







ANNUAL REPORT

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2024



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Letter From the Leadership

Dear Supporters and Partners,

As we close the year 2024, it is with great pride and gratitude that we reflect on the progress Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) has made in our mission to empower women journalists and advocate for gender equality, media freedom, and inclusive governance in Somalia. This year has been marked by significant strides in our programs, partnerships, and advocacy efforts, all aimed at creating a more informed, democratic, and equal society.

Our work continued to center on equipping journalists, particularly women, with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate Somalia's challenging media landscape. We provided training on critical safety measures, such as handling threats from crossfires, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), landmines, and suicide bombers. These initiatives were made possible thanks to the support of partners like the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), whose collaboration remains vital to the realization of our goals.

At SOMWA, we firmly believe that free speech is fundamental to democracy, transparency, and accountability. This conviction drives our work as we continue to advocate for media freedom in Somalia, a critical pillar for the country's democratic development. Our unwavering commitment to fostering an environment where free expression can thrive remains at the core of all our initiatives.

In addition to supporting the media, we intensified our advocacy for gender equality within Somalia's political sphere. This year, we facilitated open discussion with diverse participants, including women, women living with disabilities, local authorities, youth, minority groups, and female Members of Parliament. These discussions are instrumental in advancing the 30% women's quota and challenging the systemic barriers that limit women's political participation.

Understanding the importance of digital platforms in modern discourse, we also focused on social media training. We conducted a three-day workshop in Hudur for 25 current and aspiring female politicians, empowering them with the skills to communicate effectively with their constituents and advocate for gender-sensitive policies. This initiative, like others, plays a crucial role in promoting an inclusive governance model that incorporates diverse voices.

The topic of direct elections also remained at the forefront of our advocacy efforts. SOMWA continued to call for more transparent, inclusive, and participatory electoral processes. We hosted a one-day public discussion on direct suffrage in Hudur, Bakool, to create a space for constructive dialogue about this essential issue in Somalia's political future.

As part of our ongoing commitment to democratic engagement, we worked to enhance the capacity of journalists to moderate debates and public forums. This ensures that the voices of all Somalis are heard and that electoral processes remain fair and representative.

Throughout 2024, we also marked several important international observances, including World Radio Day, International Democracy Day, World News Day, International Women's Day, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and International Human Rights Day. These milestones remind us of the enduring relevance of our work and the values that guide us.

Looking forward, SOMWA remains steadfast in its commitment to empowering women, promoting media freedom, and fostering inclusive governance. We will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that every Somali has the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of our nation's future.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission.

Sincerely,



Maryan Seylac
Executive Director, SOMWA



Aknowledgement

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all those who participated in our programs, such as journalists, global partners, donors, political leaders, and local communities.

We also thank all those who have continued to contribute to the success of our work, like UN-TMIS known before (UNSOM), International Women Media Foundation (IWMF), Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Global Democracy Coalition (GDC), and strategic partners like the government. In an aspiration to be a frontline actor in supporting women journalists and empowering journalistic professionalism, women's leadership, good governance, democracy, gender equality, and the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) and people's rights in Somalia, we continue to have faith that the operational context will improve in the period ahead.



Year in Review: Major Achievements & Impact

The year 2024 has been a defining period for the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA). As we reflect on our achievements, we are proud to highlight the key accomplishments that have had a significant impact on the Somali media landscape, particularly in empowering women journalists and advocating for gender equality, media freedom, and inclusive governance.

Below are the highlights of our key activities and achievements:

Safety training for female journalists.

The Somali Women Media Association (SOMWA), in partnership with the International Women Media Foundation (IWMF), recently conducted a groundbreaking identity-informed newsroom safety training for 40 female Somali journalists from all federal states of Somalia on December 18, 2024. This initiative reflects SOMWA's steadfast commitment to enhancing the safety and professional development of female journalists in Somalia. The training was designed to equip participants with essential skills and knowledge to navigate the high-risk environments in which they operate, while also promoting the adoption of safety policies and industry best practices. The training, led by experienced security staff, covered important aspects of physical safety and situational awareness. It covered safe ways to move through checkpoints, how to deal with threats like crossfire, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), landmines, and suicide bombers, and how to make safety policies that are in line with global standards.

