

STATE OF PRESS FREEDOM IN SOMALIA | 06 JANUARY 2020

Working under Pressure and Targeted Attacks



ANNUAL REPORT 2019



Somali Journalists Syndicate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As 2019 ends, multiple actors continue to target Somalia media and its professionals through continued attacks, arbitrary arrests, death threats, and obstruction of access to information – all representing a vital constitutional right that citizens were meant to enjoy. Instead, authorities continued to order arbitrary arrests and suspensions based on perceived criticisms, blocked independent news websites and introduced an anti-press bill currently before the Upper House of the Federal Parliament¹.

While the number of journalists killed in Somalia was considerably less than previous years², the level of arbitrary arrests, attacks and suspensions remained high across Somalia. Local and Federal authorities continue to enjoy total impunity and powers to suppress Somali journalists – whether in Mogadishu, Kismayo, Hargeisa or Garowe – whenever journalists publish or broadcast perceived criticism towards them. According to interviews³ with journalists, officials routinely ordered the detention of journalists as an intimidation exercise to quell critical stories. This trend may explain why the majority of journalist detentions took place without any charges presented across Somalia in 2019.

Multiple elections took place across Somalia in 2019 and end of 2018, and subsequent attacks against the press covering these elections also took place. The politically sensitive elections could partially explain the high level of state-led attacks on the press in 2019 with **81 journalists physically assaulted** while on duty⁴. Authorities also **arrested 53 journalists** during the year. Somaliland arrested **18 journalists** with two remaining incarcerated by end year. Puntland arrested five journalists. Police in Puntland have been extremely aggressive against the media and carried out four raids on independent media houses for covering investigative news reports deemed critical to the state.

Three journalists were wounded, two of them with gun shots, during the year. The most serious incident took place in Las'anod where a Somaliland police officer shot and injured a TV journalist during a violent arrest⁵ while a member of Hirshabelle Parliament cruelly assaulted and injured another TV journalist in Beledweyne.

Key red lines for coverage remain across the country. Somali police in the country's capital, Mogadishu, have blocked journalists covering bombing sites and other security incidents more than **15 times** during the year. Other areas such as reporting on human rights abuses, especially those perpetrated by state actors, remains another “no-go” area for the Somali press. Online expression is further curbed after state actors repeatedly targeted and harassed journalists on the internet for any critical personal social media posts.

¹<https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/08/somali-journalists-syndicate-sjs-outraged-by-the-new-oppressive-media-bill-passed-by-the-parliament/>

²<https://cpj.org/data/killed/somalia>

³<https://sjsyndicate.org/category/alerts/>

⁴SJS database on press freedom violation in Somalia during 2019.

⁵<https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/16/alert-somaliland-lasanod-police-shot-and-injured-tv-journalist-before-illegally-detaining-him/>

Across Somalia authorities shuttered, temporarily suspended or raided seven media houses including five broadcasters and one newspaper, in addition to news websites blocked. The main perpetrator for these closures took place in Somaliland, seconded by Puntland and Hirshabelle states. By end year, the local, independent City FM remained closed in Jowhar⁶.

Targeted killings against journalists and media staff has significantly declined in 2019 compared to the previous years⁷. So far two journalists died in a hotel attack in the southern coastal town of Kismayo by al-Shabaab militants. While an improvement over previous years, federal and regional authorities have done little to curb impunity towards killed journalists in Somalia. The country maintains the ignominious world title for impunity towards killed journalists for the fifth year in a row⁸.

The barrage of attacks against the press, predominantly perpetrated by state actors, was one key reason the Somali Journalist Syndicate (SJS)⁹ was formed in May 2019. Identifying a dearth in effective associations that holistically protect the Somali press, professional Somali journalists set up SJS to defend the rights of working journalists and promote press freedom. Through advocacy, legal aid and capacity building, SJS is increasing in participation by journalists across Somalia on a daily basis. During the last part of 2019, SJS trained 70 journalists- 40% women journalists- with skills ranging from safety, documentary production as well as editorial planning for good journalism.

Abdalle Ahmed Mumin,
Secretary General of the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS)



⁶ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/19/hirshabelle-police-shut-down-independent-radio-station-briefly-detain-seven-journalists-in-jowhar/>

⁷ <https://cpj.org/data/killed/somalia>

⁸ <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/10/getting-away-with-murder-killed-justice.php>

⁹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/about-sjs/>



Mohamed Omar Sahal (aka Ga'ma Dhere), SBC TV correspondent based in Kismayo and Hodan Naleyeh, TV journalist and founder of Integration TV – both among killed in Kismayo hotel attack on Friday 12 July, 2019 | Photo Credit: SJS

KILLED JOURNALISTS

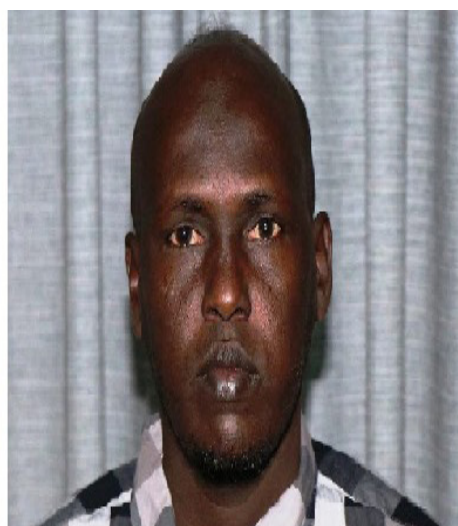
2 Journalists were killed in Kismayo hotel attack

On July 12, 2019: Somali journalists **Mohamed Omar Sahal** (aka Ga'maDhere), SBC TV correspondent based in Kismayo and **Hodan Naleyeh**, TV journalist and founder of Integration TV were killed when the Madina Hotel (also known as Cas-casey) in Kismayo was attacked¹⁰. According to colleagues, Mohamed who previously covered about local displaced people and refugees returning to the region was working on a TV story about fishing business and opportunities for the returnees in Kismayo. Al-Shabaab militant group claimed the responsibility of the attack¹¹.

IMPRISONED JOURNALISTS

2 Journalists remained imprisoned.

On July 8, 2019: Somaliland's MarodiJeh Regional Court handed down unfair and unjust 3.5 year jail term to journalist **Abdimalik Muse Oldon**¹² after he was arrested on April 17, 2019 from his home in Bur'o. The journalists was charged on defamation charges for claiming Abaarso School teaches sex education; Spreading false allegations against Somaliland and calling the Somaliland leadership a dictatorship state on a Facebook post. The Court of Appeals also ruled in favour of the Regional Court on September 29, 2019 sending a chilling message to journalists in Somaliland¹³.



Abdikadir Coday and Abdimalik Oldon remain imprisoned in Hargeisa. | Photo Courtesy/SJS.

On November 18, 2019: Somaliland police officers from Criminal Investigations Department (CID) summoned Horn Cable TV's editor-in-chief, **Abdikadir Saleban Asayr**¹⁴ (known as Coday), who was arrested upon arrival. The police at the CID presented a written order of closure against the TV for interviewing Sultan Wabar, a "separatist anti-Somaliland clan elder" and broadcasting safety complaint against Egal International Airport. The order of closure was signed by the commander of the CID, Abdi Fiin. The MarodiJeh Regional Court in Hargeisa on November 19, 2019 extended his detention.

On December 9, 2019, Somaliland government Attorney General brought two charges: interviewing the leader of separatist armed function in Somaliland and causing panic by reporting on a leaked letter of complaint about a safety related incident at Egal International Airport in Hargeisa.

