



Report

Women's press
freedom in Somalia.





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Acknowledgement

The Somali Media Women Association (“SOMWA”) is grateful to its members in all regions and news media houses for their contribution in monitoring and verifying all cases we documented and shared in this report and the other cases that we couldn’t divulge for confidentiality.

This report

Compared to 2023, the year 2024 has seen the worst violations against women journalists. This report functions as a tool for advocating for the safety and security of female journalists, as well as a national review mechanism that examines documented cases of violations of media freedom and sexual and gender-based violence against these journalists while they serve the country. This report also seeks to provide recommendations for improving the working situation and safeguarding women journalists.

This report is available for use by the general public. As long as you cite the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) as a source, you can reprint it without restriction.



About SOMWA


The Somali Media Women's Association (SOMWA) is a non-governmental organisation that advocates for the rights and empowerment of women in the media industry in Somalia. Founded with the aim of increasing women's participation and representation in the media, SOMWA addresses the various challenges that female journalists face, including gender-based discrimination, harassment, and limited access to leadership positions.


The organisation plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality in the Somali media landscape by supporting female journalists, advocating for their rights, and providing training and mentoring.

Given the challenging environment in Somalia, where women have traditionally faced marginalisation in political spaces, SOMWA has taken on the role of enhancing the capacity of women politicians in Somalia through various initiatives with the aim of more political representation and promoting visibility in political spaces.

SOMWA has a wonderful partnership with the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and is a member of the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC) and Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD).

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Executive summary

In Somalia, female journalists face a unique set of challenges, including gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment, both from within the media industry and from the wider societal context, which remains deeply patriarchal. The working conditions for Somali female journalists are fraught with threats that go beyond the dangers typically faced by their male counterparts.

In a population where women make up more than half of the population, the representation of female journalists in the Somali media remains below 30%. The unprecedented attacks faced by Somali women journalists between November 2023 and November 2024 send an alarming message.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against female journalists is a significant issue in Somalia, severely impacting media freedom and decreasing the number of women journalists in the media industry. When the number of women journalists declines, society not only loses the voice of more than half of the population, but it also loses a complete perspective. Additionally, issues such as early child marriage, women's participation at all levels, female genital mutilation/circumcision, and gender-based violence are often overlooked.

The Somali Media Women Association documented 11 cases of assassination, physical attack, detention, restriction, sexual violence, online bullying, and harassment against female journalists that happened between November 2023 and November 2024. These attacks severely impact the physical and mental health of female journalists, as well as their professional growth and career advancement, thereby chilling media freedom and challenging the mission of the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA), which is to empower, encourage, and increase the number of women in newsrooms.

Somalia's patriotic nature and victim shaming contribute to SOMWA's belief that SGBV cases receive more than just attention and documentation. Fear and stigma deter female journalists from reporting cases, leading to underreporting, and those who do tend to be reluctant to go public.

However, this report features four female journalists who are willing to share their names and their experiences. However, we are unable to reveal the identities of the other six SGBV survivors due to their request for confidentiality, which SOMWA respects for ethical reasons but encourages survivors to come forward and seek help and justice.

Some of these attacks stem from power abuse, control, intimidation, and sexual exploitation, often motivated by the lack of a robust justice system that protects female journalists and women in general. These attacks primarily undermine the role of women journalists in society, sometimes motivated by personal vendettas.

Apart from online bullying, the Somali police were the primary perpetrators of these attacks, which affected the work of journalists, undermined media freedom, and encouraged the SGBV. The majority of the incidents took place in Mogadishu, which is the capital city, the primary hub of Somali affairs, and the location of most major media outlets. This makes it one of the most dangerous places for journalists to work, particularly female journalists. Among other regions was Puntland.

Female journalists continue to face low pay compared to their male colleagues and unpaid maternity leave in most news media organisations, leading many of them to leave their beloved jobs after starting a family. The grave issue of sexual gender-based violence in the media often goes unnoticed, yet it significantly hinders the advancement of current female journalists and discourages aspiring ones, as evidenced by cases documented by SOMWA where aspiring female journalists have left the industry before their careers have even begun to grow.