Somalia remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, with female journalists facing two challenges: gender-based discrimination and the inherent risks of operating in conflict zones. Participants described the training as timely and highly practical, emphasising its relevance to their daily jobs. In her closing remarks, SOMWA's Executive Director, Ms. Maryan Seylac, commended the participants for their courage and dedication, stating, "Their commitment to journalism in such a challenging environment is truly inspiring. It is our collective responsibility to ensure they have the tools and knowledge necessary to stay safe while continuing their essential work." This training marks a significant milestone in SOMWA's efforts to support female journalists and underscores the importance of collaborative initiatives in promoting safety and professional growth in high-risk environments.

Empowering Women in Politics Through Communication and Social Media Skills

Writing for True Anthem in an article titled, 'Why social media skills for journalists matter,' Allie Gravitt has observed as follows: "Journalism and social media have become inextricably linked. From trolling Twitter (X) for breaking information to tracking down sources and everything in between, using social media is an important part of the journalism landscape.

The truth is that social media skills for journalists are no longer negotiable: they are a must." Based on this realisation, SOMWA continues to teach Somali journalists communication and social media skills. During 2024, we sustained this momentum of empowering women in politics through communication and social media skills; in this regard, SOMWA held a three-day workshop (5th to 7th May, 2024) in Hudur-Bakool in Somalia for twenty-five current and aspiring female politicians.

This initiative was aimed at connecting female politicians with their audience during election times and encouraging them to vote, become candidates, and engage as electoral staff. The workshop highlighted that social media provides unprecedented opportunities for female politicians, and they should engage in meaningful dialogue through two-way interaction and seize these opportunities in order for them to be better candidates

SOMWA argues that investing in the capacity building of women leaders contributes to the advancement of democracy, gender equality, and inclusive governance in Somalia.

The deputy district commissioner, Ali Husein, and deputy governor, Abdulahi Mohamed Nur Snake, graciously closed the event.



Improving Journalists' Capacity for Debate Moderation and Conducting a Public Forum During and After Elections



SOMWA was at the forefront again in 2024, working to improve journalists' capacity for debate moderation and conducting a public forum during and after an election. In furtherance of this mandate, SOMWA conducted three days of training in Hudur, Bakool, and as a buildup from the prior years' trainings.

Twenty-five journalists were provided with the skills, knowledge, and techniques they needed to effectively moderate debates and manage public forums while emphasising fairness, clarity, accountability, and control. The training participants were drawn from state media, independent media, and freelancers, and the majority of them had never moderated large audience debates.

Journalists play a critical role in nurturing and furthering democracy, expanding civic space, and ensuring impartial and supportive coverage of political players when they participate in engaging debates and public forums. Opening the event, the deputy district commissioner, Ali Husein, highlighted that the Bakool region does not get a lot of opportunities in terms of journalist capacity building compared to other regions in Somalia and thanked SOMWA for providing this occasion. The training session endeavoured to accomplish some key objectives, as follows:

1. To build the media's capacity to fulfil the roles expected of them during elections, as well as to limit hate speech in the media.
2. To enhance the skills of the attending journalists to run constructive discussions about the importance of the participation of all eligible Somalis—men and women—in the elections as a way to exercise their democratic rights.
3. To enhance the skills of the attending journalists to strengthen advocacy for achieving a minimum of 30 percent women's quota, more women candidates, women voters, and women electoral staff.

Among the key topics covered during the training were the introduction to political debates, the role of the moderator and his or her team members in debate preparation, reviewing case studies, compiling a list for preparation during and after the debate, management of the debates, and preventing hate speech and misinformation. At the end of the training session, many participants reported feeling more confident in their ability to moderate debates and conduct public forums.



