

UA 26/07 Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of ill-treatment

SOMALILAND Yusuf Abdi Gabobe (m), aged in his late 60s]
Ali Abdi Dini (m)] Journalists for the *Haatuf*
Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim (m)] Media Network

Three journalists employed by Somaliland's independent *Haatuf* Media Network have been arrested and charged as a result of their work. Amnesty International considers them to be prisoners of conscience, detained solely for exercising their right to peaceful freedom of expression. One man is being held incommunicado and may be at risk of ill-treatment; another is unwell and may not have access to necessary medical treatment.

Armed police raided the office of the *Haatuf* Media Network in Somaliland's capital Hargeisa on 2 January 2007, ransacking the office and destroying property. Editor-in-chief Yusuf Abdi Gabobe and editor Ali Abdi Dini were arrested, even though police did not have a warrant. Hussein Khalif Abdullahi, the treasurer of the *Haatuf* Media Network, was also arrested and reportedly beaten by police, but was later released without charge.

The journalists were reportedly detained for publishing a number of articles since November 2006, alleging corruption on the part of the President, Dahir Riyaale Kahin, and his family. Recent allegations published by *Haatuf* concerned misappropriation of public funds and property by the President's wife.

Yusuf Abdi Gabobe and Ali Abdi Dini are being held in the Police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) headquarters in Hargeisa. Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, aged in his late 60s, is reportedly unwell, though the details of his illness are not known to Amnesty International. It is thought to be unlikely that he has had access to medical treatment. Both men have been refused bail by the Hargeisa Regional Court.

Ali Abdi Dini has been charged with "offending the honour or prestige of the Head of State", "instigating soldiers to disobey the law" by means of the press, and "instigation to disobey the law". Yusuf Abdi Gabobe has been charged with "resisting a public officer" during his arrest. These charges carry maximum sentences of three or five years' imprisonment. It is not clear when their trial is scheduled to begin.

A third *Haatuf* journalist, Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim, was arrested in Borama town on 14 January 2007 and was transferred to police custody in Hargeisa. He has reportedly not been charged or taken to court and is detained incommunicado. Amnesty International is concerned that he may be at risk of ill-treatment.

A fourth journalist, Mohamed Rashid Farah, an investigative reporter with *Haatuf* and reportedly the author of the articles alleging corruption, is in hiding from police. He has been charged with the same offences as Ali Abdi Dini, and is being tried in his absence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Republic of Somaliland declared independence from Somalia in 1991, but has not so far gained international recognition. It is the only part of the former Somali Republic to have peace, an elected government and a multi-party political system.

The *Haatuf* Media Network was established in 2001 and publishes the daily *Haatuf* (the "Messenger") - a Somali language newspaper - and two weekly newspapers in English and Arabic. It has frequently been critical of the Somaliland government.

The Somaliland Press Law, which came into force in 2004, holds that complaints against the press are a matter for civil redress, and not criminal prosecution or the penalty of imprisonment. In this respect the Press Law supersedes the existing Penal Code, which had criminalised such cases. However, the Hargeisa Regional Court ruled on 13 January 2007 that the *Haatuf* journalists should be prosecuted under the Penal Code, with the result that they now face criminal charges and possible imprisonment.

The Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA) and human rights defenders in Somaliland have been active in trying to strengthen media freedom. Yusuf Abdi Gabobe recently attended a journalists' and human rights defenders' conference in Uganda organised by the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRDN) with support from Amnesty International.

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

- expressing concern at the detention of Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, Ali Abdi Dini and Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim;
- expressing concern at reports that Yusuf Abdi Gabobe is unwell, and urging the authorities to provide any medical treatment he may require;
- urging the authorities to allow Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim immediate access to his relatives and to legal representation, and

expressing concern that he is detained incommunicado;

- calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, Ali Abdi Dini and Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim, as Amnesty International believes they are prisoners of conscience, held solely for exercising their right to peacefully express their opinions in the course of their professional work as journalists;
- requesting a guarantee that if the journalists are tried, the trial will conform to internationally recognised standards for a fair trial.

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 or +252 252 3848

Email: sl_victory@hotmail.com, sl_victory@yahoo.com

Salutation: Dear President

Minister of the Interior

Mr Abdillahi Ismail Shabeel

c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs or The Presidency

[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

Commander of the Somaliland Police

Mr Mohamed Egeh Elmi,

c/o Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Presidency

Salutation: Dear Commander

COPIES TO:

Copies of letters can be sent to Somaliland's only diplomatic missions (not recognised) in 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, E-mail: snoor@sand.com

ITALY: Mr Muhiyadin Ahmed Abdi Gabose, Representative of the Somaliland Government, Corso Unione Sovietica 465, Torino, Italy.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 16 March 2007.*****