



World Press Freedom Day Celebration in Somaliland, Report.



May 4, 2024

1. Introduction.

The Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA) orchestrated a commemorative event on May 4, 2024, in observance of World Press Freedom Day. The gathering convened key stakeholders from government, opposition parties, media professionals, Civil service organizations and academia to deliberate on the current status of press freedom in Somaliland and propose pathways for enhancement. World Press Freedom Day, observed annually on May 3rd, stands as a pivotal testament to the indispensable role of a liberated and impartial press. It is a day dedicated to acknowledging the significance of journalists as watchdogs, holding governments and institutions accountable. World Press Freedom Day underscores the vital role journalists play in informing the public and safeguarding a robust democracy. It sheds light on the perils they confront, including violence, harassment, and arbitrary detention, advocating for their safety and the ability to work without fear of reprisal. A free press is the bedrock of a democratic society, facilitating the unrestricted flow of information, diverse viewpoints, and critical analysis. World Press Freedom Day underscores the imperative for media outlets to operate independently, devoid of government control or undue influence. This autonomy fosters transparency, empowers citizens to make informed decisions, and bolsters public participation in governance. The event served as a platform for stakeholders to engage in discussions aimed at fortifying press freedom in Somaliland and fortifying the democratic framework. The collaborative discourse among the participants underscored the urgency of addressing media legal gaps, enhancing election monitoring, and bolstering the capacity of journalists to ensure a fair and transparent electoral process. The perspectives and commitments articulated during the event, coupled with the identified challenges and proposed recommendations, underscore the critical importance of addressing media freedom concerns and ensuring a transparent and inclusive media law.

During the event, the participants highlighted several issues that this year's World Press Freedom Day, held on May 3rd, 2024, focused on the theme "A Press for the Planet: Journalism in the Face of the Environmental Crisis." Somaliland media can have contributed:

- **Raising Awareness:**

- Somaliland media outlets keen to follow in covered environmental challenges facing the Somaliland, such as drought, desertification, and climate change.
- Investigative journalists want to report environmental damage caused by human activities like deforestation or pollution.
- **Promoting Solutions:**
 - Media interest in showcased local efforts to address environmental issues, such as tree planting programs or sustainable resource management practices.
 - Organize discussions and interviews with environmental experts or policymakers to be aired to encourage public awareness and discussion on solutions.
- **Advocacy and Solidarity:**
 - Somaliland journalists' unions or individual journalists want to be issued statements calling for increased government commitment to environmental protection and press freedom.
 - Somaliland media outlets could have participated in online campaigns using the #World Press Freedom Day hashtag to raise awareness about environmental issues and the role of a free press.

But during the event ceremony, participants were stressed that Somaliland media may face limitations in covering environmental issues due to lack of specialized training or resources for investigative journalism.

Despite these challenges, Somaliland media likely played a significant role in raising awareness about environmental issues.

2. Stakeholder Perspectives



During the World Press Freedom Day event stakeholders expressed their perspectives and commitments:

- Somaliland's current media law is outdated and fails to adequately address the needs of the evolving media landscape. This has been a growing concern for some time. While an amended media bill has been in development for a significant period, it remains stalled. Participants in the discussions emphasized the urgent need for swift passage of this bill. Enacting an updated law that aligns with international standards is crucial, especially in the lead-up to national elections. A robust legal framework is essential to ensure a safe and free media environment where journalists can operate independently and hold powerful institutions accountable. The completion of this amendment is critical for ensuring media freedom and safeguarding the rights of journalists.