Discussion about the importance of direct election in Somalia

We are organising forums in other cities to broaden the conversation and gather more input from across the country as a means to entrench the conversation. It is gratifying to note that the Somali government has also taken the legislative initiative to transition the country to direct elections, that is, the one-person, one-vote dispensation.

The move is considered crucial for fostering durable political stability in Somalia. As Faduma Abdirahman Hudur chairwomen, quoted during the opening of the event, “To achieve a direct election and political stability and have a multiparty system is not easy and will take time, but the job starts now, and it is the responsibility of the current regime to fulfil their promises to ensure that the next election will be direct.”

Somalia’s president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, has also given his commitment to transitioning the country to this more progressive and open form of electoral practice. He promised last year to end the country’s complex clan-based indirect voting system, which has been in existence for over 50 years now. The country currently uses a complex clan-based electoral system, where a limited number of delegates from various clans select members of parliament. This formula limits the number of women entering politics.

In this context, SOMWA has been actively enhancing the debate and fostering a corresponding level of awareness and capacity. To this end, the organisation hosted a one-day public discussion on direct elections in Hudur, Bakool. The idea was to promote Somali women politicians’ visibility in public life and on social media.

The goal of the discussion was to get communities and civil society groups to have a productive conversation about how important it is for all eligible Somalis to vote in elections as a way to exercise their democratic rights and to push for a 30% women’s quota, more women candidates, more women voters, and more women working in the election process. The training covered a number of key topics.

It is also not lost on observers that the implementation of direct elections has raised concerns about its practicality, given the ongoing security challenges and the need for significant electoral infrastructure to ensure they are free, fair, and inclusive, especially in the Bakool region.





Promoting awareness and support for the minimum 30% women’s quota in Somali politics.



Promoting awareness and support for the minimum 30% women’s quota through Public discussion. Baidoa, Bay Region.

The direct election campaign continues as SOMWA engages the Somali people in discussions aimed at fostering a more inclusive and transparent electoral process. This is a step towards inculcating a culture of democracy in the country and putting the citizens—including women—at the centre of the governance process.

Somali women continue to face unique struggles in political participation, for example, the inability to access financial support to conduct campaigns, coupled with a lack of the requisite political networks and connections of their male counterparts. Indeed, the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General and Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group, Madam Amina.

J. Mohammed once aptly observed that “the political environment is not conducive to women, with many male leaders promoting male candidates. These challenges are compounded by violence and discrimination.²” In this endeavour and to raise awareness and support for the implementation of a minimum 30% women’s quota in Somali politics, SOMWA hosted a one-day open discussion in Baidoa, Bay Region, for 30 diverse participants. This was courtesy of the gracious support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), now (UNTMIS). Participants included women, women living with disabilities, local authorities, youth, minority people, and female MPs from both houses of Parliament. The event was inaugurated by the Hon. MP. Luul Ibraahim, a member of the parliamentary human rights committee and the women’s caucus. MP Luul is part of a dedicated group of female politicians touring Somali federal states, including Baidoa, to foster women’s political participation, with a particular focus on the minimum 30% women’s quota.

The forum, organised into two sessions, included a question-and-answer segment that allowed panellists to address pressing questions and provided a platform for participants to express their views and concerns. The key outcomes emanating from this initiative were as follows:

1. *The importance of addressing gender inequality and increasing women’s representation in leadership and decision-making processes as foundational rights;*
2. *e. The Somali media plays a crucial role in raising awareness about the women’s quota campaign and promoting accountability, amplifying women’s voices, challenging stereotypes, and portraying female leaders and activists positively.*
3. *The systemic barriers and denial women face in politics often result in them working in low-paying jobs without recognition, and their aspirations for higher positions often attract undue scrutiny and criticism.*

The discussion concluded with a call for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders to address the challenges faced by women, especially female politicians.