These sexualised attacks against female journalists not only affect their journalistic careers but also have an impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Some of these journalists have experienced anxiety and depression, and the stigmatisation of mental health issues negatively impacts their mental health.

These attacks also undermine the freedom of the media, instill constant fear, and reduce their productivity and visibility within the media industry.

Increased gendered online harassment negatively affects Somali female journalists. The level of violence, threats, and intimidation directed at female journalists took a toll on their mental health and also affected their work and career growth. One in three Somali women journalists has experienced some form of online attack, rendering the already under-represented industry devoid of female representation.

Digital illiteracy in the country exacerbates an already patriarchal society that struggles to allow women to hold big roles. In order to establish a more secure digital platform for women journalists, SOMWA partnered with Meta through the Somali civil society and Meta Working Group.

To promote democracy in the country and advocate for human rights, with the support of the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), we provided trainings and workshops for hundreds of Somali female journalists and politicians. To enhance inclusivity, address gender-based violence against women, and keep women's rights at the forefront of public discourse, SOMWA created a platform for various discussions with panellists and participants from minority and marginalised groups. SOMWA intends to persist in advocating for the eradication of SGBV in the media and beyond, bolstering the skills of female journalists, and advocating for women's rights across all spheres.



Maryan Seylac

Executive Director of Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA)

November 02, 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Seylac', written over a horizontal line.

Incidents and attacks

On October 19, 2024. A former award-winning Somali Swedish journalist, [Amuun Abdulaahi](#), was murdered in her farmhouse in the town of Afgoye, northwest of Mogadishu, the capital city.

Our sources confirmed that two masked men, whose motive is still unknown, shot the 49-year-old in the head.

Amuun gained notoriety for her investigative report on how Al Shabaab recruits young Somalis from Sweden's Rinkby; her report sparked backlash in her community, leading to accusations of betrayal and selling her community and religion to the Swedish government.

Amuun returned back to Somalia, where she started community development by running an agriculture project to empower women for self-sufficiency.



Amuun Abdulaahi

On March 3, 2022. Police officers brutally assaulted Suweys Jama Mohamud, a prominent female journalist for Puntland TV, in Puntland State in North-eastern Somalia, and subsequently arrested her. Not only they detained and assaulted her but also falsely accused her of drunk driving, with the intention of ruining her reputation.

In her pursuit of justice, Suweys filed a complaint against the police for brutality. She took her case to the regional police command, the regional criminal investigation service (CID), and the regional armed



Suweys Jama Mohamud

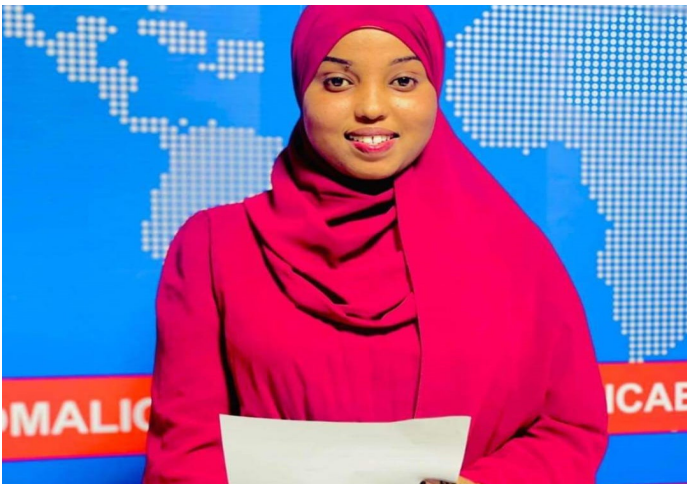
On August 13, 2024. A police car collided with Hibo Mohamed Mohamud, a female reporter for the online news channel BTN TV, causing her to sustain a leg injury.

She was covering street protests staged by tuk-tuk taxi (Bajaaj) drivers in Mogadishu, who were protesting increased taxes and demands for extortion.