- Agreed upon to take concrete steps to respect, protect, and promote the rights to freedom of expression, access to information, and media freedom. This includes ensuring that journalists and media practitioners can carry out their work freely, without intimidation and harassment, especially during the election period
- Suggested to provide training programs should be implemented to enhance the capacity of journalists, particularly in ethical conduct and professional reporting. This includes expanding regional opportunities for journalists, as well as continuous support and training for media practitioners to contribute positively to the political debate
- Noted the important of media can participate election Monitoring in the context of the upcoming presidential election and political/associations in Somaliland, media election monitoring and capacity building are crucial for ensuring a transparent and inclusive electoral process, as well as other mechanisms such as review and development election media code of conduct.
- All participants showed their concerns of recurrent Journalists are confronting arbitrary arrests, leading to an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship. This hinders their ability to report freely and independently, impacting the overall media environment, in line of this, was agreed to strengthen open dialogues between media and law enforcement agencies to improve the relationship between them and reduce stigma.
- While the journalists explained about obtaining crucial information from government institutions is proving to be challenging, impeding journalists' capacity to provide comprehensive and accurate information to the public. So that, agreed upon to hold a high level meeting between media and relevant stakeholders to discuss the challenges and will come up enhancement of these concerns.
- There is a pressing need for comprehensive training programs to enhance the capacity of journalists, particularly in ethical conduct and professional reporting. This is essential for elevating the standards of journalism in Somaliland.
- Some journalists may engage in unethical reporting practices, which can undermine the credibility of the media and contribute to the proliferation of misinformation, posing a challenge to the integrity of journalistic endeavors. Based on that, suggested to continue support to SOLJA to transfer capacity building of Somaliland journalists
- Limited Understanding and Stigma Between Police and Journalists: Addressing the limited understanding and stigma between police and journalists emerged as a critical imperative. Fostering a more

collaborative and respectful relationship between the two entities is essential for ensuring a conducive working environment for journalists.

The identified challenges underscore the multifaceted nature of the obstacles facing the media landscape in Somaliland. Addressing these challenges is integral to ensuring a robust, free, and independent press that plays a pivotal role in informing the public and upholding democratic values. The perspectives and insights shared during the event, coupled with the identified challenges, provide a comprehensive understanding of the current situation of the media landscape in Somaliland and the imperative for targeted interventions to address these challenges.

Agreed Upon Actions

During the World Press Freedom Day event, it was agreed to conduct a high-level meeting with the Ministry of Interior, Police Commissioner, Attorney General, Human Rights Commission, and other relevant stakeholders to address the current legal gaps for Somaliland journalists. The meeting aimed to evaluate the amendment of the media bill and accelerate its completion as soon as possible. Key actions agreed upon include:

- Expediting the amendment of the media law through inclusive consultations.
- Ministry of interior and minister of information and culture called an urgent holding a high-level meeting to consultative on media legal gaps and census building the amendment of media bill and joint endorsement.
- Development of tools to monitor election coverage by the media and support effective mechanisms to reduce negative impacts.
- Review of the media election code of conduct to ensure fair and unbiased coverage of the elections.
- Training programs targeting journalists across all regions to ensure comprehensive and ethical election coverage.

3. Conclusion.

This report provides a framework for summarizing the key points of the World Press Freedom Day event in Somaliland was addressed includes compared to some of the neighboring countries, Somaliland has a freer media environment. There's no official censorship, a vibrant private media sector exists alongside state-controlled outlets, while laws weak and ineffective to protect journalists, especially regarding libel suits against critical reporting and journalists, particularly those working for critical outlets, face harassment, including arrest, violence, and equipment confiscation, due to the fear of

reprisals, some journalists may practice self-censorship, avoiding sensitive topics



Overall, the situation for journalists in Somaliland is precarious. There have been recent attacks and a climate of intimidation. However, World Press Freedom Day serves as a crucial platform for fostering a more robust and independent media environment in Somaliland, ultimately leading to a stronger democracy and a more informed citizenry. The efforts to address the challenges faced by journalists in Somaliland, particularly in the context of the upcoming election, are crucial for ensuring a free and fair media environment. The agreed-upon actions and the collaborative approach taken to demonstrate a commitment to positive change and progress in the Somaliland media legal framework.