Commemorations and Events



The World Radio Day, 2024

SOMWA conducted diverse celebratory events during 2024 to mark important international days. These ranged from the World Radio Day to the International Women’s Day.

On the celebration to mark World Radio Day on Tuesday, 13th February 2024, we reflected on the vital role that Somali radios played in the coverage of the devastating El Nino rains in Somalia.

Journalists who converged for the event talked about their roles as guiders, informers, and educators. Additionally, they spoke about challenges and heart-breaking stories that they experienced during their coverage. The theme for World Radio Day 2024 was “Radio: A Century informing, entertaining, and educating.”

It is instructive to note that El Nino rains—also a phenomenon of the increasing debate on climate

change—brought devastating flash floods to Somalia, further exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation for vulnerable communities.

Bursting riverbanks in the Shabelle and Jubba rivers have destroyed bridges and washed thousands of houses, hospitals, and schools, forcing over 695,000 people to flee from their homes. During the event, four front-line radio workers—as depicted by the image below—talked to us about their first-hand stories.

It was quite apparent that, in comparison with the fast-growing TVs and social media, radios remained the most listened-to and connected platforms, especially for people who live in rural areas.

Among the most-listened-to radios was Bilan Media, an all-women media group run by six female journalists who extensively covered El Nino rainfalls, featuring touching stories that reached global audiences.



The International Women’s Day, 2024



The United Nations General Assembly declared 8 March the International Women’s Day in 1975. The day is dedicated to addressing germane issues for women. These may include, for example, gender equality, reproductive rights, violence and abuse against women, sex-based discrimination, exclusion, and women’s role in society, among others. The UN has in particular identified 5 critical areas requiring attention and joint action, namely:

- Investing in women as a human-rights
- Ending poverty
- Implementing gender-responsive financing
- Shifting to a green economy and caring society
- Supporting feminist change-makers

On this occasion of International Women’s Day 2024, SOMWA held an open discussion in Baidoa premised on investing in women and promoting gender equality in Somalia. The theme was ‘Count Her In: Invest in Women, Accelerate Progress’ (in Somalia). Girls and women in Somalia continue to face considerable cultural challenges and economic barriers that prevent equal participation in society. These obstacles affect their daily lives in terms of access to formal education as well as their long-term prospects for future jobs and career paths.

At the opening of the event, Baidoa district women’s chairperson, Hindiyow Isak, called on all women and young girls to praise and commend women who manage to break barriers and to ensure that 30% of Somali women’s parliamentary seats are achieved. SOMWA marked the occasion by conducting two sessions of panel discussions. The first panel of experts, practitioners, and participants discussed existing barriers among Somali girls and women’s access to

education, the workforce, and economic participation and how to bridge the gender divide. The second session focused on potential best practices and innovative solutions for investing in women and girls as a prevention strategy for ending violence and preparing the workforce for financial independence.

The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

The UN has observed that “violence against women and girls remains one of the most prevalent and pervasive human rights violations in the world. Globally, almost one in three women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life.¹”

On this International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, SOMWA4 reshared its annual Women’s Press Freedom Report for 2023-2024, highlighting disturbing statistics of gender-based violence faced by women journalists in Somalia. The report underscored the urgent need to address this issue and called for stronger protective measures, including the implementation of laws that ensure the safety and security of female journalists and women in the media. In the course of observing this important day, SOMWA reaffirmed its commitment to advocating for an end to gendered violence and for a safer environment for women in Somalia. Further details can be accessed through this link: <https://somwa.org/somwa-report-womens-press-freedom-in-somalia/>

1 United Nations. (n.d.). International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day>





The World News Day 2024

The World News Day’s website reads that this “is a global initiative to draw public attention to the role that journalists play in providing trustworthy news and information that serves citizens and democracy.”. World News Day is celebrated annually on September 28.

