

The four students were released in late February under a presidential pardon. Bo'aud, who was arrested in early February, is now known to have been released without charge a few days later.

The charges against the *Haatuf* journalists arose from a number of articles which had appeared in the *Haatuf* newspaper since November 2006 alleging corruption on the part of the president of Somaliland and his family. They were tried under the media offences section of the Somaliland Penal Code rather than the Somaliland Press Law (2004), which had supposedly replaced the relevant section of the Penal Code. Under the Press Law journalists can be sued for damages, but it makes no provision for criminal prosecution and imprisonment. The men's lawyer withdrew from the case in protest when the court was transferred to the prison where they were held, Mandera, and because he did not believe they would receive a fair trial.

Yusuf Abdi Gabobe and Ali Abdi Dini are reported to be in poor health: Ali Abdi Dini was too sick to attend court. However, they have reportedly been refused access to medical treatment. Mandera prison does not have even a minimally adequate medical facility.

The court also ordered the *Haatuf* media network to be banned and fined the equivalent of US\$750. However, the Vice-President later instructed that their newspapers should be allowed to continue publication.

A fourth *Haatuf* journalist was convicted in his absence of the same offences as Ali Abdi Dini and Omar Sheikh Ibrahim, and also sentenced to 29 months' imprisonment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Republic of Somaliland unilaterally declared independence from Somalia in 1991 when the state collapsed, but it has not so far gained international recognition. It has an elected government and a multi-party political system.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- appealing to the authorities to release Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, Ali Abdi Dini and Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim immediately and unconditionally, as they are prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression;
- calling for Yusuf Abdi Gabobe and Ali Abdi Dini to be given immediate access to medical treatment by a doctor of their choice.

APPEALS TO: There is no postal service to Somaliland and sending fax messages may be difficult. Where possible please send appeals by email.

President

His Excellency President Dahir Riyaale Kahin
Fax: +252 213 8324
+252 252 3848
Email: sl_victory@hotmail.com
sl_victory@yahoo.com
Salutation: Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Mr Abdillahi Ismail Shabeel

Please send appeals via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or The Presidency, marked "Please forward to the Minister of the Interior")

Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

Fax: +252 828 3271
+252 225 3871

E-mail: slforeign@hotmail.com

Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister of Justice

Mr Ahmed Hassan Ali Assowe,

c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Presidency

Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO:

Copies of appeals can be sent to Somaliland's only diplomatic missions, in the UK, USA and Italy, asking for them to be forwarded to the authorities in Somaliland.

UK: Mr Osman Ahmed Hassan, Representative of the Somaliland Government, Somaliland Mission, 102 Cavell Street, London E1 2JA, United Kingdom

Fax: +44 207 247 5336

USA: Mr Saad Sheikh Omar Nur, Representative of the Somaliland Government, Washington DC, USA

Fax: +1 301 231 5990

Email: snoor@sand.com

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 19 April 2007.
