

EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS NETWORK

Public Statement

EHAHRD-Net Index: SOMA 009 /005/2008 (Public)

04th March 2008

KAMPALA: EHAHRD-Net CONDEMNS THE MOST RECENT ATTACKS ON THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN SOMALIA

EHAHRD-Net is shocked by the recent attacks by the armed forces of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) on Radio Shabelle and Radio Simba that took place on 2nd March 2008.

The forces not only forcefully entered the offices of both radio stations, confiscated crucial recording equipment, forced the stations off the air but they reportedly also attacked one journalist in the Simba news studios and detained Muqtar Mohamed Hirabe, the Director of Radio Shabelle. The forces also attempted though unsuccessfully, to force Radio HornAfrik off air.

“This most recent in a series of systematic attacks on the media and on freedom of expression in Somalia is very disconcerting and must stop immediately. The independent media plays a crucial part in shedding light on the violations that have been committed by the different actors in this conflict. Their voices and the information they provide can play an essential part in encouraging the international community to pay attention to these violations. These key human rights defenders must no longer be prevented from pursuing their legitimate work. Furthermore, the TFG authorities must respect freedom of the press without fail if they are to be seen to be interested in establishing democratic governance in war-torn Somalia,” says Hassan Shire Sheikh, Chairperson EHAHRD/Net.

Radio Simba, Radio Banadir, HornAfrik and Shabelle are independent media outlets that have been the most affected by the recent crack-down on the media. The deliberate attacks on the media and on freedom of expression have seen at least 9 journalists killed in Somalia in 2007, scores of others injured, while at least 50 have fled Mogadishu in the past four months and have been forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries, or even further a field, at times without any support. Journalists who decide to remain within Somalia are frequently intimidated and receive death threats – leaving many with no alternative option but to go into hiding within Somalia or exercise self-censorship.

EHAHRD-Net appeals to the TFG authorities:

- To immediately halt its attacks on these two important independent media sources, and others;

- To unconditionally and immediately release Muqtar Mohamed Hirabe and to allow him and his fellow colleagues at Radio Shabelle and Radio Simba to pursue their work freely notably by restoring or replacing the equipment that has been destroyed;
- To investigate in an impartial manner these attacks and to ensure that those responsible for these flagrant violations of freedom of expression are not accorded impunity;

EHAHRD-Net further appeals to the insurgents, the Ethiopian forces and the TFG:

- To respect media freedom without fail. All warring factions must desist from any further attacks on journalists as a media black-out would constitute a further compromise of the rights of the Somali people;

Finally EHAHRD-Net calls upon the UN, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and all other concerned international humanitarian bodies:

- To use their relevant mandates to ensure that Somali authorities desist from the ill-treatment of journalists; and that those already in exile receive adequate support not only to offer them a lease to life, but to enable them to continue monitoring the situation back home.

All Network members are encouraged to write to the Somali authorities furthering this appeal.

Send appeals to:

The Somali Ambassador in Kenya, asking for them to be forwarded to Somalia's President, Col. Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed: TFG Ambassador, Mohamed Ali Nur,
P.O. Box 623-00606
Jabavu Road, Hurlingham
Nairobi, Kenya
Email: mali@somaliembassy.co.ke
Salutation: Dear Sir

For further information, please contact

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