Hibo underwent minor surgery on her leg after sustaining an injury, but the police did not intervene, leaving her still waiting for justice.



Hibo Mohamed Mohamud



Nimco Cardoof

On 19 August 2024. Nimo Muhidin, a reporter for Somali Cable TV, and Safa Osman, who works for Dalsan TV, were among the journalists covering waves of demonstrations that resulted in the introduction of new taxation in the country for the first time since the collapse of the Siyad Barre regime.

The police intimidated both Nimo Muhidin and Safa Osman. They placed Bistol on Nimo's head, forcing her to stop recording, and threatened to beat Safa Osman if she didn't leave.



Safa Osman

Early this year, Cardoof was also arrested and assaulted by Somali police in the Benadir region. She told SOMWA that the police officer's slap caused her face to swell while she was taking photos of a burnt place, preventing her from going to work.

Expressing her experience during the press release, Amina told SOMWA that it left a mark on her, and she hesitates to ask questions in press conferences, scared of embarrassment.

On 16 September 2024. Amina Ibrahim, a female reporter of Arlaadi Media, which broadcasts in Maay language, has been discriminated against in a press conference held by the foreign minister Ahmed Moalim Fiqi in Mogadishu, the capital. Mohamed Abdi Waare, the Deputy Executive Secretary of IGAD, interrupted and refused reporter Amina's question to minister Fiqi due to her language and her pressing question about the tension between the Somali federal government and [federal member states](#). However, minister Fiqi gave Amina another chance to finish her question.

Amina shared her experience during the press release with SOMWA, stating that it left a lasting impression on her. She now hesitates to ask questions during press conferences, fearing embarrassment and experiencing feelings of hate and discrimination.



Amina Ibrahim



International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists

On this occasion of November 2nd, the International Day to End Impunity Crimes Against Journalists, the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) expresses its concern about the increasing violence against Somali female journalists. The violence against Somali female journalists encompasses physical attacks, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and online gendered attacks, all of which go unnoticed and unaddressed by stakeholders such as media stations they work for, authorities, and digital companies.

Freedom of expression and ideas is guaranteed by the transitional federal charter of the Somali government as depicted in Article 20 Sections 1 and 2, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the international treaties as well as the regional and global conventions in which Somalia is a member. However, Somalia currently faces severe restrictions on its freedom of expression and media freedom.

This year's theme for IDEI 2024 is "Safety of Journalists in Crises and Emergencies," which is an ideal theme for Somali journalists who often face physical attacks, detention, confiscation of equipment, or denial of access to reporting sites due to the country's insecurity. These incidents can result in fatalities or leave them with long-term injuries that impact their work.

We call on the authorities and others to confront instances of sexual and gender-based violence, conduct thorough investigations into crimes against female journalists, and hold those responsible accountable.

Recommendation


- Hold the authorities, specifically the federal and members of state law enforcement, especially the police, accountable for their human rights violations, which encompass intimidation, physical assaults, and psychological manipulation of female journalists.
- Putting an end to crimes of impunity against journalists, particularly those who are women and bear a double burden.
- Enhancing the safety and security of digital platforms for female journalists with the support of tech companies and the government.
- Reviewing the penal code to remove provisions that restrict media freedom and criminalise journalists
- Urging all news organisations to put in place measures that protect female journalists.
- The promotion of the sexual offensive bill aligns with the principles of Islamic Sharia, ensuring the protection and safety of women journalists in the communities they serve.
- There should be no gender discrimination against female journalists because of their gender or the language they speak. We should address it, as it is a fundamental constitutional right.
- All media companies or news organisations should prioritise equal opportunities and payments to promote diversity in the media industry, recognising it as a fundamental human right and a constitutional right in Somalia.
- Closing the gender gap in Somali media by fostering more inclusive environments, offering support systems to female journalists, and implementing policies and practices that foster gender equality within the industry and beyond.



SOMALI MEDIA WOMEN ASSOCIATION

Women Empowering

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