

SJS ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Cyber-Attack,
Arbitrary Detentions
and Judicial
Harassment

STATE OF PRESS FREEDOM IN SOMALIA

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Since its establishment in 2019, the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) has annually released this report on the State of Press Freedom in Somalia. Grounded in our ongoing research and meticulous documentation, the report serves as an advocacy tool aimed at safeguarding and enhancing the safety of journalists, as well as improving their working conditions in Somalia.

Drawing on a comprehensive array of sources, including interviews with journalists, editors, media owners, government officials, security personnel, and lawyers working with journalists, the report provides analysis and perspectives on the state of press freedom in Somalia and Somaliland.

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About SJS

The Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) serves as an independent trade union representing journalists, advocating for their human rights, safety, and freedom. Established in 2019 by professional Somali journalists, SJS is dedicated to defending the rights of working journalists and promoting press freedom.

SJS fulfills its mission by defending press freedom, advocating for journalists' safety, and offering legal assistance to journalists facing court cases related to their work. The organization's goal is to facilitate communication and networking among journalists, providing them with daily updates and opportunities for professional development.

Consistently monitoring and documenting media violations and attacks on journalists throughout Somalia, including Somaliland, SJS releases regular press statements on incidents and publishes annual statistics on media freedom violations. Through various initiatives such as trainings, seminars, and workshops, SJS aims to enhance journalists' skills and capacity to produce quality journalism.

Proudly affiliated with international organizations such as the International Press Institute (IPI), The Congress of African Journalists (CAJ), CIVICUS, and the Global civil society coalition for the implementation and monitoring of the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), SJS also collaborates with renowned institutions like the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, Amnesty International, and Reporters Without Borders.

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Acknowledgment

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Executive Summary

The lack of transparency surrounding the assassination of Somali Cable TV director Abdifatah Moalim Nur (Qeys) by a suicide bomber in Mogadishu on October 16, 2023 and the unwillingness by Somali government's security agencies to investigate the attack, serves as a stark reminder of Somalia's failure to uphold its commitments to ensuring the safety and security of journalists. This tragic incident underscores Somalia's persistent presence among the world's worst impunity offenders for crimes against journalists, as identified by the Committee to Protect Journalists.

In the course of 2023, the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) conducted extensive documentation efforts across the country, revealing numerous instances of threats, attacks, and persecution targeting media workers. One such incident involved an armed attack on Radio Barawe, the only minority community-owned independent radio station in the Southwest State of Somalia, resulting in the closure of the radio and its journalists fleeing into exile.

Additionally, SJS documented the arbitrary detention of 25 journalists, many of whom faced persecution and judicial harassment simply for carrying out their professional duties or advocating for media freedom. Notably, seven of these detentions, including one involving female journalist Busharo Ali Mohamed, were carried out by Somaliland authorities, while 18 cases were attributed to various Somali police units, the national intelligence agency, and affiliated regional forces such as those in Galmudug and Jubbaland. At least one media worker sustained injury in Mogadishu due to a knife attack.

Further exacerbating the challenges faced by journalists in Somalia, two television networks were instructed by local authorities to halt broadcasting or remove content deemed critical, while prominent journalists reported instances of forced removal of online content. This included reports exposing instances of torture perpetrated by Somali police in Mogadishu against a person with physical disabilities. Moreover, the Somali Ministry of Information boasted of its partnership with Facebook to censor online reporting critical of security forces combating Al-Shabaab, while Al-Shabaab itself threatened journalists collaborating with the state. Throughout the year, SJS documented numerous other cases involving online threats and physical violence against journalists.

Somali media organizations, including the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), encountered a substantial online assault, signaling a concerning uptick in endeavors to sabotage their vital works. Employing a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) tactic, the cyberattack besieged the SJS website, inundating it with traffic and rendering it inaccessible. Concurrently, at least three other local media entities also found themselves under siege by analogous attacks, underscoring the pervasive nature of the threat faced by journalistic platforms in the digital sphere.

Of particular concern is the increasing use of Facebook's Community Standards and mass reporting to censor Somali journalists critical of the government, resulting in content takedowns, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the deletion of social media accounts. Journalists and media outlets critical of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's government and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) faced widespread censorship on Facebook, with warnings of page restrictions, suspensions, or content removal often issued under the guise of combating "dangerous organizations and individuals" or "violating community standards."

Throughout 2023, journalists in Somalia and Somaliland faced significant challenges in reporting on corruption allegations, human rights violations perpetrated by state security forces, and insecurity and deadly attacks carried out by Al-Shabaab. Despite constitutional commitments to uphold press freedom, impunity for crimes against journalists remains a pressing concern, with no progress made towards investigating and holding perpetrators accountable.

In light of these ongoing challenges, the Somali Attorney General must prioritize the safety and security of journalists and address the issue of impunity, especially through the Special Prosecution Unit established in 2020 to investigate crimes against journalists, including cases involving high-profile government officials. Furthermore, the persistent use of penal codes in both Somalia and Somaliland continues to pose a threat to freedom of expression, underscoring the urgent need for legal reform.

In response to these challenges, SJS and its international partners took significant actions in 2023, lodging two major complaints with the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions (UNWGAD) and the Human Rights Committee. These complaints addressed the arbitrary arrest and detention of Mohamed Bulbul, Information and Human Rights Secretary of SJS, and the persecution of Abdalle Ahmed Mumin, the Secretary-General of SJS. SJS remains committed to pursuing justice and accountability for these violations of press freedom.

Leveraging its international affiliations, SJS continued its advocacy efforts by collaborating with various civil society organizations to champion causes such as media freedom, human rights protection, secure online access, and safety measures for human rights defenders, including journalists, not only in Africa but also across other regions globally.

In July 2023, SJS achieved a significant milestone by joining the prestigious International Press Institute (IPI), a global network comprising editors, media executives, and distinguished journalists. This membership further strengthens SJS's commitment to defending press freedom, safety of journalists, and upholding freedom of expression, both within Somalia and on the international stage.

Throughout the year, SJS played a crucial role in supporting journalists amidst legal obstacles, providing a multifaceted approach to address the complexities of legal proceedings and threats to freedom of expression. This included offering legal defense support, mentorship, and advice to 47 journalists, with a significant representation of women. Additionally, SJS conducted training programs for 84 journalists, focusing on empowering female reporters and addressing human rights and women's rights issues in Somalia. With support from organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Canadian Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), and Medico International, approximately 40% of the participants were women. SJS plans to continue similar training initiatives in 2024 to further enhance the capabilities of local journalists across vital areas of reporting.