The editor remains in jail as of the time of writing. Horn Cable TV was on November 19, 2019 allowed to resume operations as the court rejected police request to legalize the illegal suspension of the TV.

¹⁰ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/19/hirshabelle-police-shut-down-independent-radio-station-briefly-detain-seven-journalists-in-jowhar/>

¹¹ <https://cpj.org/data/killed/somalia>

¹² <https://cpj.org/reports/2019/10/getting-away-with-murder-killed-justice.php>

¹³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/about-sjs/>

¹⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/18/somaliland-police-arrest-horn-cable-tv-editor-in-chief-and-orders-closure-of-outlet>

CONFISCATION OF EQUIPMENT, BEATINGS, HARASSMENT AND THREATS

Equipment of 27 journalists confiscated, 6 of them broken

On Feb 18, 2019: Somali police handcuffed, beat up two freelance journalists: Said Warsame Sabriye (Qarafan) and Abdullahi Omar Abdi, in Mogadishu and denied them from recording footage near KM5 in the capital¹⁵. The journalists were working on a story about closure of roads by the police¹⁶. Two police officers confiscated the cameras of the journalists and handcuffed them while ordering the journalists to lie down on the ground on the roadside for nearly an hour before releasing them. The journalists told SJS that the two officers responsible for the violence were officers at the Villa Somalia Presidential Office¹⁷. The journalists complained about this act of violation against their rights and were told the officers responsible were detained but no charges were brought against the two as of the end year.



COMBINED PHOTO: Journalist Ahmed Isak Abdulle, a freelance correspondent for STN TV, was slightly injured on the left hand's small finger and his camera smashed during the assault.

On May 14, 2019: Somali government security forces confiscated journalists' equipment, detained five reporters and cameramen went to Warta Nabadda (formerly Wardhigley) District Headquarters where a car bomb blast inflicted deaths and injuries¹⁸. Among the journalists whose equipments seized: Said Yusuf Warsame (EPA Photographer); Feisal Omar (Reuters photojournalist); Mohamed Osman Gurey (Al Jazeera TV freelance photographer); Farah Abdi Warsame (Associated Press photographer); Mohamed Abdulkadir Jirow (Radio Kulmiye videographer).

On May 22, 2019: Somali Police shot at, beat up and briefly detained Radio Kulmiye journalists: Abdullahi Hussein Anshur (a news reporter) and cameraman Mohamed Abdulkadir Jirow in reporting mission in Mogadishu near Daljirka security checkpoint in Mogadishu¹⁹. The police shot two bullets at Abdullahi Hussein Anshur and three bullets at cameraman Jirow who were filming a scene of a car bomb that morning. Jirow sustained bruises from the beating²⁰.

On July 13, 2019: Jubbaland security forces broke the camera of Ahmed Isak Abdulle (a freelance correspondent for STN TV) and physically assaulted him together with three journalists who were at the funeral of colleague journalists: Mohamed Omar Sahal and Hodan Naleyeh killed in Kismayo hotel attack on July 12, 2019²¹. Police accused the journalists to be filming the nearby funeral site of government officials killed in the hotel attack²².

¹⁵ https://twitter.com/Horn_Globe/status/1097583885729304576

¹⁶ According to news reports and SJS interview with journalist Said Warsame Sabriye in Mogadishu on December 24, 2019.

¹⁷ SJS interviews with the journalists in Mogadishu on December 24, 2019.

¹⁸ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/20/somali-government-security-forces-confiscate-journalists-equipment-detain-camera-man-and-beat-up-two-others/>

¹⁹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/22/somali-police-shoot-at-beat-up-and-briefly-detain-journalists-in-reporting-mission-in-mogadishu%0ef%0bb%0bf/>

²⁰ SJS interviews with the two journalists in Mogadishu on May 22, 2019.

²¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/13/jubbaland-security-forces-physically-assault-four-journalists-at-colleagues-funeral-in-kismayo-somalia/>

²² SJS interviews with the journalists in Kismayo, July 13, 2019

On October 27, 2019: Somali police arrested five journalists, confiscated and damaged cameras and other journalistic equipment while covering public transporters' protest in Mogadishu's KM4 neighborhood²³. The journalists- **Farhan Mohamed Hussein** (Radio Kulmiye reporter), **Yonis Duran Ali** (Radio Kulmiye camera reporter), **Yahye Haji Olad** (Radio Kulmiye camera operator), **Ahmed Ali Barre** (Universal TV reporter) and **Ali Adan Mumin** (Goobjoog reporter) were taken into custody at Hawlwadaag police station before they were released later during the same day without charge²⁴.



Photo credit: SJS, Journalists taking photos from the blast site in Mogadishu

On October 29, 2019: Puntland armed police in Sanaag confiscated equipment of three local journalists in Badhan town in Sanaag while covering a news conference by clan elders in a hotel in Badhan²⁵. The journalists –**Mohamed Hassan Dhalo** (Radio Daljir reporter), **Abdiaziz Abdullahi Hassan** (Horn Cable TV reporter) and **Mohamed Ahmed Agta** (SBC journalist) were forced to stop interviews they were conducting²⁶.

On November 4, 2019: Somali police harassed, beat, shot and confiscated equipment of Al-Jazeera and Reuters journalists shortly after an assignment in Mogadishu. **Jama Nur Ahmed** (Al-Jazeera Arabic correspondent), **Abdinasir**

Abukar Hared (Al-Jazeera cameraman), **Omar Siyad** (driver), **Mohamed Ali Dahir** (crew assistant), and **Feisal Omar** (Reuters journalist) were returning from an assignment at Aden Adde International Airport where planes carrying humanitarian aid for the floods-affected regions in the country landed²⁷. Two pick-up trucks with armed police officers stopped the journalists' car and immediately began harassing, beating and fired several bullets into air while pointing guns at the journalists. The journalists' cameras were later returned without explanation.

On November 10, 2019: Somaliland police officers confiscated equipment of two TV journalists in Hargeisa. The officers accompanied by employees from a private business company Deero Group assaulted and beat up before seizing the cameras of **Ahmed Nur Isse Mohamed Samrawi** (Bulsho TV reporter,) and **Ibrahim Abdirahman Ibrahim Jokar** (Horyaal24 TV reporter,) while covering a protest by local traders who complained about unpaid dues against Deero Group in Hargeisa²⁸. The equipment was later returned but the journalists told SJS that they found their memory cards deleted making them unable to retrieve the footage for use of their news reporting²⁹.

On November 13, 2019: Masked Officers from National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) and led by unidentified officer forcibly confiscated phones from three journalists:

²³ <https://www.somaliaffairs.com/news/somali-journalists-briefly-detained-in-mogadishu-for-covering-demonstration/>

²⁴ SJS interviews with the journalists after their release in Mogadishu on October 27, 2019.

²⁵ <https://www.hornobserver.com/news/police-in-somalias-puntland-assault-journalists-filming-press-conference-in-badhan-town/>

²⁶ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/04/somali-police-attack-beat-journalists-and-confiscate-equipment-in-mogadishu/>

²⁷ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/04/somali-police-attack-beat-journalists-and-confiscate-equipment-in-mogadishu/>

²⁸ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/10/tv-journalists-assaulted-and-briefly-held-for-covering-protest-in-hargeisa/>

²⁹ SJS interviews with the two journalists and a colleague in Hargeisa on November 13, 2019.

Abdikarin Isse Adawe (Shabelle TV cameraman), **Abdullahi Warsame Roble** (Somnews TV reporter), and **Mohamed Khadar Moalim Ahmed** (Goobjoog Media) as cameraman and reporter as they separated the three for questioning each for 30 minutes and instructed them to inform authorities before covering election related news³⁰. The journalists were having their evening tea at a downtown restaurant in Dhusamareb town in central Somalia State of Galmudug when the officers entered the restaurant and took out the journalists.