SOMWA celebrated World News Day—part of a global effort spanning over 100 countries and hundreds of media organisations—by hosting a panel discussion that centred on the significance of fact-based journalism in Somalia, a country where fact-based journalism has been largely replaced by disinformation, misinformation, and propaganda-based media. This discussion entailed a call to Somalia's authorities to access information for the media.

The image below depicts the discourse as conducted by SOMWA during the day’s virtual panel discussion, highlighting the critical role of fact-based journalism in Somalia.

During this virtual engagement, esteemed speakers included Abdalle Mumin, General Secretary of the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), and Mowliid Haaji Abdi, CEO of Horn Broadcasting Network (HBN) and a former BBC senior journalist. Other prominent speakers were Fardowsa Abdirahman, a senior journalist with BBC Media Action, and Maryan Seylac, a women’s rights activist and SOMWA's Executive Director.

The panel centred on timely messaging of truthful journalism, focusing on the importance of its accuracy for purposes of fostering peacebuilding, governance, and transparency in the country. In conclusion, an apt message from a Somali youth-led anti-tribalism organisation implored the media to help heal the nation and avoid fuelling clan-based conflicts. In concurrence, the speakers agreed that fact-based journalism plays a crucial role in promoting social cohesion and amplifying the voices of marginalised communities.

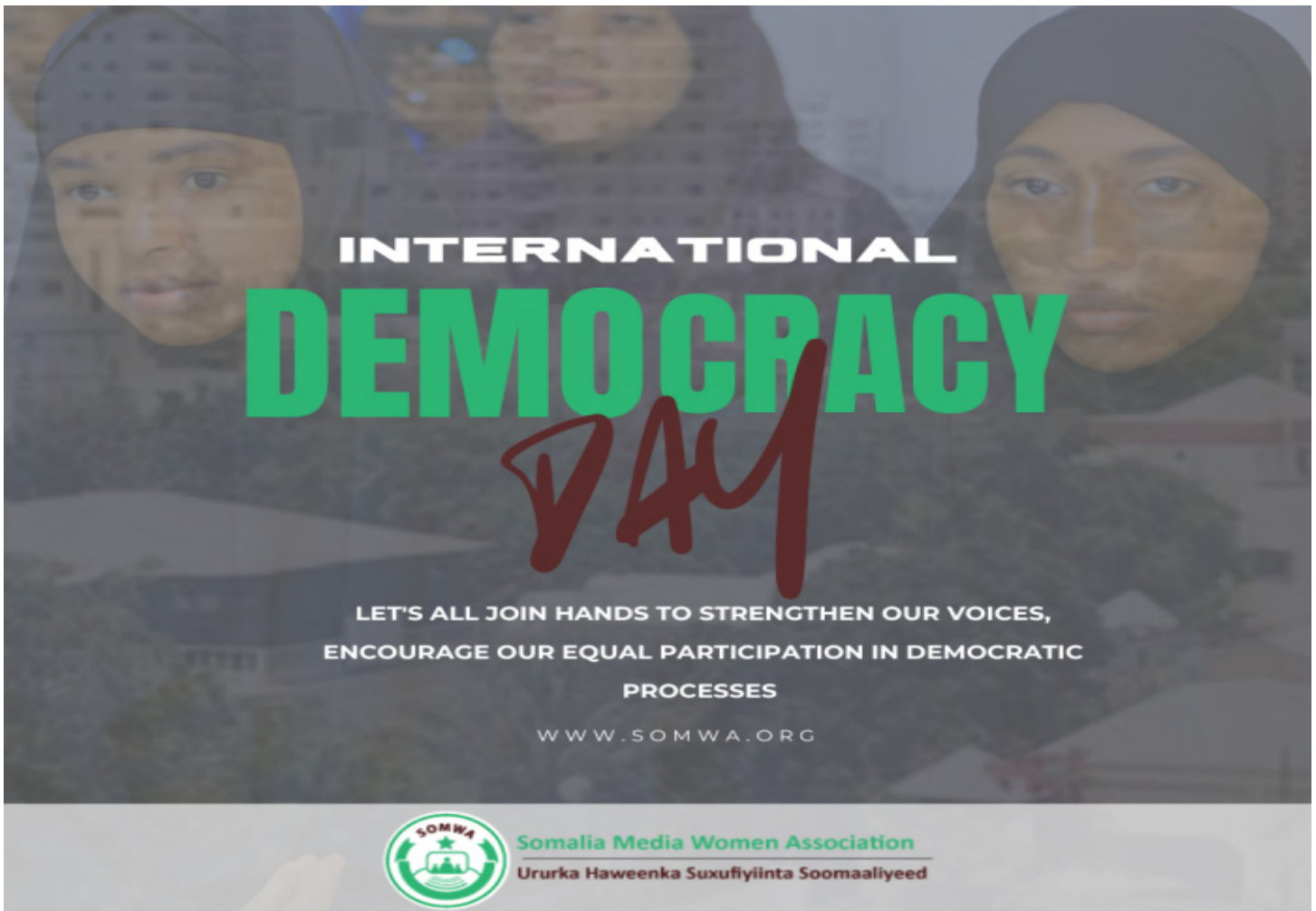
WORLD NEWS DAY 2024
LIVE ON TWITTER SPACE
Why does fact-based journalism matter in Somali media?
MODERATOR
Kiin Hasan Fakat
 Producer and reporter at Star Media and the deputy chairperson of SOMWA.
WED. 25 SEPTEMBER 2024
6:00 PM GMT
8:00 PM EAT
ONLINE