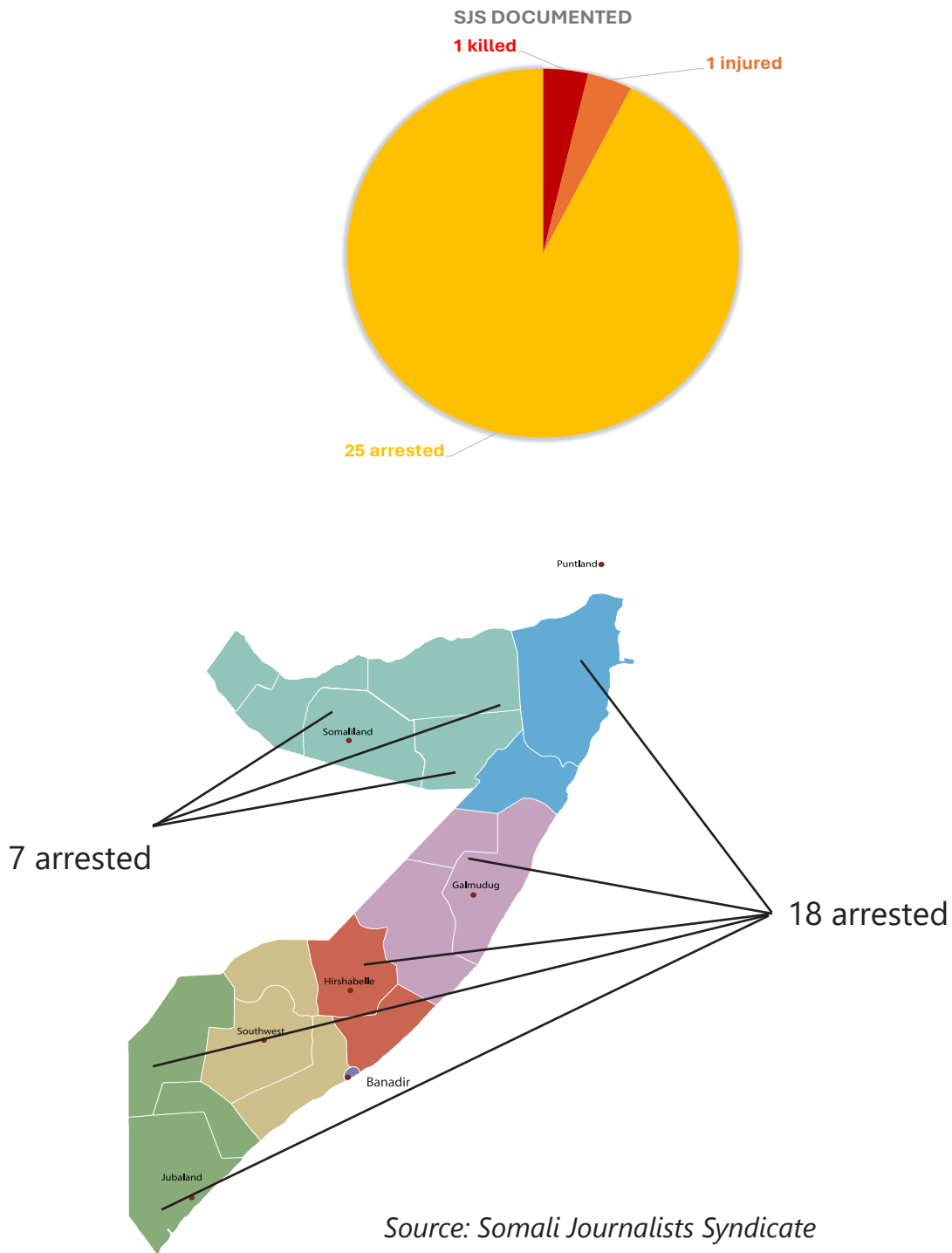
Mohamed Ibrahim Isak

President, Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS)

March 08, 2024

Media Violations in 2023

Additionally, SJS documented the arbitrary detention of 25 journalists, many of whom faced persecution and judicial harassment simply for carrying out their professional duties or advocating for media freedom. Notably, seven of these detentions, including one involving female journalist Busharo Ali Mohamed, were carried out by Somaliland authorities, while 18 cases were attributed to various Somali police units, the national intelligence agency, and affiliated regional forces such as those in Galmudug and Jubaland. At least one media worker sustained injury in Mogadishu due to a knife attack.



Killed journalists



Somali Cable TV director and journalist, Abdifatah Moalim Nur (Qeys) killed in a suicide bombing in Mogadishu, Monday 16 October, 2023. | PHOTO/ Facebook Abdifatah Moalim Nur (Qeys.)

On 16 October 2023, A suicide bomber detonated his vest loaded with explosives killing Abdifatah Moalim Nur (Qeys),¹ the director of the privately-owned Somali Cable TV in Mogadishu. The ‘assassination-style’ suicide bombing took place inside the Blue-Sky restaurant in the vicinity of the Somali presidential palace, The Villa Somalia in Mogadishu, around 9:00 pm on that Monday night, 16 October. The Mogadishu police released a statement on the night of the incident and said “4 people were injured and the journalist, Abdifatah Qeys, the director of Somali Cable TV Mogadishu, died.” However, the identity of the four others were never revealed. The absence of any official investigation to date raises serious questions about the transparency surrounding the death of our colleague. w

SJS has identified a concerning pattern of events before and after the tragic suicide bombing that resulted in Abdifatah’s death and the injury of several others. Eyewitness accounts and information from colleagues and security personnel reveal a troubling incident where a security officer stopped and subsequently released the individual who would later carry out the suicide bombing just outside the restaurant

Contrary to the initial police statement posted on Twitter (now X) on the night of the incident, new information from police sources confirms that Abdifatah died while en route to the hospital, not at the scene of the attack.

Eyewitnesses reported the presence of officers from the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) at the restaurant during the incident, but inquiries about their activities at that specific time were met with silence. Two sources from Somali Cable TV told SJS that Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack on a Telegram channel. However, they remain uncertain whether Abdifatah’s name was specifically mentioned in the posting and SJS could not access the Telegram message. Media reports also highlighted the claim on the Telegram channel a day after the attack.

Documentation from SJS reveals that Abdifatah had previously reported receiving threats against his life due to Somali Cable TV’s reporting, particularly between January to October 2023. The new information indicates that government officials, including one from the Ministry of Information and another from the Ministry of Internal Security, made threatening calls and sent text messages to Abdifatah following the station’s report on the killing of a local construction engineer in Mogadishu by an alleged member of the Ma’awisley militia, a government-allied clan militia group, on 3 January 2023.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/12/31/with-new-details-emerging-sjs-demands-independent-probe-into-tv-directors-killing-in-mogadishu/>

The threats led to the modification of the television story's title by removing the name of the "Ma'awisley". Colleagues disclosed that Abdifatah, during an editorial meeting on the day after the Ma'awisley story, mentioned a threat from the deputy minister of information, Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adaa-la, who demanded "bring evidence for the story or be prepared of severe consequences" for "insulting the Ma'awisley militia". A week later, police officers from the Banadir police division demanded the Somali Cable TV staff to provide the contacts of the victim's family but the demand was turned down by the television editors.



Journalists, family members and civil society join the burial journalist Abdifatah Qeys in Mogadishu, on 17 October, 2023

On 5 October 2023, Somali Cable TV interviewed a military officer in Mogadishu who allegedly said that "Al-Shabaab members in Mogadishu were utilizing drugs and prostitution". The journalist, however, pressed counter-questions against the officer during the interview. Colleagues at the station told SJS that following the interview broadcast, Abdifatah had told them of receiving "threats of retaliation" from unknown callers and even cautioned his colleagues to be watchful of potential risky interviews in the future. Despite these threats, no investigation took place.

Feeling unsafe, Abdifatah expressed his intention to leave the country for a short break on 11 October 2023. Abdifatah's routine on the day of the attack appeared normal. After completing his tasks which included producing a story on the war in Gaza, and he left for lunch at 3:00 pm (local time) before heading to the Blue-Sky restaurant for a work-related meeting in the evening. Eyewitnesses told SJS that he saw Abdifatah in the restaurant's open yard shortly after 7:00 pm (local time). Colleagues at Somali Cable TV confirmed Abdifatah's was busy on preparing and inviting sources for an upcoming talk show addressing unsafe buildings in Mogadishu, which had caused multiple deaths recently. The talk show, however, never aired.