ASSAULT ON JOURNALISTS AND DENIAL OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

81 journalists were assaulted and denied access to information by the security forces in Mogadishu, Garowe and Hargeisa.

On February 18, 2019: About 15 journalists from the local radio and TV stations were blocked from reporting from an event where Somali Prime Minister, Hassan Ali Khaire was inaugurating the construction of the Afgoye-Mogadishu and Mogadishu-Jowhar roads³¹. The journalists said they were invited by the Office of the President's Communications Officer a day earlier but as the event management was later handed over to the Office of the Prime Minister, Communications Officer at the PM's Office, Ali Nur Siyad denied the journalists from reporting from the event without reason.

On May 22, 2019: Somali Police shot at, beat up and briefly detained Radio Kulmiye journalists: **Abdullahi Hussein Anshur** (a news reporter) and cameraman **Mohamed Abdulkadir Jirow** in reporting mission in Mogadishu near Daljirka security checkpoint in Mogadishu³². The police shot two bullets at Abdullahi Hussein Anshur and three bullets at cameraman Jirow who were filming a scene of a car bomb that morning. Jirow sustained bruises from the beating³³.

On May 26, 2019: Somali security forces in Mogadishu beat, punched and kicked journalist **Abdulkadir Ahmed Mohamed** (alias Mo'alim) who works for Radio Voice of Banadir Regional Administration (BRA)³⁴. The journalist was reporting from the 59th Anniversary of Somali Independence Day on 26th June event where top Somali government officials including President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo celebrated in commemoration the Independence Day at the BRA Headquarters in Mogadishu when a presidential guards soldier punched, kicked and beat him as other journalist videotaped in a crowded venue inside the BRA compound³⁵. Officials from Villa Somalia promised that the officers committed the brutal act will be arrested but that pledge remains unfulfilled until today.

³⁰ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/13/galmudug-security-forces-confiscate-journalists-phones-and-instruct-them-to-inform-authorities-before-covering-election-related-news/>

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMygIkWI7Ug>

³² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/22/somali-police-shoot-at-beat-up-and-briefly-detain-journalists-in-reporting-mission-in-mogadishu%ef%bb%bf/>

³³ SJS interviews with the two journalists in Mogadishu on May 22, 2019.

³⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/06/26/sjs-condemns-assault-against-a-radio-journalist-by-a-security-officer-in-mogadishu-calls-for-proper-investigation/>

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/Daacad1414/videos/2274618195987527/>

On June 9, 2019: Somali military soldiers threatened to kill harassed and shot at Radio Kulmiye reporter and the producer of the popular political news show “Xog Wareysi”, **Hussein Abdulle Mohamed** (known as Hussein Gurmad) who was heading to work³⁶. Bodyguards of General Saney Abdulle Gaab smashed the journalist’s private car’s sidebar mirror at a security checkpoint at Hawo Tako area, near Villa Somalia Palace in Mogadishu. According to the journalist, this was second incident he encountered from the same officer³⁷. No reasons were given to justify these incidents.

On June 15, 2019: Somali police assaulted, fired live ammunition at five journalists and denied access, after a group of journalists went to report following a car bombing at Sayidka Junction near the Parliament Building in Mogadishu³⁸. The journalists: **Jama Nur Ahmed** (Al-Jazeera Arabic’s correspondent), **Mohamed Abdihakim Ismail** (Al-Jazeera English), **Feisal Omar** (Reuters Photojournalist), **Abdirazak Hussein Farah** (AFP Videographer) and **Sadaq Mohamed Mohamud** (Anadolu cameraman) were trying to report from the site of the car bombing that day.

On July 2, 2019: Somali official at of the Somali Prime minister office Abdirahman Dirie “Goomey” physically assaulted and threatened **Abdulaziz Billow Ali**³⁹, Mogadishu-based correspondent for the China Global Television Network (CGTN) and his cameraman **Mohamed Ahmed Mohamed**. Uniformed personnel were used to eject both the journalist and the cameraman from the facility while gathering public views on Somali Independence Day⁴⁰. The official initially demanded his speech be featured in the news report but the journalists said they were focusing views of Somali youngsters who were born during the civil war to reflect on the 59th Anniversary of Somalia’s Independence Day.

On July 13, 2019: Jubbaland security forces physically assaulted four journalists who were at the funeral of colleague journalists: Mohamed Omar Sahal and Hodan Naleyeh killed in Kismayo hotel attack on July 12, 2019⁴¹. Police accused the journalists to be filming the nearby funeral site of government officials killed in the hotel attack⁴². Among the journalists assaulted were **Mohamud Warsame Shiike** (correspondent for Som News TV) who sustained bone crack at the upper right arm; **Ahmed Isak Abdulle** (a freelance correspondent for STN TV) slightly injured on the left hand’s small finger, while **Mohamed Qasim Wahar** (Somali Cable TV correspondent), and **Abdiweli Beddel** (STN TV cameraman) both sustained minor bruises on the back and the right hand respectively.

On October 19, 2019: Somali Federal Parliament (People’s House) temporarily denied access to the independent media and journalists during ongoing parliamentary debates. The officials at the

³⁶ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/06/09/somali-military-soldiers-threaten-to-kill-harass-and-shoot-at-radio-kulmiye-reporter-in-mogadishu/>

³⁷ *SJS interview with journalist Hussein Gurmad in Mogadishu on June 9, 2019.*

³⁸ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/06/15/somali-police-assault-fire-live-ammunition-at-journalists-and-deny-access-to-blast-site-in-mogadishu/>

³⁹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/02/sjs-condemns-assault-threats-and-harassment-against-cgtn-tv-correspondent-in-mogadishu/>

⁴⁰ <https://twitter.com/AbdulBillowAli/status/1145767371312963589?s=20>

⁴¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/13/jubbaland-security-forces-physically-assault-four-journalists-at-colleagues-funeral-in-kismayo-somalia/>

⁴² *SJS interviews with the journalists in Kismayo, July 13, 2019.*

Parliament described the move due to limited space at the Parliament's offices at Villa Hargeisa in Mogadishu⁴³. The new move restricts all independent media from covering the People's House in unknown period of time while on the hand allowing journalists from state-owned TV and radio to cover the event.

On October 29, 2019: Puntland armed police assaulted, kicked and confiscated equipment of three local journalists in Badhan town in Sanaag while covering a news conference by clan elders in a hotel in Badhan⁴⁴. The journalists – **Mohamed Hassan Dhalo** (Radio Daljir reporter), **Abdiaziz Abdullahi Hassan** (Horn Cable TV reporter) and **Mohamed Ahmed Agta** (SBC journalist) were forced to stop interviews they were conducting⁴⁵.



Journalists waiting for press conference | Photo credit: SJS

On November 10, 2019: Somaliland police beat, harassed, unlawfully detained and confiscated equipment of two TV journalists in Hargeisa. Police officers accompanied by employees from a private business company Deero Group assaulted and beat up **Ahmed Nur Isse Mohamed Samrawi** (Bulsho TV reporter,) and **Ibrahim Abdirahman Ibrahim Jokar** (Horyaal24 TV reporter,) while covering a protest by local traders who complained about unpaid dues against Deero Group in Hargeisa⁴⁶.

On December 11, 2019: Somali police in Mogadishu blocked and threatened to shoot a group of **19 journalists** working for local media and international news agencies while taking photos and filming SYL Hotel following a terrorist attack on previous night⁴⁷. The journalists who spoke to SJS said after gathering outside the hotel they heard officers attached to the Presidential Guards Unit known as “the red beret” shouting “beat the journalists” and later chased the reporters in a bid to stop journalists from taking photos and recording footage of the hotel.

