

Somaliland: 25 journos arrested, four held, TV station closed

Reporters Without Borders is worried by events of the past week affecting the media in the breakaway northwestern territory of Somaliland, in which a total of 25 journalists were arrested and a television station, HornCable TV, was closed in Hargeisa.

The organisation accuses authorities of trying to intimidate the media and calls for the release of four journalists still being held illegally.

"This wave of arrests of journalists is without precedent in Somaliland," Reporters Without Borders said. "We are disturbed by this crackdown and by the president's readiness to brand a media as a 'nation destructor.' This will further intimidate journalists who already have to cope with tough conditions in this region of Somalia. We urge the authorities to free the four journalists still being held and to reopen HornCable TV without delay."

Employees protest against closure

When HornCable TV employees demonstrated outside the presidential palace in Hargeisa on Sunday, 15 January 2012, in protest against the station's closure, they were attacked and beaten by members of the Somaliland Special Protection Unit and eight of them were arrested. The eight detainees, all journalists, were Nimco Sabriye, Hamsa Ali Bulbul, Mohamed Gurashe, Abdirahman Sheik Yunes, Ayan Diriye, Nimo' Diriye, Hodan Ali Ajabi and Safiya Nuh Sheikh.

13 other journalists from various media who went to help their detained colleagues were then also arrested. HornCable TV's owner was summoned to the president's office later on Sunday and interrogated. The detained journalists, who included six women, were taken to police headquarters in Hargeisa and were finally released yesterday, on interior minister Mohamed Nour Arale's orders, after being held for more than 24 hours.

No warrant to close the station

HornCable TV was closed on 14 January when around 100 policemen arrived in seven armoured vehicles, ordered all the staff to leave and sealed the doors. The transmitter was disconnected soon afterwards. The officer in charge of the raid, Mohamed Du'alle, admitted he did not have a warrant but said he was acting on orders from superiors. Mohamed Abdi Sheik, HornCable TV's East Africa director, was briefly detained during the operation.

In an address to parliament earlier the same day, Somaliland president Ahmed Mohamed Siilaanyon described HornCable TV as a "nation destructor" and accused it of broadcasting anti-government propaganda.

The government's anger was reportedly aroused by the station's coverage of a tribal meeting in Taleh district of Sool region, in which representatives of various tribes announced the creation of an autonomous administration in the region. The interior minister confirmed that this was the reason, and said the station's licence had been withdrawn for "anti-Somaliland propaganda."

Journalists arrested

The four journalists who are still detained were arrested in a series of incidents from 8 to 11 January.

Ali Ismail Aare, a reporter for the weekly *Waheen*, was arrested on 11 January for taking photos of a service station and a building belonging to Somaliland vice-president Abdirahman Abdilahi. Mohamed Omar Sheikh, a reporter for the weekly *Saxafi*, was arrested the same day for writing articles that were deemed likely to create conflict in the Awdal region.

Abdqani Hassan Farah, a Universal TV reporter in Las Anod district of Sool region, was arrested with two colleagues from HornCable TV and Somaliland TV on 9 January. The other two were freed after a few hours but Farah is still being held on a charge of "exaggerating reports of a meeting that created instability in the Sool, Sanag and Eyn regions." It was a meeting of the Taleh tribes the day before. His arrest was reportedly arranged by Sool's governor on the orders of Somaliland information minister Ahmed Abdi Habsade.

On 9 January, Somaliland police also prevented four journalists from attending the laying of fibre-optic cable by SomCable Ltd that will enable the territory to be connected with the outside world via Djibouti. It has been the source of a great deal of controversy as it was authorised by the previous government and rejected by the new one.

Yusuf Abdi Ali, a reporter better known as Indho Quruh who works for London-based Royal TV, was arrested without a warrant in the Borame district of the city of Awdal on 8 January after being accused by a local NGO, Africa Youth Development Association, of making false allegations of corruption and management problems in local development projects. He is still being held in the Borame district police station. He has not been charged and has not been able to see a lawyer.

Source: allAfrica.com.