Injured



SJS lawyer and legal adviser for the journalists, Abdirahman Hassan Omar

On 10 February 2023, SJS lawyer and legal adviser for the journalists, Abdirahman Hassan Omar¹ sustained multiple injuries after he was attacked by four armed men while he was heading home from work. Four men (three armed) and one driving a tuk tuk (bajaj) attacked him with several leg and hand injuries.

SJS had reported the incident to the police who promised to investigate and we are waiting for more information from them. Despite, his removal from the defense team by the court, which SJS considers weakening their defense², Avv. Abdirahman was part of the defense lawyers of SJS secretary-general, Abdalle Ahmed Mumin in the press freedom case at the Banadir Regional Court.

1. <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/02/23/amid-ongoing-crackdown-against-media-freedom-sjs-condemns-recent-arbitrary-arrests-of-journalists-in-mogadishu-and-somaliland/>

2. https://twitter.com/sjs_Somalia/status/1624722247838584833

Arbitrary detention of journalists and media workers



Recently detained journalists (from left to the top right): Kalsan TV journalist Abdihafid Nur; SomNews TV Mahdi Siyad; Horyal24 TV reporter Abdirahman Mohamed Adani; SomNews TV reporter Mohamed; SomNews TV reporter Jabir Said Duale and Mohamud Koronto. | PHOTO/Combined/SJS.

On 17 January 2023, Somali police in Kahda district, Mogadishu, arbitrarily detained Kalsan TV journalist Abdihafid Nur¹ as he was covering a public protest by the community members in Kahda who were complaining against the district commissioner. According to Kalsan TV, Abdihafid was freed on the following night without charge.

On 25 January 2023, Somaliland police detained two SomNews TV journalists: reporter Mohamed Mohamud Koronto and cameraman Mahdi Siyad² in Hargeisa on Wednesday following a raid by the police on the news station's offices in Hargeisa that day as reported by the station. According to journalists who spoke to SJS, the two journalists are still held in the police custody without charges. SomNews TV representative told SJS that it was not immediately clear the motive of the raid and the detention of their journalists but they suspect that authorities were irritated by the TV's constant coverage on the Laascaanood unrest. At least one of the detained journalists is hailing from Laascaanood town.

On 26 January 2023, The Somaliland's Sanaag Regional Court³ sentenced Horyal24 TV reporter Abdirahman Mohamed Adani with nine months of imprisonment and 900,000 SI.Sh. (USD 105) fine for covering a story the exposed a Somaliland military officer who closed down the only available mother and child health centre in Fiqifuliye, a rural village in the southern Sanaag region which reportedly led to the death of a young expectant mother in October last year. A second journalist Jabir Said Duale who covered the story for SomNews TV was also sentenced to a 600,000 SI.Sh. (USD 70) fine. The pair were detained on 17 October 2022 but were freed on bail on the same day. The court freed a third journalist Abdirisak Haji Ahmed who reports for the state-owned Somaliland National TV who was also held for the same case.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/01/28/amid-deteriorating-press-freedom-situation-journalists-continue-to-face-detention-and-harassment-in-somaliland-and-mogadishu/>

² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/01/28/amid-deteriorating-press-freedom-situation-journalists-continue-to-face-detention-and-harassment-in-somaliland-and-mogadishu/>

On 13 February 2023, After several occasions of postponed¹ the hearing² of the press freedom case involving SJS secretary-general Abdalle Ahmed Mumin, the hearing started on 13 February at the Mogadishu's Banadir Regional Court. The court sentenced Abdalle Ahmed Mumin to two months in prison, a verdict rejected by officials of the Mogadishu Central prison who dismissed his imprisonment saying that 'he already served the two months sentence and eventually freed on the same day. However, that was a short-lived relief after armed men from the police on 23 February raided Jazeera Hotel in the capital, where SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Mumin was attending the parliamentary public consultation meeting on the targeted financial sanctions bill. Mumin was forcibly detained from the hotel in a dramatic and violent nature. He was held in a private house before he was transferred to the Mogadishu Central Prison where he spent another 33 days. Mumin was freed after his health deteriorated on 26 March 2023.

On 19 February 2023, Somaliland police in Wajale detained Saab TV³ reporter Guled Ali Ibrahim a day after he exposed an illegal tax collection by the mayor of the border town of Wajale. The journalist posted receipts showing illegal taxation on his Facebook. According to colleagues, the journalist was held at the police station. He was freed on Tuesday 21 February after he was forced to retract his Facebook post.

On 20 February 2023, the Somali intelligence agents in Mogadishu briefly detained⁴ Ali Elmi Salaad and Sakariye Mohamed Salad, a reporter and a cameraman for the privately-owned Radio Kulmiye in Mogadishu. According to the Director of Radio Kulmiye Burhaan Diini Farah, the radio journalists were covering a disputed election by the Banadir Truck Owners Cooperative. Upon arrest, they were taken to NISA headquarters known as 'Habar Khadijo', where they were held for an hour and after interrogations they were freed without charges.

On 12 February 2023, Somali police in Kaaraan district, Mogadishu, detained two Risaala Media Corporation journalists Qasim Ibrahim Adani and videographer Abdikarin Mohamud Mohamed who were reporting a protest by the local transporters who were complaining against road closure at Sana'a intersection in Mogadishu's Kaaraan district. At the police station, the journalists were ordered to delete the footage of the protesters and refrain from covering any further protests by the Kaaraan district police station commander, Salaad Arale, before they were freed without charge.

On 23 February 2023, One plain clothed intelligence officer and a uniformed police approached Abdalle Ahmed Mumin⁵, Secretary General of SJS while at Jazeera Hotel in Mogadishu, where he was attending⁶ a public consultation event organized by the Somali Federal Parliament's Upper House (The Senate) on the targeted financial sanctions held at Jazeera hotel in Mogadishu. Abdalle was put on police vehicle and taken to a private house that day and was held until the next day when he was transferred to the Mogadishu central Prison. His arrest was ordered by the regional police chief Mahdi Omar Mumin, under the influence of the Director of the National Intelligence Mahad Salad and the Deputy Minister of Information Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adaala.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/risaalatelevision/posts/pfbid033bufwikd3xvLhoJQpRZkAW5C9KrPzZGeQ7Ef1xJJC5uywj3iEJN-TUZTES3cRgyvRI>

² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/01/28/amid-deteriorating-press-freedom-situation-journalists-continue-to-face-detention-and-harassment-in-somaliland-and-mogadishu/>

³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/02/23/amid-ongoing-crackdown-against-media-freedom-sjs-condemns-recent-arbitrary-arrests-of-journalists-in-mogadishu-and-somaliland/>

⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/02/23/amid-ongoing-crackdown-against-media-freedom-sjs-condemns-recent-arbitrary-arrests-of-journalists-in-mogadishu-and-somaliland/>

⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/02/24/sjs-secretary-general-abdalle-ahmed-mumin-re-arrested-and-faces-government-persecution/>

⁶ https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1872658076446768&extid=NS-UNK-UNK-UNK-IO5_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=2Rb1f-B&ref=sharing



Freelance journalist Said Yusuf Warsame.

On 2 March 2023, Somali police at the Aden Adde International Airport, Mogadishu, briefly detained freelance photojournalist Said Yusuf Warsame¹ who was invited to cover an event to the airport during the arrest. He was arrested at the Airport police station at 10:00am and was released at 1:30pm local time without charges.