On December 17, 2019: Security officers attached to the Federal Minister of Youth and Sports, Khadija Mohamed Diriye threatened and removed Goobjoog TV journalists **Abdullahi Mohamed Omar** and **Mohamed Hussein Qalinle** from an event at Liido beach hotel where national players team were hosting a dinner of celebration following the just concluded Council for East and Central Africa Football Associations (CECAFA) championship cup. The journalists were informed that they were not allowed to cover the event because the minister did not like their media outlet⁴⁸.

⁴³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/10/19/sjs-calls-somali-parliament-to-allow-access-of-independent-journalists/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.hornobserver.com/news/police-in-somalias-puntland-assault-journalists-filming-press-conference-in-badhan-town/>

⁴⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/04/somali-police-attack-beat-journalists-and-confiscate-equipment-in-mogadishu/>

⁴⁶ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/10/tv-journalists-assaulted-and-briefly-held-for-covering-protest-in-hargeisa/>

⁴⁷ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/11/authorities-block-journalists-from-reporting-and-seize-their-equipment-across-somalia/>

⁴⁸ SJS interview with the journalists in Mogadishu on December 17, 2019.

JOURNALISTS ARRESTED / DETAINED

53 journalists were arrested by the security forces throughout the year.

On January 2, 2019: Security forces in Beledweyne under the orders of then Governor of Hiran, Yusuf Ahmed Hagar arrested SBC TV reporter, **Abdinur Osman Adan** in Beledweyne. Security forces arrested the journalist while in the midst of interviews with displaced people who accused local officials of misappropriating relief aid meant for them⁴⁹. He was released on January 4, 2019 without charge.

On March 10, 2019: Somaliland police arrested three TV journalists: **Said Nuh Kibar** (Horyaal24 TV), **Mohamed Abdi Omar Watin** (freelancer) and **Jafar Awil** (Eryal TV) in Gabiley town, about 57KM from Hargeisa, Somaliland a day after the journalists were harassed by a police officer who fired live bullet against the journalists while on assignment at a newly built playground. After several court appearances over allegations of obstructing police, on April 2, 2019 Gabiley District Court sentenced journalist Said Nuh Kibar for one year in jail and six months on Jafar Awil while ordering the release of Mohamed Abdi Omar (Watin). Both Kibar and Awil were released after each of them paid USD200 cash in exchange for their jail sentences.

On March 19, 2019: Somali National Army (SNA) in Beledweyne arrested SAAB TV journalist **Abdishakur Mohamed Hassan** following a report he filed days ago which featured increased illegal roadblocks by the armed forces and clan militias in the region. The journalist was held in a detention run by the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) in Beledweyne under the orders of then Governor Yusuf Ahmed Hagar⁵⁰. The journalist was released on March 21, 2019 without charge.

On May 14, 2019: Somali government security forces briefly detained five reporters and cameramen went to Warta Nabadda (formerly Wardhigley) District Headquarters where a car bomb blast inflicted deaths and injuries⁵¹. Among the journalists whose equipments seized: **Said Yusuf Warsame** (EPA Photographer); **Feisal Omar** (Reuters photojournalist); **Mohamed Osman Gurey** (Al Jazeera TV freelance photographer); **Farah Abdi Warsame** (Associated Press photographer); **Mohamed Abdulkadir Jirow** (Radio Kulmiye videographer).

On May 20, 2019: Police in Erigavo arrested Badda Cas TV reporter, **Said Muse Farah** following a report in which the journalist interviewed members of the internally displaced people who complained about diversion of food aid. The arrest was, according to the journalist, ordered by the Governor of Sanag, Mohamed Ahmed Aalin (Tinbaro). Journalist Farah was released after 24 hours in police custody⁵².

On May 22, 2019: Somali Police briefly detained Radio Kulmiye journalists: **Abdullahi Hussein Anshur** (a news reporter) and cameraman **Mohamed Abdulkadir Jirow** in reporting

⁴⁹ SJS interviews with journalist Abdinur in Beledweyne on December 26, 2019.

⁵⁰ Phone interview with journalist Abdishakur in Beledweyne on December 26, 2019.

⁵¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/20/somali-government-security-forces-confiscate-journalists-equipment-detain-camera-man-and-beat-up-two-others/>

⁵² SJS interview with journalist Said Muse Farah on December 25, 2019 and a colleague who knows about the case.

On May 24 2019: Jubbaland security forces arrested journalist Mohamed Omar Sahal, who worked for the privately-owned SBC TV reporter, at Kismayo General Hospital on May 24, 2019 where he interviewed family members of an 8-years-old girl, whose mutilated body was found dumped outside the city and was brought to the hospital .

On May 28 2019: Somali police arrested Goobjoog Media reporter Ali Adan Muminin Mogadishu for reporting news of bombings in Mogadishu and being too critical to the government . Police issued a letter of summon to the journalist ordering him to appear at the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) where he was arrested upon arrival . He was released on 31 May, 2019 after Banadir Regional Court Judge quashed charges .

On June 15, 2019: Police in Mogadishu arrested Shabelle TV reporter, Mohamud Abdinasir Sofeysane and his cameraman Mohamed Amin Tafare as they were recording interviews and street footage for a TV piece in Mogadishu's Hawlwadaag district. According to journalists and colleagues, both Sofeysane and Tafare were released the next day without charges .

On July 14, 2019: Puntland police arrested journalist Mohamed Said Yusuf with the orders from Nugal Police Commissioner, Col. Abdihamid Mohamed Dirir who asked journalist Yusuf to appear at the police station in person for questioning about an interview the journalist conducted a day earlier with a local elder which was deemed critical to the Puntland government . He was released on 29 July 2019, after the Nugal Regional Court in Garowe, judges quashed all charges against journalist. SJS in partnership with Media Legal Defense Initiative provided legal assistance to Yusuf's case .

On July 22, 2019: Six plain-clothed Puntland police officers armed with pistols arrested Horseed Media journalist Omar Said Abdirahman (alias Lucky Man) at gunpoint from a restaurant in Bosaso . He was detained at the Central Police Station for more than 48 hours before he was released without charges on July 24, 2019 .

On July 23, 2019: Somali police briefly arrested Abdullahi Osman Adani and Hassan Wali Abukar who work for Radio Shabelle in Mogadishu by officers from Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in Mogadishu. The journalists were accused to have contributed to an online article which alleged police officers extorting bribes from citizens seeking documents at the CID

⁵⁴<https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/24/somalia-jubbaland-security-forces-briefly-detain-tv-journalist-over-interview-of-victims-family/>

⁵⁵SJS interview with Ali Adan Mumin in Mogadishu in May 31, 2019.

⁵⁶<https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/28/alert-somali-police-arrest-goobjoog-reporter-in-mogadishu/>

⁵⁷<https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/31/goobjoog-media-reporter-freed-after-spending-four-days-in-jail/>

⁵⁸SJS Interviews with the journalists and colleagues in Mogadishu.

⁵⁹<https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/14/puntland-police-arrest-freelance-journalist-over-critical-interview-in-garowe/>

⁶⁰<https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/29/nugal-regional-court-freed-freeance-journalist-from-jail-in-garowe/>

⁶¹<https://www.marqaanews.net/2019/07/akhriso-maxay-ahayd-sababtii-loo-xiray-wariyihii-marqaanews-ee-deegaanada-puntland/>

⁶²SJS phone interview with journalist Omar Said Abdirahman in Bosaso on December 26, 2019.

detention cells in Mogadishu . The two journalists were released later in the evening of July 23, 2019.

