

2007

Further Information on UA 26/07 (AFR 52/002/2007, 02 February 2007) - Prisoners of conscience/incommunicado detention/fear of ill-treatment New concern: Legal concern

SOMALILAND Yusuf Abdi Gabobe (m), aged in his late 50s]
 Ali Abdi Dini (m)] Journalists for the *Haatuf*
 Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim (m)] Media Network

New name: Bo'aud (m), former leader of the Somali National Movement
 Four students (names not known)

Journalists Yusuf Abdi Gabobe and Ali Abdi Dini were arrested at the office of the *Haatuf* Media Network in Hargeisa on 2 January. They were transferred to Mandera prison, 70km east of the Somaliland capital, Hargeisa, on 3 February. Their trial, which was due to start on the same day, has apparently been postponed. A third man, Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim, who is also employed by the *Haatuf* Media Network, is still being held incommunicado without charge. His place of detention is now known to be Koodbur police station in Hargeisa.

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. The *Haatuf* Media Network had published a number of articles since November 2006, alleging corruption on the part of the President, Dahir Riyaale Kahin, and his family. The trial of the two journalists, reportedly due to be held inside Mandera prison, has not yet started. One of their two defence lawyers was briefly detained, while the other withdrew in protest at the decision to hold the trial within the prison.

Amnesty International has learnt that four students arrested last month while demonstrating peacefully against the arrests of the three journalists for the *Haatuf* Media Network are also being held in Mandera prison. They were sentenced to six months' imprisonment at an unfair trial by a secret "emergency court" in Hargeisa, without being granted the right to legal representation or the right to appeal against their sentence. Two other students arrested with them have been released.

Two other men, writer Ali Dool Ahmed (also known as Ali Qoriolei), and Bo'aud, one of the former leaders of the Somali National Movement, were arrested in early February for distributing leaflets calling for the release of the three journalists. Bo'aud is believed to be still detained without charge in Hargeisa police custody. Ali Dool Ahmed was reportedly beaten by police when he was arrested, but was released on bail around 13 February.

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.

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

- expressing concern at the continued detention of Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, Ali Abdi Dini and Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim, and the reported intention of the authorities to hold the trial of Yusuf Abdi Gabobe and Ali Abdi Dini in Mandera prison;
- renewing appeals for Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim to be allowed access to his relatives and to legal representation;
- calling again for the immediate and unconditional release of Yusuf Abdi Gabobe, Ali Abdi Dini and Mohamed Omar Sheikh Ibrahim as prisoners of conscience;

- calling for the release of four students held in Mandera prison who were jailed by an apparently illegal emergency court, and for the release of Bo'aud, detained in Hargeisa police custody, as they were all detained on account of their peaceful protests against the journalists' detentions;
- calling for all those detained to be given fair trials in accordance with international standards.

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

Email: snoor@sand.com

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 2 April 2007.
