

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: AFR 52/016/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 206
26 October 2007

Somalia: Journalists suffering worst time since 1991 state collapse

With the murder on Friday, 19 October of journalist Bashir Nur Gedi, Amnesty International today said that the situation of journalists in Somalia is currently the worst it has ever been since the disintegration of the Somali state after the overthrow of the Siad Barre government in 1991.

Throughout the subsequent years of conflict without a functioning government, newspapers and other private media were gradually established and journalists became able to report -- without the same scale of violent repercussions they now face.

Since the capture of Mogadishu from the Union of Islamic Courts by Ethiopian forces supporting the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in late December 2006, the situation for journalists has continued to deteriorate, with eight journalists killed with impunity this year. The most recent killing was of Bashir Nur Gedi, acting manager of the Shabelle Media Network, who was shot dead by unidentified gunmen at his house on the evening of Friday, 19 October.

Amnesty International called on the TFG to conduct prompt, effective and impartial investigations into these criminal acts of killing or threats of violence against journalists and to bring those responsible to justice through fair trials and without the application of the death penalty. They must also meet their responsibility to protect journalists and media workers from these attacks.

The TFG must also put an end to its practise of repeated closure of media houses and arrests of journalists by its security forces. Such actions have created an environment where attacks against journalists by the TFG security forces and armed opposition groups -- in reprisal for their reporting -- have become commonplace. Intimidation of journalists has become a stratagem by all parties to the conflict in Somalia.

Amnesty International also called on armed groups active in Somalia opposed to the TFG to end their practise of intimidation, threats of violence and the criminal act of killing journalists.

These attacks on journalists by the TFG and armed groups violate the rights to freedom of expression and the media, as recognized in international and regional human rights treaties and Somalia's Transitional Federal Charter.

Since Amnesty International's last statement on the dangers faced by journalists in Somalia, particularly in Mogadishu (*Urgent need for protection of journalists*, 7 September 2007, AI Index: AFR 52/015/2007), attacks on journalists in different parts of Somalia have continued and include:

- o The attempted shooting of Radio Shabelle's acting manager Jafar Mohammed "Kukay" in Mogadishu on 24 September, and the siege of Radio Shabelle's building on 18 September, during which TFG security forces fired automatic weapons at the second and third floor windows of the Radio Shabelle, injuring a security guard. The UN Special Envoy to Somalia

later reported that TFG leaders had stated this was an accident and gave assurance that it would not happen again.

- o The temporary closure of Radio Garowe in the Puntland capital of Garowe on 19 October and the arrest of three members of staff by Puntland security forces. All were released on 20 October and the station has resumed broadcasting.
- o The closure for 24 hours of Radio Simba, a Mogadishu-based radio station and the arrest of two Radio Simba journalists by TFG security forces on 11 October. Abdullahi Ali Farah and Mohammed Farah were released the next day.
- o The arbitrary detention of Mr. Mohamed Hussein Jimale, a Mogadishu-based journalist from the news website www.puntlandpost.com, who was detained by TFG police in the prison adjacent to the President's Office in Villa Somalia from 12 to 16 September.
- o Numerous other incidents in recent weeks of journalists being harassed, intimidated and arrested for short periods of time in Mogadishu by the TFG security forces.

This growing insecurity is not only faced by journalists. Humanitarian workers have also been subjected to attacks. The extraordinary raid on the UN compound in Mogadishu by over 50 officers of the TFG's National Security Service on 17 October and the arbitrary detention of Idris Osman, the local director of the UN World Food Program from 17 to 23 October, was a flagrant disregard for the rights of humanitarian workers acting in the best interests of the most vulnerable populations, displaced by the ongoing internal conflict in Mogadishu.

Amnesty International called on the TFG Minister for Information, Madobe Numow Mohamed, to respect the legitimate role of journalists. Amnesty International is concerned to note that the Minister, in a letter dated 3 October 2007, declared that the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) was not recognised by the TFG and had no right to represent and organise journalists. The NUSOJ has been a strong and impartial advocate for the rights of Somali journalists, documenting attacks on them and calling for action.

Amnesty International urges the international community to press the TFG to protect the rights of journalists much more strongly. The United Nations, the United States of America, the European Union and the African Union have all invested considerable energy and resources in the development of the Transitional Federal Institutions of Somalia. It is essential that they increase their pressure on these institutions to uphold the importance of the right to freedom of expression and of the press in Somalia, and the right to life for the journalists of Somalia.