On 16 April 2023, Mogadishu police in Mogadishu arbitrarily detained four local journalists² covering for Risaala Media Corporation and 5TV while reporting from the site of a bomb blast in Hamar Jajab neighborhood. The journalists: Mohamed Said Nur (Risaala TV), Qasim Ibrahim Adan (Risaala TV), Mohamud Abdirashid Sofeysane (5TV) and Isaq Rashid (5TV) were held at the Hamar Jajab police station before they were later transferred to the regional police headquarters where they were held for half an hour, according to the journalists and two editors of the affected media stations. The Banadir Regional Police Commissioner, Mahdi Omar Muumin (Mo'alin Mahdi), addressed the journalists to inform them that "the police banned any coverage related to bombing sites in the capital". All were freed on the same day.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>

² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>



SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Mumin.

The year 2023 began with the troubling pattern of persecution by high-ranking Somali government officials against the SJS leadership, aiming to impede the organization's crucial efforts in advocating for press freedom and human rights. While the persecution¹ of SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Mumin commenced the year prior, 2023 witnessed a surge in threats, encompassing judicial harassment and politically-driven court cases designed to hinder their work.

On January 4, 2023, the Banadir Regional Court, which had previously imposed travel restrictions on Mumin, commenced what it termed a 'criminal case' against him, citing his advocacy for media freedom and defiance of directives from the Ministry of Information aimed at curtailing press freedom. The proceedings faced numerous delays, and one of Mumin's defense lawyers being removed from the team followed by a knife attack on 10 February while the lawyer was heading home at that night.

Subsequently, **on 13 February 2023**, the Banadir Regional Court sentenced Abdalle Mumin to two months in prison, a verdict that prison officials in Mogadishu Central Prison dismissed, asserting that he had already served the sentence and consequently released him on the same day. However, his freedom was short-lived, as armed police and intelligence officers raided Jazeera Hotel on 23 February, where Mumin was participating in a parliamentary

consultation meeting with the members of the civil society.

During the raid, plainclothes intelligence officers and uniformed police forcibly detained Abdalle Ahmed Mumin, taking him to a private residence before transferring him to Mogadishu Central Prison the following day. His arrest was ordered by regional police chief Mahdi Omar Mumin, under the influence of National Intelligence Director Mahad Salad and Deputy Minister of Information Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adaala. Mumin endured torture during his detention and spent a total of 44 harrowing days in captivity², until his release on 26 March 2023, due to deteriorating health.

On 27 March 2023, officials at Mogadishu airport, acting on orders from National Intelligence Director Mahad Salad, blocked Abdalle Mumin from traveling to Nairobi, Kenya, for urgent medical treatment and to reunite with his family. Following diplomatic intervention and pressure from Somali Members of Parliament, Mumin was finally allowed to travel on March 28, enabling him to access medical care and reunite with his family after enduring over seven months of persecution.

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/05/abdalle-mumin-a-human-rights-activist-and-giant-of-somali-journalism/>

² <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/first-person/2023/05/08/why-somalia-one-hardest-places-world-be-journalist>



Busharo Ali Mohamed (popularly known as Busharo Baanday).

On 15 May 2023, Somaliland police ¹ arrested Busharo Ali Mohamed (popularly known as Busharo Baanday) at the Wajaale town, while crossing from Ethiopian side of the border to Somaliland. Security forces at the border reportedly tortured the journalist upon arrest and transferred her to a police custody in Hargeisa. On 17 May, 2023 Hargeisa based court remanded the female journalist to seven more days in the police custody, according to colleagues who visited her at the police station. The court several times extended Busharo's custody on the basis of pending investigation. On 20 June 2023, Busharo was charged with: Article 205 (Disclosure of Information the Divuligation of Which Has Been Prohibited); Article 212 (Anti-National Activity of a citizen Abroad) and Article 328 (Publication or Circulation of False, Exaggerated or Tendencious News Capable of Disturbing Public Order). All are derived from the outdated Somali penal code.

On 15 August, 2023, the Maroodi Jeex court in Hargeisa delivered a troubling verdict, sentencing journalist Busharo Ali Mohamed to a one-year jail term after a brief court session earlier in the day. The decision appears unfounded and absurd, lacking evidence of any actual wrongdoing on Busharo's part. Instead, it seems to serve as a form of retaliation, with punitive measures being the only recourse sought. Notably, no appeal request was lodged by the prosecutor's office, indicating their satisfaction with the ruling. According to the defense attorneys, the judge stated that the sentence would be retroactively calculated from Busharo's initial detention on May 15 (equating to three months served by the time of the verdict). The remaining period could then be converted into a bond, allowing for Busharo's release² on August 15 upon payment of a monetary sum of about USD 200.

On 5 June 2023, Armed men from the National Intelligence in Mogadishu detained freelance journalist Abdirahman Ahmed Ade³n , who contributes for the The New Humanitarian. Abdirahman told SJS that young NISA officers stopped him on the road on his way to home. They blindfolded him, assaulted him with their pistol during the interrogation, and revealed their intentions to target journalists affiliated with international media, including him, and at one point threatening to kill him. He was held at the Wadajir police station for eight hours that day as confirmed by Abdirahman and a family member who visited him at the police station. Following the terrifying ordeal, the journalist was released without charges, but not before being cautioned that his journalistic activities would be closely monitored.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/05/19/somaliland-detains-critical-female-journalist-sjs-calls-for-her-unconditional-freedom/>

² https://twitter.com/sjs_Somalia/status/1691353034587021312

³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/06/19/sjs-calls-for-end-to-suppression-and-detention-of-journalists-and-demands-release-of-imprisoned-colleagues/>

On 8 June 2023, Security forces loyal to the Luuq District Commissioner in Somalia's Gedo region¹ Ali Kediye Mohamed detained Mohamed Kaafi Adan Bishaar, a correspondent for the Jubbaland State TV after he reported on local elders welcoming a new administration appointed by the Jubbaland authorities for the Gedo region. Mohamed Kaafi told SJS that he was held at the Luuq police station for three days before being released on 9 June without any charges filed against him. Prior to his arrest, armed individuals had also visited his residence. Due to safety concerns, Mohamed Kaafi has since fled the town.

On 13 June 2023, Eryal TV journalist Khalid Yusuf Hassan was detained by Somaliland police in Hargeisa. Despite visits from his colleagues to the criminal investigation department in Hargeisa, the police have not disclosed the grounds for his detention, and no charges have been filed against him, according to journalists who spoke to SJS. Eryal TV has stated that they have not been informed of the reasons behind their colleague's arrest. He was released on 20 June, 2023 without charges.

On 23 August, 2023, Somali Police² officers apprehended two journalists from Five Somali TV, Zakariye Mohamed Salad (reporter) and Mohamed Dulmi-diid (cameraman). The journalists were on assignment to report on the aftermath of coordinated Al-Shabaab attacks that had unfolded in various neighborhoods of Mogadishu overnight on Tuesday. According to Fua'd Haji Abdiweli, Director of Five Somali TV, the two journalists were dispatched to conduct interviews at 8:00 AM on Wednesday. However, under orders from the Kaxda police station commander, they were detained for a span of three hours, during which their equipment was seized. Following this detention, they were released around mid-day without any formal charges being brought against them. Regrettably, the journalists were compelled to abandon their news story.

