

H.E President Ahmed Mohamed Mahamoud
President, Republic of Somaliland

cc: Abdullahi Mohamed Dahir, Minister of Information
Hersi Ali H. Hassan, Minister of Presidential Affairs

20 December 2013

Dear Mr President,

I write as the Vice-Chair of Somaliland Focus (UK). 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.

We are moved to write to you regarding concerns about media freedom in Somaliland, and in particular regarding recent incidents concerning Hubaal newspaper. We refer you to our open letter of 11 November 2013 addressed to your colleagues Mr Mohammed Behi Younis, Foreign Minister and Mr Abdullahi Mohamed Dahir, the Minister of Information.

In that letter we expressed our concerns about a long pattern of harassment and intimidation of news media members in Somaliland. In particular, we referred to 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. The men were released and publication recommenced. In August you issued a presidential pardon of the two men, dropping all charges against them.

We were thus distressed to hear reports that on December 13, the paper's offices were again raided by the police, apparently in response to unfavourable coverage, and that staff members were assaulted and arrested and subsequently released. The paper's managing director has reportedly gone into hiding, and the paper has once again ceased publishing.

The action follows a protest in early December by members of the media, at which four media members were arrested and detained for six days. The protest was prompted by the release of a police officer arrested following the April raid. The release of the officer prompted Hubaal's managing director and chief editor to address an open letter to you in late November calling for the officer's proper treatment before the law.

We urge that all members of the media be released and harassment of media members cease forthwith, and echo the call of Hubaal's managing director and chief editor that the alleged assailants in the April raid be dealt with properly under the law. These events, and the long chain they are part of, constitute a major breach of the freedom of the press, explicitly protected by law in Somaliland.

We can only repeat our earlier points: targeting of the media has a chilling effect on the proper functioning of the media and is likely to lead to ineffective coverage and self-censorship. 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)