On July 24, 2019: Somali police briefly detained Somali Cable TV reporter, Suleiman Ahmed Rage and camera operator Abdirahman Omar at KM4 intersection in Mogadishu while the journalists were working on a follow up TV story about businesses affected by a deadly car bombing that hit the area the previous day . The Journalists told SJS that they were barred from recording footage and were held in the open air near the police checkpoint before they released an hour later. When the journalists returned to their TV station, they dropped the story because they had not captured footage for the story.

On July 30, 2019: Somaliland police raided the Grand Hadi Hotel and arrested four Eryal TV journalists: Badri Kosar, (Deputy Director), Abdirahman Abdillahi (Head of News), Aidarus Mohamed Abdi (reporter) and Kamal Khalif Abdi (cameraman) during an interview with individuals who complained against an allegedly corruption-marred new government-initiated employment campaign .Three of them: Abdirahman Abdillahi, Aidarus Mohamed Abdi and Kamal Khalif Abdi were released in that afternoon without charge, while Badri Kosar was set free the morning of July 31, 2019 without charge.

On August 10, 2019: Officers attached to National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) detained journalist Mohamed Abdiwali Tohow, a freelancer for Universal TV and Radio Kulmiye in Dhusamareb town in Galmudug State after the journalist posted an article mentioning the unusual military deployment into Dhusamareb town ahead of Galmudug elections by Somali National Army on his Facebook .He was released the same day without charge.

On August 22, 2019: Puntland police assaulted, harassed and briefly arrested two television journalists Burhan Mohamed Abdi, correspondent for the state-owned Puntland TV and Abdiweli Jama Cagarane, reporter for SBC TV in the town of Galkacyo . Both journalists were held at Miir police station in Galkayo for two and half hours before they were released.

On September 6, 2019: Somaliland police arrested Horyaal24 TV director; Mohamed Osman Mire (Sayid) in Hargeisa after the TV broadcasted a documentary alleging increase of drug (khat) use within Somaliland women .Sayid was released on bail after September 16, 2019 on bail .

On September 10, 2019: Somaliland authorities arrested Hadhwanaag website journalists; News Editor Abdiqani Abdillahi Ahmed (Asbaro) and reporter Abdirisaaq Goud Nur, while reporter

⁶³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/23/somali-police-briefly-detain-two-radio-journalists-in-mogadishu/>

⁶⁴ Phone interviews with the journalists and editor of Somali Cable TV.

⁶⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/07/30/somaliland-police-arrest-four-tv-journalists-in-hargeisa/>

⁶⁶ Phone interviews with the journalist after his release and colleagues.

⁶⁷ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/08/22/somalias-puntland-police-harass-and-briefly-detain-two-tv-journalists-in-galkayo/>

⁶⁸ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/08/closure-of-horyaal24-tv-and-arrest-of-its-boss-heightens-fear-over-press-safety-in-somaliland/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Horyaal24tv/videos/839137186481197/>

⁶⁹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/18/violence-against-journalists-on-the-rise-in-somaliland-oldons-defense-lawyer-quits/>

Abdirahman Sheikh Hassan was arrested⁷⁰ on the night of September 19, 2019 following series of articles on Hadhwanaag News that alleged Somaliland's Central Bank Governor, Ali Ibrahim Jama (Baghdadi) of stealing public funds⁷¹. Mr. Baghdadi filed complaints against the website and its journalists. The three journalists were released on a bail on September 23, 2019⁷².

On September 16, 2019: Two journalists Nuh Mohamed Abdi and Shafi'i Abdi Jama were arrested in Bur'o town in Somaliland as they were recording footage in the city centre⁷³. The arrest, according to the journalists, was ordered by a Member of Bur'o City Council as Somaliland president Muse Bihi was touring Bur'o city. Both journalists were released the following day on September 17, 2019 without charges.

On October 14, 2019: Somalia's Hirshabelle arbitrarily detained freelance TV journalist and member of Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), Abdiiaziz Hassan Moalim⁷⁴ (also known as Abdiiaziz Folyarey) for covering a violent public protest in Jowhar. The journalist was released the following day on October 15, 2019 without charge.

On October 17, 2019: Puntland police arrested Ahmed Sheikh Mohamed (Tall man)⁷⁵, a former Radio Daljir director from his home in Garowe with the orders of Puntland police chief, General Muhidin Ahmed Muse in relation to reports of a prisoner who died in police custody after an alleged torture. He appeared at the Nugal Regional Court on Monday October 21, 2019. He was released on October 22, 2019 after he was forced to recant by discrediting Radio Daljir's news reports⁷⁶ on the death of the prisoner and a result the police reportedly dropped the charges against Ahmed.

On October 27, 2019: Somali police arrested five journalists, confiscated and damaged cameras and other journalistic equipment while covering public transporters' protest in Mogadishu's KM4 neighborhood⁷⁷. The journalists- Farhan Mohamed Hussein (Radio Kulmiye reporter), Yonis Duran Ali (Radio Kulmiye camera reporter), Yahye Haji Olad (Radio Kulmiye camera operator), Ahmed Ali Barre (Universal TV reporter) and Ali Adan Mumin (Goobjoog reporter)

⁷⁰ <http://hadhwanaagnews.ca/articles/6704/Wariyihii-saddexaad-ee-hadhwanaag-ka-hawl-gala-oo-ciidanku-xalay-xidheen>

⁷¹ <http://hadhwanaag.ca/mobile/articles/5754/Gudoomiyaha-Baanka-Dhexe-Cali-Baqdaadi-Oo-Fooqyo-Waa-Weyn-Ka-Dhisana-aya-Magaalada-HargeysaSawiro>

⁷² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/23/somaliland-three-hadhwanaag-news-journalists-released-from-jail-on-bail/>

⁷³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/18/violence-against-journalists-on-the-rise-in-somaliland-oldons-defense-lawyer-quits/>

⁷⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/10/14/hirshabelle-police-detain-freelance-journalist-for-covering-public-protest-or-der-to-shoot-others/>

⁷⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/10/21/sjs-calls-puntland-authorities-to-drop-charges-against-former-radio-daljir-director/>

⁷⁶ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/10/23/puntland-former-radio-daljir-director-released-new-threats-mounting-on-journalists/>

⁷⁷ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/11/04/somali-police-attack-beat-journalists-and-confiscate-equipment-in-mogadishu/>

were taken into custody at Hawlwadaag police station before they were released later during the same day without charge⁷⁸.

On November 19, 2019: Universal TV reporter, Abdinasir Guray Me'ad was arrested in Gabiley following a post on his Facebook criticizing Gabiley District Court for sentencing young men over alleged robbery charges without presenting adequate evidence⁷⁹. On November 20, 2019, Gabiley District Court ordered the journalist to be remanded in jail pending further investigations. The journalist was released later on November 20, after he posted a written statement on his Facebook page to apologize the police and the court⁸⁰.

On December 9, 2019: Police officers from Las'Anod police station detained Horn Cable TV reporter, Abdirahman Ahmed Olol after the journalist live-streamed police raid on a newly opened hotel in Las'Anod⁸¹. Earlier in that day, Somaliland police stopped journalists from covering the inauguration event of the hotel and confiscated equipment from seven journalists including journalist Olol.

On December 19, 2019: Armed police officers in Jowhar of the Hirshabelle State of Somalia briefly arrested seven journalists working at City FM radio in Jowhar after the police summoned the radio director for broadcasting a news story that alleged Hirshabelle State president of grabbing private farm land⁸². The seven journalists: Mahad Muse Mahdi, Sakariye Osman Abdi, Hussein Abdi Farey, Mohamud Ali Omar, Abdinasir Ahmed, Abukar Ali Adow and Nur Mohamed Moalim were later released from police detention without charge. The arrest follows after their media house CITY FM was raided and shut down indefinitely⁸³.