On 15 August 2023, Galmudug police officers in Dhuusamareeb detained³ journalist Abdifatah Yusuf Beereed while in the midst of interviewing police officers who had expressed grievances about the non-payment of salaries spanning several months. The police commissioner of Dhusamareeb, Nur Elmi Mohamed, headed a team of officers that escorted Beereed away from the city center. During his time in custody, which lasted until 16 August, Beereed told SJS that he was held at the police cell during the night and the following day when he was freed without any charge. However, his release came about solely after the footage from his interviews was erased and his camera equipment returned afterwards.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/06/19/sjs-calls-for-end-to-suppression-and-detention-of-journalists-and-demands-release-of-imprisoned-colleagues/>

² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/08/24/press-freedom-under-fire-bulbul-held-incommunicado-two-more-reporters-briefly-detained-and-a-minority-radio-station-attacked/>

³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/08/24/press-freedom-under-fire-bulbul-held-incommunicado-two-more-reporters-briefly-detained-and-a-minority-radio-station-attacked/>

Detention of Mohamed Bulbul



SJS Secretary of Information and Human Rights Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul.

On 17 August 2023, SJS Secretary of Information and Human Rights Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul was unlawfully detained and tortured by plain clothed officers from the Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) a day after his reporting on corruption allegations against the Somali police involved in European Union's EUCAP-supported training. The report was published by Kaab TV where our colleague had been an editor. Bulbul has been held incommunicado at the police criminal investigations department and the Hamar Jajab police station until his transfer to Mogadishu Central Prison on 28 September.

On 21 August, SJS received a call by police officers from the criminal investigation department (CID) demanding access to Bulbul's phone and laptop logins. They also demanded details about the sources of Bulbul's investigative news story. The Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) firmly refused to comply with these unusual and unlawful demands.

2023. Subsequently, Bulbul was immediately transferred to the hospital, where he was undergoing treatment.

On 04 September, SJS expressed¹ profound concern over the apparent compromise of SJS Secretary of Information and Human Rights, Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul's phone devices, a matter that has recently come to our attention. Since his unlawful detention on 17 August, 2023, plain-clothed national intelligence officers² confiscated Bulbul's devices. Officers from the police Criminal Investigation Department (CID) had requested access to his devices, aiming to uncover the sources behind his recent investigative report exposing police corruption linked to a training seminar involving the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP Somalia). However, SJS vehemently rejected this unlawful demand. On 7 October, a judge at the Banadir Regional Court granted Bulbul release on bail³ while informing defense lawyers that the case would be heard on Wednesday, 11 October.

On 22 January 2023, Somali police officers shot live bullets⁴ at two journalists working for Risaala Media Corporation⁵ as they were covering a terror attack at the Mogadishu mayor's office. According to the director of Risaala Media Corporation, they were not hurt, however, the journalists were forced to leave immediately the scene.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/09/04/alert-sjs-colleague-mohamed-bulbul-phone-devices-compromised-during-incommunicado-detention/>

² https://twitter.com/sjs_Somalia/status/1692153301372928098

³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/10/09/mohamed-bulbul-freed-on-bail-amid-deteriorating-health-court-schedules-second-hearing/>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/risaalatelevision/videos/860490415058522/>

⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/01/28/amid-deteriorating-press-freedom-situation-journalists-continue-to-face-detention-and-harassment-in-somaliland-and-mogadishu/>

Restrictions, blockage, closure and other threats

On 28 February 2023, During a meeting with local media directors, the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs Mr. Hassan Moalin Mohamud¹ together with the Permanent Secretary of the ministry Mr. Faysal Adan and the director of the Department of Communication and Awareness Ms. Ugbad Nor ordered the independent media to refrain from interviews and programs criticizing the government. According to journalists who attended the meeting, the Minister instructed the media to “stop discussing the persecution and targeting of SJS Secretary Abdalle Mumin” as the Federal Parliament begun debating Abdalle’s unlawful detention.



On 16 March 2023, Al-Shabaab released a video message denouncing² independent media, including some local press freedom organizations and journalists. The group described the free press as the “mouthpiece for the enemy propaganda” and blamed the local journalists and press freedom groups as “entities working for the interest of the foreigners”.

Radio Barawe journalists are seen in the radio studio days before the attack on the radio premises.

On 27 March 2023, Mogadishu airport officials blocked SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Mumin from traveling to Nairobi, Kenya for medical treatment and to reunite with his family a day after his freedom from detention. The officials at the airport cited orders received from Mahad Salad, the director of the National Intelligence as the reason for refusing Mumin’s departure. Mumin had been released from jail the previous day due to his deteriorating health. Following the intervention of foreign diplomats and Somali Members of Parliament, Mumin was finally able to travel on March 28. This allowed him to see his doctor and reunite with his family for the first time in over seven months of persecution.

On 1 April 2023, Deputy minister of information, Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adaala has ordered a local journalist from Bandhig Forum to halt³ “until further notice” a scheduled Twitter Space discussion on press freedom and human rights highlight the attacks and persecution against SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Ahmed Mumin. The journalist was among the organizers of the discussion which was scheduled on 5 April. The discussion was later held on time despite disruptions by notorious online trolls.

On 7 April 2023, Mahad Arab Dhiblawe, a national intelligence (NISA) officer operating at the Mogadishu Airport has started targeting SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Ahmed Mumin with threats of physical harm while in Nairobi. Mahad has also threatened journalists at the local media station, Risaala Media Corporation following the station’s broadcast of a lengthy interview with Abdalle Mumin⁴ detailing Mumin’s detention and subsequent persecution broadcasted during March.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>

² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>

³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>

⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>

On 8 April 2023, Somaliland's deputy minister of information, Said Hassan Habane¹ issued a directive which bans interviews and talk shows, among other issues, contrary to the culture, the good ethics and religion. This vaguely-worded directive which was sent to local media stations not only curtails the press freedom and the freedom of expression but it also instills fear among the journalists who are uncertain on what to report following the directive.

On 10 May 2023, Police at the Criminal investigation Department (CID) summoned² Ahmed Said Ahmed, an online reporter that also covers for Radio Kulmiye as news editor, according to the summon letter seen by SJS. Ahmed told SJS he was interrogated by police officer Hussen Aden Abdulle, the deputy commander of the CID about his investigative stories related to a government officials who reportedly vanished into foreign countries amid allegations of abuse of foreign visas. On 20 May, 2023, Radio Kulmiye, where Ahmed Said Ahmed confirmed their editor was summoned and interrogated by the criminal investigation department on 13 May, 2023 over complaints submitted by the unnamed government officials.

On 20 May 2023, Office of the Somalia's Attorney General summoned SYL TV journalist, Hussein Abdulle Mohamed³ where upon reaching was questioned by the government deputy attorney general, Mohamed Osman Mohamud about his recent reporting that exposed alleged corruption and power abuse involving the Attorney General Sulayman Mohamed Mohamud and another graft story implicating President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's family members. Hussein told SJS that after one hour of questioning, he was subsequently released, with a cautionary notice that he could be called in for further interrogation by the police at any given moment.

On 29 May 2023, Jubbaland Minister of Information, Saleban Mohamed Mohamud, announced an oral order imposing⁴ additional limitations on local journalists, instructing them to cease providing neutral coverage of the war on al-Shabaab and instead "side with the government and promote government propaganda". According to journalists who attended the meeting and media reports, the announcement was made during a meeting funded by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). This move by the Jubbaland minister of information comes in the wake of a previous directive issued by the Federal Ministry of Information in October 2022, which imposed unlawful restrictions on independent media and journalists.

On 4 June 2023, Deputy Minister of Information Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adaala made a statement claiming that the Ministry of Information had reached an agreement with Facebook, granting authorities⁵ "the power to restrict coverage of content related to al-Shabaab on the social media platform". Al-Adaala further disclosed that the national intelligence and other undisclosed entities are involved in this concerning collaboration. This announcement follows reports from several journalists who have informed SJS that their news content has been deleted or restricted on Facebook.

