

H.E President Ahmed Mohamed Mahmoud Silanyo
President, Republic of Somaliland
(cc: Mr Abdullahi Mohamed Dahir, Information Minister)

RE: PRESS AND MEDIA FREEDOM IN SOMALILAND: CLOSING DOWN OF HAATUF NEWSPAPER

10 April 2014

Dear President Silanyo,

It is with great concern that I write to you as the Vice-Chair of Somaliland Focus (UK) only four months after our last letter concerning the closure of the Hubaal newspaper.

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

It is with great disappointment that we now write to you again with regards to the recent raid, closing down and indefinite suspension of the Haatuf newspaper and its sister English-language weekly, Somaliland Times, by the police. This appears to be part of a long series of attacks on media freedom in Somaliland which seems to happen at times when journalists expose cases of corruption against government officials – which are then alleged to be false accusations by the courts without due investigation. We note and support the recent statement by the Somaliland Journalists' Association (SOLJA) on this matter.

In 2013, we wrote a number of open letters to Somaliland government officials and yourself on the harassment and intimidation of news media members in Somaliland. In particular, we referred to the targeting of the Hubaal newspaper, which saw its office in Hargeisa attacked, its staff imprisoned and released, and publication suspended to this day.

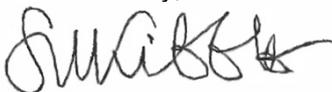
Both incidents call into question the independence of the judiciary as there have been concerns that in both cases due process has not been followed. They are also contrary to the constitution and some of the hard gains Somaliland has made since independence towards establishing democracy.

With the International Press Freedom Day fast approaching on 3rd May, we urge you to remove the ban on the Haatuf and Hubaal newspapers, stop the imprisonment and harassment of journalists, and conduct a proper investigation into the corruption allegations. 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.

A free media and independent judiciary are critical for a thriving and functioning democracy and have a critical role to play in exposing cases of corruption where they may occur.

We can therefore only repeat our earlier points: targeting of the media has a chilling effect on its proper functioning 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 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. It may also compromise an essential selling point for Somaliland's international recognition.

Yours faithfully,



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