On December 29, 2019: Armed police officers in Jowhar led by Capt. Mohamed Ali Siyad (Anjeh) briefly detained Radio Jowhar journalist Abdiqani Sheikh Mohamed⁸⁴ following a news report about growing insecurity in Jowhar in the Hirshabelle State⁸⁵. The police freed the journalist one and half hour later after the management of the radio accepted to broadcast an apology and retract the news story about the insecurity set as conditions for the release of the journalist⁸⁶.

⁷⁸ <https://www.somaliaffairs.com/news/somali-journalists-briefly-detained-in-mogadishu-for-covering-demonstration/>

⁷⁹ <https://www.wajaalenews.net/?p=108556>

⁸⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/naasir.meeccad.58/posts/565461180910033>

⁸¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/11/authorities-block-journalists-from-reporting-and-seize-their-equipment-across-somalia/>

⁸² SJS phone interviews with City FM journalists and Director of Information Ministry of Hirshabelle on December 19, 2019.

⁸³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/19/hirshabelle-police-shut-down-independent-radio-station-briefly-detain-seven-journalists-in-jowhar/>

⁸⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/29/hirshabelle-police-briefly-shut-down-a-second-independent-radio-and-detain-a-journalist/>

⁸⁵ According to an audio news clip reviewed by SJS broadcasted on Radio Jowhar on Sunday, December 29, 2019.

⁸⁶ According to interviews with Radio Jowhar director, Mohamed Abukar Aseyr and journalist Abdiqani Sheikh Mohamed after his release.

MEDIA SUSPENSIONS, RAIDS AND CLOSURE

Seven media houses were temporarily shuttered, suspended or raided

On February 10, 2019: A regional court in Hargeisa, Somaliland ordered the independent Foore newspaper⁸⁷ to suspend publishing for one year and fined its editor-in-chief, Abdirashid Abdiwahaab Ibrahim, three million Somaliland shillings (USD300), following a conviction for publishing “false news” and anti-Somaliland propaganda citing an October 11, 2018, story on the construction of a new presidential palace. After several appeals by the management of Foore, Somaliland Supreme Court on December 25, 2019 overturned the one-year ban and ordered Foore Newspaper to resume publications⁸⁸. According to the editors, the paper is expected to resume its publication early January, 2020⁸⁹.



Journalists on duty | Photo credit: SJS

On March 30, 2019: About 10 armed officers (nine of them in police uniform), who claimed to be attached to Banadir Regional Revenue Authority, stormed the offices of Universal TV⁹⁰ in the capital, Mogadishu and started shooting inside the building causing about 12 journalists on duty to frighten and forced the live TV show to halt subsequently⁹¹. This was a clear violation against the work of the journalists and endangering the safety of the Universal TV journalists. A promised investigation and “appropriate measures to be taken by the director of communication at the office of the President in Somalia, Abdinur Mohamed Ahmed, did not bear fruits as of today.

On June 18, 2019: Somaliland police under the leadership of Somaliland’s Deputy Head of Criminal Investigations Department (CID) Abdi Fiin raided two independent TV stations: **Eryal TV and Horyaal 24 TV** studios in Hargeisa and instructed the management of the two stations to close indefinitely⁹². Abdi Fiin had a letter of order of closure accusing both outlets of propagating anti-Somaliland agenda, propaganda against security forces and fueling conflict within the community⁹³. Both TV stations were allowed to resume operations on June 30, 2019⁹⁴.

On September 8, 2019-Somaliland police from Criminal Investigations Department (CID) raided and shut down Horyaal24 TV headquarters and instructed the staff to leave while taking over the premises⁹⁵. The order stemmed from the Somaliland information minister, Mohamed Muse Dirie following a documentary about the increase of drug (khat) addiction within Somaliland women⁹⁶. According to the management, the TV resumed operations on October 23, 2019 after the Information Minister revoked the shutdown order.

⁸⁷ <https://cpj.org/2019/02/somaliland-court-suspends-newspaper-for-one-year-f.php>

⁸⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/Horyaal24tv/videos/3773283899352088/>

⁸⁹ Phone interview with Foore staff member and editor in Hargeisa on December 26, 2019.

⁹⁰ <https://cpj.org/2019/04/somalia-raid-universal-tv-shooting.php>

⁹¹ <https://hornglobe.com/somali-policemen-raid-universal-tv-studio-in-mogadishu/>

⁹² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/06/18/somaliland-authorities-indefinitely-shut-down-two-privately-owned-tv-stations-in-hargeisa/>

⁹³ <https://www.facebook.com/Horyaal24tv/videos/353133822056875/>

⁹⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/06/30/somaliland-authorities-allow-horyaal-24-tv-and-eryal-tv-to-resume-operations-impose-new-restrictions/>

⁹⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/08/closure-of-horyaal24-tv-and-arrest-of-its-boss-heightens-fear-over-press-safety-in-somaliland/>

⁹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/Horyaal24tv/videos/839137186481197/>

On September 14, 15 and 16, 2019: Somalia's Puntland police carried out multiple raids against privately owned Radio Daljir offices in the towns of Garowe and Bosaso and briefly shut down the radio's transmitter in Bosaso on Monday 16 September, 2019⁹⁷. The raid followed when Radio Daljir reported a story about a prisoner who died in police custody following an alleged torture⁹⁸. The radio was back on air on the same day.

On October 15, 2019: Puntland police from the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) led by Officer Ahmed Adawe raided the RTN TV station's office and harassed journalists on duty⁹⁹. The officers searched the premises as they looked for the television's Garowe reporter **Abdiqani Ahmed Mohamed** who filed a vox-pop news report featuring interviews criticizing Puntland State president's attendance at the controversial inauguration of Jubbaland president in Kismayo¹⁰⁰.

On December 19, 2019: Somali police in Jowhar raided and closed down the privately-owned independent City FM radio in Jowhar in definitely. It was not immediately clear reasons behind the closure which also followed the brief detention of seven of its journalists¹⁰¹. City FM radio remains closed as the time of writing.

On December 29, 2019: Hirshabelle police led by Capt. Mohamed Ali Siyad (Anjeh) raided and closed down briefly the independent Radio Jowhar in Jowhar town after the radio aired a news report featuring growing insecurity¹⁰² in the city¹⁰³. The police later detained journalist **Abdiqani Sheikh Mohamed** who presented the news report on Radio



Radio Jowhar briefly shuttered. | Photo credit: SJS

Jowhar. The journalist was released and the radio resumed operation later on the day after the management accepted to broadcast apology on the radio and retract the news report about the insecurity¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁷ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/16/puntland-police-carry-out-multiple-raids-on-radio-daljir-and-briefly-shut-down-radio-transmitter/>

⁹⁸ <https://www.daljir.com/ciidamada-gaarka-ah-ee-janaraal-muxyadin-oo-lagu-eedeeyey-dil-maxbuus-iyo-dhac-hanti-dhegayso/>

⁹⁹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/10/15/puntland-police-raid-rtn-tv-office-in-garowe-threaten-journalists-after-vox-pop/>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxF6KsMsIY4>

¹⁰¹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/19/hirshabelle-police-shut-down-independent-radio-station-briefly-detain-seven-journalists-in-jowhar/>

¹⁰² According to an audio news clip broadcast on Radio Jowhar on Sunday December 29, 2019 reviewed by SJS on December 29, 2019.