On 12 August 2023, Armed men affiliated to former Somalia's Southwest State district commissioner of Barawe Liban Abukar Osman fired several gunshots at the premises of Radio Barawe, a community-owned local radio station that speaks for the marginalized Bravanese community, according to Radio Barawe reporting at the time⁶. The Radio's director, Osman Aweys Bahar who was in the studio at the time of the incident told SJS that the shooting came days after the radio covered an allegation of torture resulting in the death of a local resident at the hands of the police. As a result, Radio Barawe director fled the city and is currently seeking safety in another location.

1 <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>

2 <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/05/25/journalists-face-intimidation-and-threats-of-prosecution-for-reporting-allegations-of-corruption-and-injustices-in-mogadishu/>

3 <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/05/25/journalists-face-intimidation-and-threats-of-prosecution-for-reporting-allegations-of-corruption-and-injustices-in-mogadishu/>

4 <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/06/19/sjs-calls-for-end-to-suppression-and-detention-of-journalists-and-demands-release-of-imprisoned-colleagues/>

5 <https://www.facebook.com/universalsomalitv/videos/936974557585118>

6 https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=778133280780133&id=100057504036904

This response followed a disturbing pattern, as SJS previously documented two raids targeting Radio Barawe and the subsequent detention of its journalists in 2020 and 2021 by Southwest State authorities in Barawe. These actions were motivated by an apparent attempt to halt the radio station's unique programming in the Chimwimini, a local dialect spoken by the ethnic Baravanese community.

On 12 August 2023, Radio Barawe, the only community-owned independent radio in Barawe town, Lower Shabelle region was forced off-air and its journalists fled the town after an armed attack on the radio premises¹. The shooting attack was carried by armed personnel associated to the former Barawe District Commissioner of the Southwest State.

On 18 October 2023, The Somali Federal Government's Office of the Attorney General summoned and questioned the director of Arlaadi Media Network, Abdirahman Jeylani Mohamed (known as Adani), who is also an SJS member, by the Attorney General of Somalia in Mogadishu. Abdirahman Adani appeared before the Office of the Attorney General, where he was interrogated for 30 minutes. SJS representatives accompanying him were instructed to wait outside the Attorney General's office while Abdirahman Adani was questioned within. The interrogation focused on Arlaadi Media Network reports concerning payments allegedly imposed by local authorities on the people of Wajid, a district in Bakool region, Southwest State, whose residents have been struggling with besieging imposed by Al-Shabaab. The report which was aired by Arlaadi Media Network on 23 September 2023. The case remained pending as of the end of the year.

On 23 November 2023, Two journalists with the Mogadishu-based Arlaadi Media Network (AMN) encountered obstruction while attempting to cover an event in Baidoa. The event, aimed at launching the Maay language script and co-hosted by Southwest State authorities, welcomed journalists. However, upon arrival, the AMN reporters, who journeyed from Mogadishu, were instructed to refrain from covering the proceedings and to return home, a directive they complied with. This incident adds to a series of actions taken by Southwest State officials against journalists associated with AMN, including previous detentions and targeting.

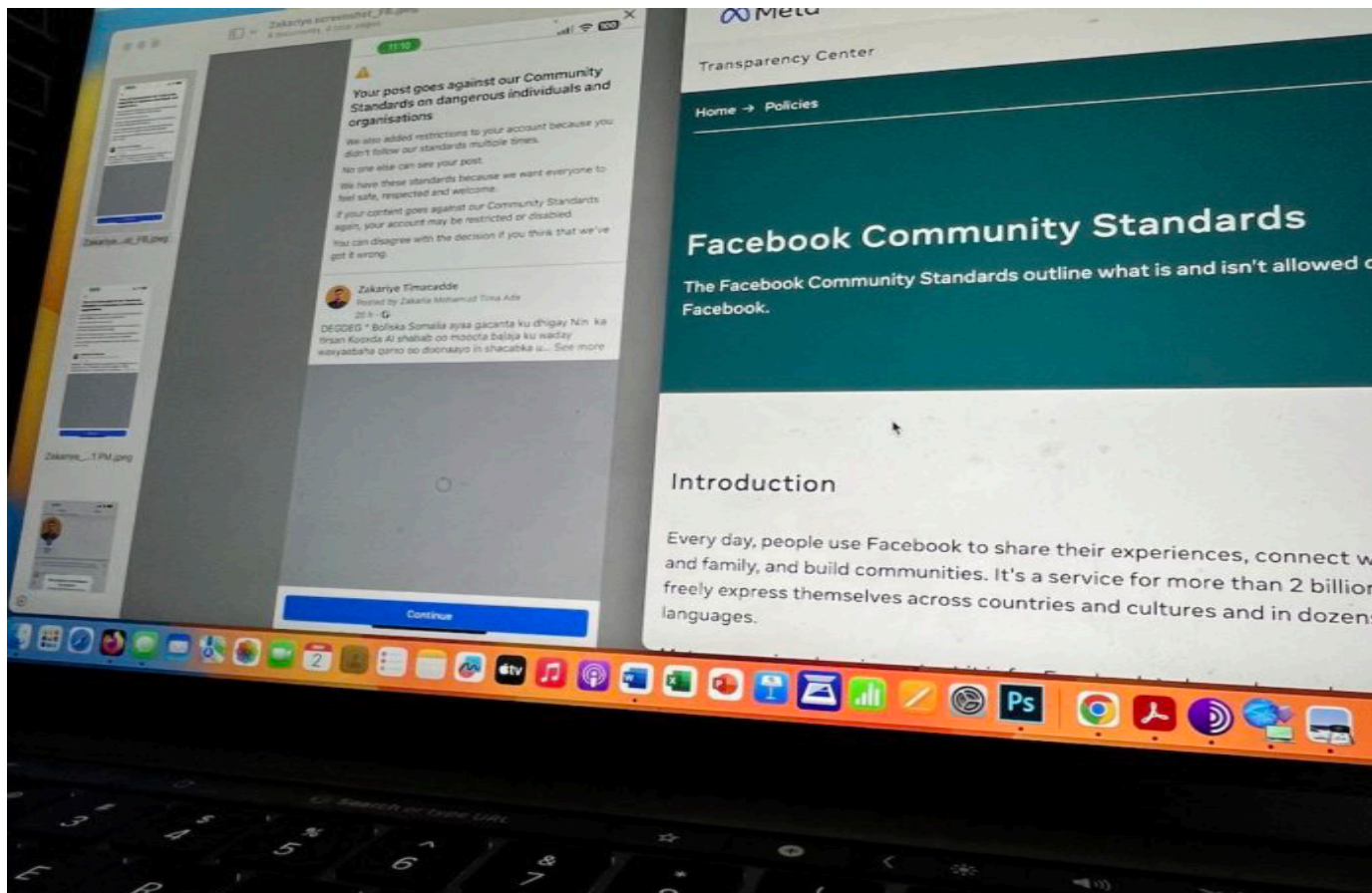
On 27 December 2023, Ali Hassan Mohamed, the Minister of Information for Somaliland, issued a directive ordering the private channel, Universal TV, to cease broadcasting television debates, labeling them as "immoral" and contradictory to Islamic values². This directive was prompted by Universal TV's recent airing of a public debate on the Somaliland clans' lineages, during which participants expressed varying viewpoints.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/08/24/press-freedom-under-fire-bulbul-held-incommunicado-two-more-reporters-briefly-detained-and-a-minority-radio-station-attacked/>

² <https://kaabtv.com/somaliland-oo-amaro-kusoo-rogtay-muuqbaahiyaha-universal-tv/>

Online content removals

On 9 June 2023, The director of a privately-owned channel, SYL TV notified ¹ SJS that they received warnings regarding potential hacking or suspension of their Facebook pages after covering a widely shared incident of a physical attack on a young man with a disability by police officers in Mogadishu. The threat led journalists to remove their news report fearing for their Facebook accounts and their safety. During the same period other journalists in central Somalia have also told SJS that their content was removed after reporting allegations of sexual violence against women and girls by the armed militia. Journalists and media directors have expressed to SJS that the National Communications Authority of Somalia (NCA) is implicated in the censorship and blocking measures aimed at the journalists' critical reporting.