GUESTS

Maryan Seylac Women's activist and founder and executive director of the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA)	Fardowsa Abdirahman Member BBC Media Action	Abdalla Ahmed Mumin Secretary General SJS, Somalia Award winning journalist and human rights defender.	Mowliid Haaji Abdi CEO of Horn Broadcasting Network (HBN) and former BBC Programme Co-presenter.
Somali M Host	Mowliid H Speaker	Abdalle A Speaker	Ururka Ba Speaker
Fardowsa Sh Speaker	Kiin Fakat Speaker	Ahmed Ali h Speaker	Nasra Husse Speaker



The International Democracy Day 2024



The United Nations has rightly espoused that “The International Day of Democracy is an opportunity to reinforce the importance of upholding free speech, civil liberties, and the rule of law; ensuring accountable institutions; and protecting and promoting human rights.”

The year’s theme focused on artificial intelligence as a tool for good governance. SOMWA celebrated International Democracy Day on September 15, 2024, by looking back at the active role that this event has played in nurturing democratic values and encouraging inclusive political participation in Somalia. SOMWA focused on empowering women and marginalised groups, advocating for direct elections, and supporting gender equality in Somali politics; the following image captures the mood and message of the day.

SOMWA’s activities to mark International Democracy Day 2024 highlighted the critical role of women and marginalised groups in advancing democracy in Somalia. Through public discussions, workshops, and advocacy campaigns, SOMWA continues to lead efforts towards cultivating a more inclusive and representative political dispensation.



SOMWA's Fight for Freedom of Speech and Expression



Somali Media
Women Association



Media Association
of Puntland(MAP)



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

During 2024, Somali media faced the worst wave of cyberattacks targeting Somali journalists, bloggers, public figures, and government officials, primarily via Facebook. The attacks involved the deliberate misuse of Meta's systems to delete Facebook accounts or designate them as "memorialised," falsely indicating the individuals had passed away. Our findings showed that the aim of the attack was to intimidate and create a sense of fear in order to silence the journalists and public figures.

SOMWA, along with other media organisations, primarily SJS, MAP, and SOMA, remained at the forefront of the fight to safeguard freedom of speech and expression and worked with Meta, especially Facebook, to reinstate those profiles and accounts, though some of these accounts have yet to recover.

