

Mr Mohammed Behi Younis, Foreign Minister
Republic of Somaliland
(cc: Mr Abdullahi Mohamed Dahir, Information Minister)

11 November 2013

Dear Minister,

I write as the Vice-Chair of Somaliland Focus (UK). We would like to offer you our congratulations at your appointment as Foreign Minister.

Since 2005, Somaliland Focus has been making the case for wider awareness of Somaliland and its democratic process, acting as joint coordinators of the international observers to Somaliland's elections in 2010 and 2012, and through our involvement with the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Somaliland and Somalia. We've been proud to be associated with the achievements of Somaliland.

Yet we are moved to write to express our concerns about harassment and intimidation of news media members in Somaliland. We are copying this letter to your colleague Mr Abdullahi Mohamed Dahir, the Minister of Information. Media freedom is relevant to both of your briefs as it reflects on Somaliland internationally, and ensuring a free media is the responsibility of the entire government.

We note there have been numerous incidents, prompting the concern of groups inside and outside Somaliland. Most prominent lately has been the targeting of Hubaal newspaper, which in April saw its office in Hargeisa attacked, with injuries to staff members. In June, publication was suspended after articles critical of Somaliland's government appeared, and its editor-in-chief and managing director were imprisoned. Although the men have since been released and publication has recommenced, the events constitute a major breach of the freedom of the press, explicitly protected by law in Somaliland.

The Hubaal affair is part of a long chain of events. In 2012 numerous journalists were arrested and a television station, HornCableTV, was shut down, while in 2011, the editor of the Jamhuuriya newspaper was arrested. That year also saw threats from ministers and security personnel towards the chief editor of YOOL, another newspaper, the arrest and imprisonment of Mahamud Abdi Jama, the editor of Waaheen, and an award-winning African journalist, and the arrest and imprisonment of a reporter for Haatuf.

Some of the arrests have been on grounds of criminal defamation and others apparently at the behest of regional governors. While pardons and releases have followed, such actions have a chilling effect on the proper functioning of the media and are likely to lead to ineffective coverage and self-censorship. There is a significant need for fully institutionalising the freedom of the media, particularly in making defamation a civil rather than a criminal offence, and in local governors not being able to organise the arrest of journalists.

Yet we note concerns reported in local media about proposed press law changes which could further undermine media freedom. Actions against media are becoming a regrettable hallmark of Somaliland administrations past and present, and negatively affecting our ability to effectively advocate for Somaliland. We urge that you and other policymakers address this compromising of a vital democratic pillar, which in turn undermines the completion of Somaliland's transition into the multi-party democracy to which you have committed yourselves.

Yours faithfully,



Dr Steve Kibble
Vice-Chair, Somaliland Focus (UK)