A photo shows Facebook's Community Standards page alongside a screenshot of journalist Zakariye Timacadde whose Facebook page was restricted after posting interview critical to Somali authorities.

On 10 April 2023, Following his interview ² with SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Mumin, Europe-based Somali journalist Mohamud Mohamed Dahir (Mohamud Arab) was forced to remove his video interview which became viral and exposed human rights violations in the Mogadishu detention centres run by NISA. The interview was first published on a Facebook Page run by Mohamud Arab. After the journalist appealed against the decision, the interview was re-posted but with restrictions describing it as "dangerous content or dangerous individual." The restriction has since been revoked due to a second appeal by the journalist. According to the journalist, the Meta decision came after the Somali ministry of information reported the interview as "a dangerous content."

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/06/19/sjs-calls-for-end-to-suppression-and-detention-of-journalists-and-demands-release-of-imprisoned-colleagues/>

² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/04/17/attacks-and-threats-against-journalists-and-media-stations-in-somalia-continue-with-impunity/>

Censorship and online attacks



SJS website.

In August 2023, Somali media organizations, including SJS, faced a significant online attack, marking a troubling escalation in efforts to undermine their crucial work. The cyberattack targeted the Somali Journalists Syndicate's website www.sjsyndicate.org, employing a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) tactic, which inundated the site with traffic and rendered it inaccessible. Around the same time, Mohamed Ibrahim Osman Bulbul, a staff member at SJS and editor at Kaab TV, was arrested by authorities, seemingly in retaliation for his investigative reporting on alleged corruption. These dual crises placed immense pressure on the organization.

Seeking assistance, SJS turned to Qurium, a nonprofit based in Sweden, which stepped in to host the SJS's website. However, despite this intervention, our website faced another wave of DDoS attacks shortly afterward. Fortunately, Qurium managed to prevent the site from going offline. Further analysis by Qurium revealed that the tools used in the attacks originated from a U.S.-based company called RayoByte, owned by Sprious. Upon investigation, Sprious acknowledged the issue and took measures to prevent further targeting of SJS's site.

Other media outlets, such as Kaab TV, Horn Observer, and Horn Examiner, also reported similar cyber assaults. Kaab TV and Horn Observer, in particular, experienced prolonged downtime lasting nearly three weeks, disrupting their online operations until they could resume normal functioning.

In December 2023, Reuters published¹ an investigative report linking Wyoming LLCs to several high-profile hacking incidents, including the attacks on SJS and other media outlets. Interviews with tech experts and hacking victims revealed a concerning trend where Wyoming, once associated with rugged frontier history, now harbors entities facilitating modern cybercrime.

In response to these revelations, Joe Rubino, the general counsel for Wyoming's Secretary of State's Office, expressed the intention to investigate the matter further. While Secretary of State Chuck Gray supports the idea of implementing new laws to prevent misuse of Wyoming's corporate filing system by foreign entities, the state legislature has yet to address the issue.

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/technology/cybersecurity/how-cybercriminals-are-using-wyoming-shell-companies-global-hacks-2023-12-12/>

Ending impunity for crimes against journalists should be a priority for Somalia

On the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists marked on 2nd November, the International Press Institute (IPI) and the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) expressed concern over the lack of progress on 11 cases of killed journalists in Somalia. We called on the authorities to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring that crimes against the press are not carried out with impunity by carrying out thorough, transparent investigations into these cases and prosecuting the perpetrators.

IPI and SJS submitted¹ a letter to the authorities in Somalia including the Office of the Attorney General, the National Media Council, and the Ministry of Information raising concerns about the state of press freedom in Somalia and inquiring about the status of investigations of cases of killed journalists.

This letter expresses concern about the lack of progress in investigating and prosecuting crimes against journalists, noting that several cases remain unresolved, some dating back to 2016. It specifically mentions cases of 11 journalists who were killed while undertaking their professional duties or as a result of their work as journalists.

Somalia has made commitments to uphold press freedom at global, regional, and national levels, as noted in Article 18 of its Constitution. This includes its commitments by virtue of being a signatory to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and subsequently the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information.

IPI and SJS urge the Somali Attorney General to prioritize the safety and security of journalists and address the issue of impunity, especially through the Special Prosecution Unit that was established in 2020 to investigate crimes against journalists. The letter also called on the Attorney General to ensure that the overall operating environment is conducive for media freedom to thrive.



Journalists observe a minute of silence and prayer for the slain colleagues in Somalia during the commemoration of International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists held in Mogadishu, 2 November 2020.

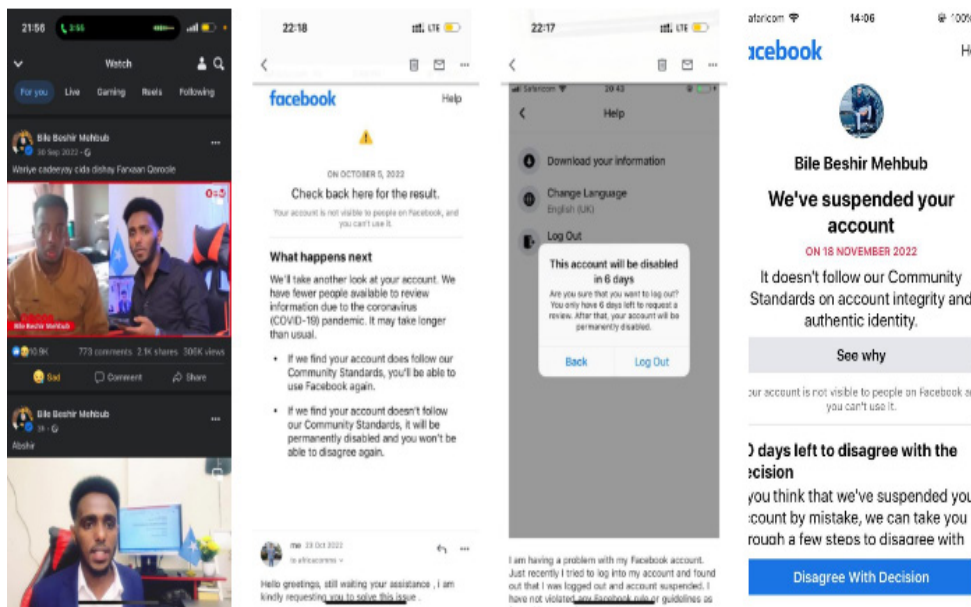
¹ https://ipi.media/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IDEI23_Letter-to-Somalia-Authorities.pdf

Facebook’s role in silencing journalists and critics in Somalia

The increasing use of Facebook’s Community Standards and mass reporting to censor Somali journalists critical of the government is a cause for concern. This practice has resulted in content takedowns, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the deletion of social media accounts.

