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Somalia: Journalist captured by al-Shabab must be released

Amnesty International is calling for the immediate release of a Somali radio journalist held by the armed group al-Shabab, apparently after a report was broadcast alleging the group had killed a man in the Wanleweyn district.

Ali Yusuf Adan, a 47 year old correspondent for Radio Somaliweyn, is being held by the armed group in the port city of Merka, in southern Somalia.

“Amnesty International fears for the safety of Ali Yusuf Adan, given the numerous human rights abuses committed by al-Shabab against civilians, including journalists”, said Erwin van der Borgh, Africa Director at Amnesty International.

“Al-Shabab must immediately release him without harm, stop threatening journalists and respect the right of all Somalis to freedom of expression.”

Ali Yusuf Adan was captured on 21 February in Wanleweyn, a town north-west of the capital Mogadishu controlled by the armed group.

Al-Shabab has said that the journalist was held because he made a “mistake”.

In the past few months the group has imposed drastic restrictions on journalists in an attempt to stifle information in areas they control.

They have closed down radio stations, banned the airing of reports mentioning Somalia’s government and made intimidating statements against journalists.

Many journalists who fled Somalia reported to Amnesty International that they did so after receiving death threats from individuals claiming to be members of al-Shabab.

Nine journalists were killed in 2009 in Somalia; at least three of them were deliberately murdered.

Two radio directors, Said Tahlil Ahmed and Mukhtar Hirabe, were killed in Bakara market last year, an area of Mogadishu controlled by al-Shabab militia.

Although al-Shabab spokespeople have denied involvement in these killings, the group’s leaders have failed to publicly condemn attacks against the media and order their forces not to target journalists.

Background

Al-Shabab currently controls vast areas of south and central Somalia, including major cities such as Merka, Kismayo and Baidoa, as well as districts of the capital Mogadishu.

The internationally-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia exercises authority only in part of the capital is repeatedly attacked by al Shabab and other armed groups and has not been able to establish a national justice system.

Al- Shabab armed groups have grown out of the Islamic Courts Union, a movement that temporarily established control over Mogadishu and other areas in 2006.

The Islamic Courts Union were militarily defeated by Ethiopian troops who intervened in Somalia in late 2006 to assist the Transitional Federal Government.

After Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a former Islamic Courts Union leader, was appointed President of the TFG in January 2009, and Ethiopian troops left Somalia, al-Shabab and other armed groups have continued fighting against the TFG, claiming that it is allied to Western nations.