¹⁰³ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/12/29/hirshabelle-police-briefly-shut-down-a-second-independent-radio-and-detain-a-journalist/>

¹⁰⁴ SJS interviews with Radio Jowhar director, Mohamed Abukar Aseyr and two journalists including Abdiqani Sheikh Mohamed who work at the station in Jowhar on December 29, 2019

INJURED JOURNALISTS

*3 Journalists
wounded in
Somaliland and
Hirshabelle*



Somaliland police shot and injured **Abdirahman Keyse Tungub** in Las Anod | **Photo credit: SJS**

On May 16, 2019: Somaliland police in Las'anod have shot and injured **Abdirahman Keyse Tungub**¹⁰⁵, a correspondent for the Hargeisa-based privately-owned independent Bulsho TV. The police followed the journalist who was with friends in the downtown on Las'anod and violently attacked him as they tried to arrest him. The journalist and his friends attempted to challenge the capture without a warrant of arrest resulting armed police to shoot and wound journalist Abdirahman¹⁰⁶. He was released on May 29, 2019 without charge¹⁰⁷.

On August 14, 2019: SAAB TV reporter, **Abdishakur Mohamed Hassan** was physically assaulted¹⁰⁸. He sustained a busted upper lip after he was punched by a Hirshabelle Member of Parliament, Sharma'arke Hassan Ganey inside the Hiran Regional Administration Headquarters in Beledweyne. The journalist, who was on assignment that day to cover regional security meeting was taken to a local hospital for treatment¹⁰⁸.

On October 1, 2019: A gunman shot and injured Kalsan TV journalist **Hussein Hassan Adde** in Buhodle town in Togdher region¹¹⁰. The journalist broke the right thigh and was taken to Hargeisa hospital for treatment¹¹¹. Despite sources claiming reason of the attack as not related to his work as a journalist, there was no proper investigation conducted by authorities until today.

¹⁰⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/16/alert-somaliland-lasanod-police-shot-and-injured-tv-journalist-before-illegally-detaining-him/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/16/alert-somaliland-lasanod-police-shot-and-injured-tv-journalist-before-illegally-detaining-him/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/05/29/sjs-welcomes-release-of-journalist-abdirahman-keyse-from-lasanod-jail/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/Radiohalkan114/posts/2060690620905684>

¹⁰⁹ SJS phone interview with journalist Abdishakur and a colleague in Beledweyne on August 15, 2019.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGuJ2eR2qQQ>

¹¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7kc1m7jczQ>

BLOCKING INTERNET AND WEBSITES

Local authorities ordered the blockage of 2 news websites in Puntland and Somaliland



News Editor Abdiqani Abdillahi Ahmed (Asbaro) and Abdirisq Goud Nur (both pictured) were arrested on 10 September 2019. | Photo courtesy/Private

On September 3, 2019: Somaliland's Hargeisa-based MarodiJeh Regional Court ordered the blockage of independent news website Hadhwanaag.ca following a request from the police asking the internet service providers to block the news site¹¹². The court document reviewed by Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) attributed articles and series of interviews published by Hadhwanaag News, which allege misuse of public money by the Governor of the Central Bank of Somaliland, Ali Ibrahim Jama (also known as Baghdadi)¹¹³ as the reason of the order of the blockage. The order was followed by arrests of three Hadhwanaag News journalists in Hargeisa who were released on bail after two weeks in jail and fled into exile¹¹⁴.

On September 3, 2019: in Puntland State of Somalia, the Minister of Information, Ali Hassan Ahmed (also known as Sabarey) ordered internet companies to block the independent news website Puntlandtimes.com¹¹⁵. During a press conference¹¹⁶ in Garowe, Minister Sabarey accused the website of publishing lies referring an article on Puntland Times allegedly reported civil servants' protest at the Puntland Ministry of Information on August, 26 and 27, 2019 over unpaid salaries and Minister Sabarey's name was mentioned¹¹⁷.

DRACONIAN ORDERS IMPOSED BY THE STATE

Puntland and Somaliland authorities imposed draconian orders aimed to censor the media

On September 9, 2019: Somaliland's Minister of Information, Mohamed Muse Dirie instructed all TV stations operating in Somaliland to prioritize Somaliland related news over other reports about Somalia¹¹⁸. In a written directive¹¹⁹ issued the same day, the Minister said he gave the instructions to the independent TV stations' bosses during a meeting at the Minister's office in Hargeisa. Nine heads of the independent private TV stations: Saab TV, Eryal TV, Horn Cable TV, Star TV, Codka Bariga Afrika (CBA), Badda Cas TV, Bulsho TV, SOM News TV and Sahan TV attended the meeting. When the media bosses, at the meeting attempted to challenge the order they were told that they did not have the right to dispute the Minister's directive.

¹¹² <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/04/somaliland-and-puntland-should-rescind-order-of-blockage-of-two-independent-news-websites/>

¹¹³ <http://hadhwanaagtv.com/video/12336/Daawo-Muuqaal-Musuq-Maasuqa-Cali-Baqdaadi-Aniga-Ayaa-Wax-Ka-QorayWaraysi-Qoraa-Cabdi-Shootali>

¹¹⁴ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/18/violence-against-journalists-on-the-rise-in-somaliland-oldons-defense-lawyer-quits/>

¹¹⁵ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/04/somaliland-and-puntland-should-rescind-order-of-blockage-of-two-independent-news-websites/>

¹¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/100001807801317/videos/2867373969999502/>

¹¹⁷ <https://puntlandtimes.ca/2019/08/update-shaqaalaha-wasaaradda-warfaafinta-puntland-oo-shaqadooda-ku-laabtay-wasiir-kuxigeenka-oo-qabsaday-48-saac/>

¹¹⁸ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/10/somaliland-information-ministry-imposes-restrictive-editorial-censorship-on-tv-stations/>

¹¹⁹ <https://sjsyndicate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Somaliland-Information-Ministry-imposes-restrictive-editorial-censorship-on-TV-stations.pdf>

On September 22, 2019: Puntland minister of information in Garowe, Ali Hassan Ahmed (Sabarey) imposed oppressive measures against the independent media and journalists by instructing journalists and media houses in Puntland to register before October 15, 2019¹²⁰ under which, according to the minister, all journalists were to be issued with Ministry of Information Identification Cards (ID)¹²¹. The restrictive order was not, however, implemented following local journalists and unions' outcry.

JOURNALISTS FORCED INTO EXILE

12 Journalists were forced to flee the country in fear for their lives in 2019.

Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) documented more than 12 journalists¹²² who have been forced into exile in the last 12 months, fearing imprisonment or death at the hands of al-Shabaab or from officials of Somali government and regional states due to their work as journalists.

With a deteriorating freedom of the press, use of restrictive laws and criminalizing critical reporting, Somalia, where government crackdown on independent media and journalists scaled up during 2019, is on the top of the list of places journalists fled during the year followed by Jubbaland, Mogadishu and Puntland.

All the journalists told SJS that after reporting critical news stories or posting news stories deemed critical on social media platforms, they were threatened with death or imprisonment either directly from al-Shabaab or by members of the state intelligence, police officers and senior state officials in their respective regions leaving them with only one option: to flee their homes. For instance: two journalists who fled Puntland told SJS that they have been personally threatened with imprisonment by a senior Puntland official after they wrote critically about Puntland president¹²³.

Two of three other journalists who fled Jubbaland in 2019 also reported receiving death threats from Jubbaland intelligence due to the journalists' impartial news reporting about the 2019 Jubbaland elections while the third journalist said he fled the country after receiving death threats due to his contribution to a report about allegations of rape committed by members of the army¹²⁴. Majority of the journalists have fled to the neighboring countries and Turkey.