It is against this background that four media entities, namely Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA), Media Association of Puntland (MAP), and Somali Media Association (SOMA), issued a joint press release dated November 18, 2024. The message was to "strongly condemn the recent wave of coordinated cyberattacks targeting Somali journalists, bloggers, public figures, and government officials, primarily through Facebook."

Part of the press release also acknowledged that the "attacks, which also targeted influencers and journalists, raise grave concerns about online safety and freedom of expression in Somalia, particularly during a time of growing conflict, political disputes over federalization, and the elections in Somaliland." In conclusion, the four organizations demanded an immediate and exhaustive investigation into the attacks to find and hold accountable those responsible.



The International Human Rights Day

On this occasion of the International Human Rights Day, SOMWA renewed her commitment to stand united under the theme, 'Our Rights, Our Future, Right Now'. This powerful slogan emphasised the urgent need for action to uphold human rights as the cornerstone of a just and equitable future.

For Somali women, however, this vision remains far from reality, as they continue to face systemic exclusion from meaningful political participation. The year 2024 witnessed the denial of women politicians' political participation and the emergence of a male-dominated cabinet, with only two women appointed out of 24 ministries. The image below captured the clear message passed by SOMWA in 2024, as part of the occasion to mark International Human Rights Day on 10th December 2024.

This was a good opportunity for SOMWA to lament about the government's apparent exclusion of more women in government! SOMWA complained that "(the) male-dominated government fails to reflect women's ambitions and contributions, despite the fact that they account for more than half of the population and play critical roles in the country's social, economic, and cultural fabric."

SOMWA is well aware that women's under-representation in Somali politics stems from strongly entrenched patriarchal practices. Women encounter societal hostility, restricted educational opportunities, and financial obstacles that make it difficult for them to effectively compete in politics. At the same time, the clan-based political structure marginalises women further, as male elders frequently dominate leadership roles, prioritising clan loyalty over gender inclusion.





Other Engagements and Deliberations Conducted by SOMWA During the Year

Meetings to Foster Strategic Collaboration

It was a great honour for SOMWA's Executive Director, Maryan Seylac, to meet with Ms. Inta Klotins, the second secretary of the Canadian High Commission in Kenya. Both had the occasion to discuss empowering Somali women and pushing the Women Peace and Security agenda in Somalia through the media. SOMWA hailed the excellent job that the embassy has already done in areas related to female journalists' capacity-building programmes and gender-based violence.

Additionally, the Executive Director of SOMWA had the pleasure of meeting his Excellency, Ambassador Joachim Waern of the Sweden Embassy for Somalia, and counsellor Johan Svensson. In their meeting, they got to discuss pertinent issues as to do with gender equality, women's empowerment at all levels, and the crucial role of media in peacebuilding and inclusion. SOMWA was grateful for the outstanding job that the Swedish Embassy has already done in the areas of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).

Still, as part of the continuing efforts at strategic partnership-building, Maryan Seylac paid a courtesy visit to the British Embassy in Somalia in Mogadishu and met Sara Merchant, the second secretary of politics. During the visit, they both discussed media freedom in Somalia as well as the safety and protection of journalists, particularly female journalists. This meeting came the celebrations to mark the World Press Freedom happened.

sjs_Somalia extended heartfelt congratulations to our esteemed colleague Maryan Seylac for her exceptional recognition as one of the 50 outstanding #African-Women in the communication and media industries for the years 2023-2024.

Despite facing challenges as a journalist, Maryan, a devoted mother of young kids, has fearlessly advocated for a more equitable media landscape in her capacity as the head of the Somali Media Women Association SOMWA. This prestigious acknowledgement comes from @CommsOfAfrica, an independent entity dedicated to highlighting women who positively influence the communication and media sectors through their exemplary professional endeavours.

@sjs_Somalia proudly honours Maryan's remarkable achievement, not only because of her role as a journalist but also her commitment to the rights of women.

