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Joint Statement from Civil Society Organizations on The Somali Government's Arbitrary Detention of Activist Sadia Moalim Ali

We, the undersigned women-led and human rights organizations, condemn the arbitrary detention of Sadia Moalim Ali (also known as “Sadia Bajaj”), who is being targeted by the Somali authorities for her activism – both on social media and through her participation in peaceful protests.

Sadia Moalim Ali is a 27-year-old tuktuk (rickshaw) driver and social activist who [was arrested](#) on 12 April in Hodan District, Mogadishu, by officers from the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA). She was initially detained at Hamar Jajab Police Station before being transferred to Mogadishu Central Prison on 14 April, where she remains detained.

On 6 May, the Office of the Attorney General of Somalia [announced](#) that it was investigating Sadia on allegations of “defamation” and “public incitement.” On 1 June, she was charged under the Somali Penal Code with “insulting government institutions” and “public incitement” at the Banadir Regional Court. Vague charges relating to speech on their face violate the right to freedom of expression under international human rights law. Following objections from Sadia’s lawyer, the court asked the prosecution to further clarify the charges against Sadia and return for another hearing.

Media [reported](#) that Sadia may have been subjected to torture and other ill-treatment in detention, while being denied basic due process rights, raising serious concerns about her safety and well-being. Somalia’s National Human Rights Commission [said](#) that she had been denied access to her relatives.

Sadia’s detention follows her use of social media platforms, including [TikTok](#) and [Facebook](#), to publicly criticize the federal government, notably on issues of alleged government corruption, youth unemployment, nepotism by senior government officials, high taxation and high fuel prices. In one video, she said that if any harm were to come to her, responsibility would lie with the [President](#). She has also participated in peaceful protests, including on 17 March, concerning increased fuel prices affecting tuktuk drivers. She was previously arrested on 12 March for participating in similar protests and released after four days.

The arbitrary arrest and detention of Sadia is not an isolated case. Since mid-to-late 2022, Somali authorities have engaged in an escalating crackdown on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Journalists, activists, and the general public have faced arbitrary arrests, detention, harassment, threats, and intimidation for expressing dissenting views and for reporting on topics the government deems sensitive.

Sadia’s arrest based on her activism constitutes arbitrary detention and raises serious concerns about due process, fair trial guarantees, and protection from torture and other ill-treatment.

We call on the Somali authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release and drop all the charges against Sadia Moalim Ali, as she is detained solely for the peaceful exercise of her human rights;
- Ensure that, pending her release, she is protected from torture or other ill-treatment and held in conditions that meet international human rights standards;
- Guarantee that, pending her release, she has immediate, regular and unmonitored access to her family, lawyers, and adequate health care; and
- Put an end to the targeting, harassment, and arbitrary detention of individuals for expressing dissenting views and for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

We further call on Somalia's international partners, including governments and diplomatic missions, to raise this case and publicly and privately call for her release and to advocate for the protection of civic space, including the rights of activists, journalists, and human rights defenders in Somalia. This should especially be a matter of priority ahead of, during and after the planned elections in the country.

Signatories:

1. Amnesty International
2. Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa
3. Human Rights Watch
4. Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) Network