A dozen of journalists have, in the meantime, said they resorted to self-censorship or even decided to quit the profession due to unbearable threats they received from state agents including the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA).

¹²⁰ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/09/25/somalia-puntland-minister-of-information-employs-oppressive-measures-threatens-journalists/>

¹²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/1347891271958315/posts/2542740079140089/>

¹²² SJS interviews with the exiled journalists in December 25 and 26, 2019.

¹²³ SJS interviews with two journalists (names withheld for fear of safety) who fled Puntland between August and November 2019.

¹²⁴ SJS interviews with the journalists (names withheld for fear of safety) who went into exile after fleeing their homes in Kismayo.

RESTRICTIVE MEDIA LAW

The Somalia government has imposed a new draconian media bill that, if endorsed, will be the most repressive media bill in Somalia's history. Using a litany of sweeping terminology and purposely vague phrases, the media bill¹²⁵ would provide authorities unprecedented powers to arbitrarily target journalists for any reporting deemed critical of the government.

Somalia parliament approved the media law on July 2019 with 139 out of 140 voting in favor of the law. However, there have not been major changes made during the review time. Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) engaged Somalia's Upper house and sent legal comments to be considered by the parliament. It is still too early to determine whether this consultation will help in amend the bill.

ONLINE HARRASMENT

Online expression is further curbed after state actors repeatedly targeted journalists for any critical personal social media posts. In at least four cases, authorities detained and questioned journalists for critical commentary published on their personal Facebook pages. In mid June, 16 journalists said their Facebook sites had been hacked and closed. In all cases, the incidents took place soon after the journalists commented on security issues within the country, the journalists told SJS, suspecting state authorities behind the closures.

Online Harassment has been of major concern for the journalists working in Somalia in 2019, especially targeted attacks aimed to threaten journalists' fair reporting. Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) documented 15 cases of journalists who have become subject to online harassment and intimidation in the last six months of this year¹²⁶. SJS is extremely worried that female reporters covering local or national politics are particularly vulnerable to these online threats and harassment and had already had a chilling effect on them.

SJS is also worried that many of the local journalists faced by these online threats and harassment have no idea of how to mitigate and remain safer online¹²⁷. Such attacks could compromise journalists' independent reporting and their safety.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) would like to thank our member journalists for their continued support and fundraisings during the year. We would not be as successful as it has been without you. We are so grateful to you all.

We thank our local and international friends in press freedom for standing with us in defending Somali journalists, training and mentoring journalists and advocating for freedom of the press.

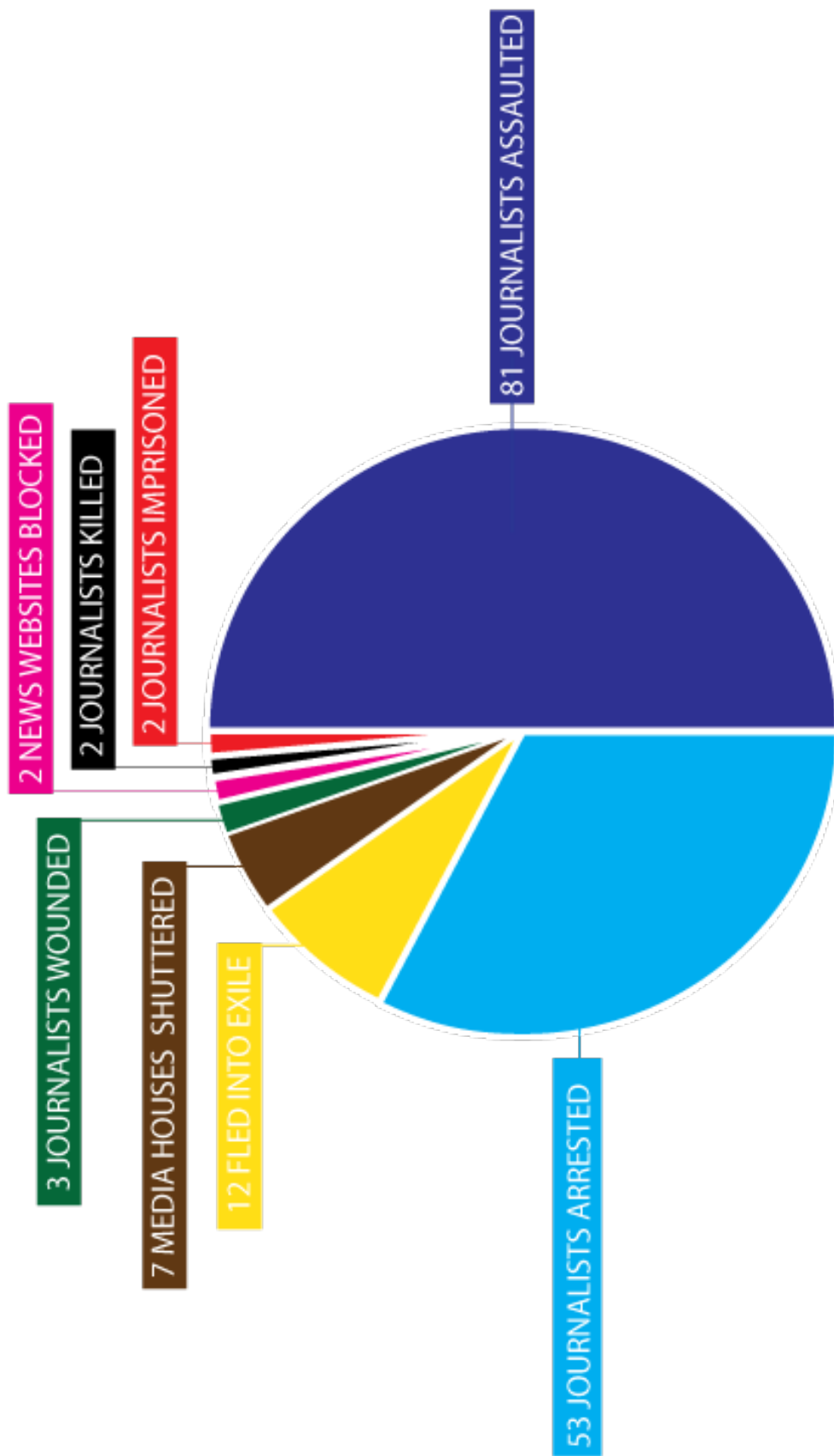
Special thanks to Somali Digital Media Academy (SODMA), Media Legal Defense Initiative (MLDI), the Foreign Correspondents' Association of East Africa (FCAEA), International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), Somali National University, Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and International Press Institute (IPI). We look forward to continued success through this collaboration!

¹²⁵ https://sjsyndicate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/TALO-JEEDIN_XEERKA_SAXAAFADDA_AQALKA-SARE_NOV2019.pdf

¹²⁶ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/10/25/rising-online-threats-harassment-against-journalists-raise-safety-concerns-in-somalia/>

¹²⁷ <https://sjsyndicate.org/2019/10/25/rising-online-threats-harassment-against-journalists-raise-safety-concerns-in-somalia/>

INFOGRAPHIC : SOMALI PRESS FREEDOM IN SOMALIA



ABOUT SJS

Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) is an independent journalists' trade union established in May 2019 by professional Somali journalists to defend the rights of the working journalists and promote press freedom.

Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS) provides legal aid to journalists whose journalism work results in court cases and in need of legal defense through professional lawyers. SJS's goal is to create a platform for the journalists to interact and communicate by means of networking and provide daily updates.

SJS also aims to address the growing needs of the media professionals by building their capacity through trainings, seminars or workshops, with the aim to strengthen the skills and the capacity of the journalists to produce quality journalism.

For more information, please contact our secretariat:

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