Journalists and media outlets critical of president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud’s government and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) have faced widespread censorship on Facebook, receiving warnings of page restrictions, suspensions, or content removal, often labeled as “dangerous organizations and individuals” or “violating community standards.” Journalists who covered human rights violations, including incidents involving the Somali security forces and Al-Shabaab, were often subject to content removals and account blocks.

Prior to World Press Freedom Day 2023, the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) interviewed ¹ nine online journalists and five local media stations, all of whom described how their news content was censored, restricted, removed, or made less visible through mass reporting by anonymous Facebook users. Some reported their pages being banned from posting or deleted entirely, as attackers exploit Facebook’s Community Standards to suppress independent journalism.



Screenshot taken by journalist Bile Beshir Mehub informing him account suspension by Facebook in October and November 2022 as well as an email communication to Facebook by the journalist requesting assistance.

The targeted content ²includes articles, video interviews, news pieces, and images critical of the Somali Federal Government, Ministry of Information, NISA, and the police. Mass reporting has also led to the removal of reports alleging misconduct by police commanders, including sexual violence against women. The use of mass reporting has left journalists concerned about the safety of their reporting. This form of censorship not only induces fear but also silences and discredits journalists, impacting both individuals and local media organizations.

Analysis by SJS reveals that Facebook consistently categorizes restricted content as ‘Dangerous organizations and individuals’, a classification within Facebook’s Community Standards policy. However, a 2018 review by Article19 found these standards to be out of line with international human rights law, with Facebook providing insufficient information on their practical application. Despite repeated attempts by SJS to reach out to Meta, the parent company of Facebook, regarding these incidents and to share our concerns and findings, we have yet to receive a response.

There is a call for greater transparency from Facebook and other social media companies on how they navigate government demands, including from the Somali authorities, regarding the censorship or banning of journalistic content. Furthermore, a revision of Facebook’s definitions of terms like ‘terrorism’, ‘hate speech’, and ‘incitement to violence’ is urged, aligning them with international standards to prevent vague interpretations.

¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/05/02/wpfd2023-facebooks-mass-reporting-community-standards-constantly-used-to-censor-and-suppress-somali-journalists/>

² <https://kaabtv.com/exploitation-of-facebook-community-standards-and-ddos-attacks-by-somali-authorities-to-suppress-critical-voices/>

SJS formally joins IPI

We are thrilled to commemorate yet another achievement as we join the prestigious International Press Institute (IPI). On 28 July 2023, The Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) takes immense pride in announcing¹ its official membership to the esteemed IPI, a global network comprising editors, media executives, and distinguished journalists. This momentous occasion further bolsters SJS’s unwavering commitment to defending press freedom, safety of journalists and upholding freedom of expression, both within Somalia and on the international stage.

With this strategic partnership, SJS solidifies its role as a formidable advocate for press freedom, empowering its members in the face of daunting challenges confronting media professionals in Somalia. The inclusion into the International Press Institute marks a significant milestone in our ongoing fight for media independence and journalist safety.

SJS serves as a national-level journalists’ union and a steadfast advocate for press freedom, relentlessly and courageously safeguarding the rights of journalists while providing vital legal aid to those facing court cases arising from their journalistic work. Our mission is to ensure that journalists can carry out their duties without fear of reprisal, and our collaboration with IPI reinforces this endeavor. As the media landscape continues to evolve, SJS remains dedicated to promoting responsible journalism and defending the rights of those who courageously report the truth. Our partnership with IPI strengthens our collective commitment to preserving the fundamental principles of free and independent media.

Expressing this significant moment, SJS Secretary-General Abdalle Mumin stated “In these challenging times, SJS calls upon all stakeholders to recognize the critical role of a free press in upholding democracy, fostering transparency, and empowering the public with accurate information. Together, we can build a society that values press freedom and cherishes the tireless efforts of journalists striving for truth and accountability.”

SJS expresses its gratitude to the International Press Institute for welcoming us into its esteemed network and pledges to continue championing press freedom in Somalia and beyond.



¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2023/07/28/sjs-formally-joins-ipi/>

Legal support and mentorship

Throughout the year, the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) has played a crucial role in supporting journalists amidst legal obstacles, providing a multifaceted approach to address the complexities of legal proceedings and threats to freedom of expression. With a focus on empowering journalists through legal defense, mentorship, and advocacy, SJS's efforts reflect a proactive response to the pressing challenges facing media workers in Somalia.

The provision of legal defense support, mentorship, and advice to 47 journalists, including a significant representation of women (17 of them), underscores SJS's commitment to ensuring that journalists have access to resources and guidance necessary to navigate legal complexities effectively. By representing journalists in court and assisting with legal procedures, SJS not only provides tangible support but also fosters a sense of solidarity within the journalistic community.

Moreover, SJS provided mentorship to the journalists for field assignments and reporting stories from diverse regions, including Mogadishu and regional states. By equipping these journalists with the skills and knowledge needed to excel in their reporting endeavors, SJS contributes to strengthening the quality and diversity of media coverage in Somalia.

In light of the prevalent use of the Somali penal code provisions to stifle freedom of expression, SJS's advocacy for legal reform will continue. By advocating for the revision of laws that pose a threat to freedom of expression and human rights, SJS demonstrates a proactive stance in addressing systemic challenges that undermine press freedom in Somalia.

Overall, SJS's efforts to empower journalists amidst legal challenges underscore the organization's critical role as a defender of press freedom and advocate for media rights in Somalia. As journalists continue to face legal hurdles and threats to their freedom, the comprehensive support provided by SJS serves as a beacon of hope and resilience in the fight for a free and vibrant media landscape.



Lawyers and journalist Mohamed Bulbul celebrate shortly after his release from detention on 11 October 2023.

The Somali federal government and its FMS should:

- End the impunity for crimes against journalists including those perpetrated by government officials and the members of the security forces;
- Review the ministry of information's 8 October 2022 directive and ensure that the freedom of expression and media freedom should not be muzzled under the pretext of the fight against al-Shabaab;
- Investigate and repeal the presidential order seeking the independent media to send their content for approval;
- Encourage the government security forces to protect journalists and stop threats and attacks on the journalists;
- Allow journalists and media workers access to government information including by not putting restrictions on accessing government buildings and interviewing public officials;
- Provide safety and protect journalists who are investigating and uncovering serious human rights violations including those perpetrated by the government officials, the security forces and the armed groups;
- Protect whistle blowers who contribute valuable information to the journalists for the sake of public interest;
- Not unjustifiably restrict and interfere with the rights of individuals including media professionals to seek, receive and impart information;
- Accelerate and draft the Access to Information Bill through the parliament as required by the Constitution.
- Direct the ministry of information to open the review and amendment of the Media Law with a wider consultation with the journalists, media associations and other stakeholders in order to amend the provisions that restrict media freedom and threaten journalists' safety;
- Stop using the outdated penal code for journalists and encourage the decriminalization of journalism in Somalia;

The international partners should:

- Support local civil society groups to carry out systematic monitoring and reporting on violations and abuses of the right to freedom of expression, access to information and media freedom throughout the country;
- Urge the Federal Government of Somalia and the Federal Member States to respect, protect and promote the rights of journalists;
- Pressure the Somali Federal Government and FMS to accelerate the Access to Information Bill through the parliament and provide the necessary support.
- Support public education campaigns on respect for human rights including the right to freedom of expression, access to information and media freedom;
- Support actions that promote the safety of journalists in Somalia;
- Include the Somali development and peace-building funding support initiatives that promote human rights, media freedom and safety of the journalists;
- Strengthen efforts made by the local civil society and journalists associations to promote media freedom and the right to freedom of expression, access to information and media freedom.
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