



# SHE SPEAKS UNDER SIEGE

The State of Women's Media  
Freedom in Somalia

2025 Report



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## Acknowledgements

The Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) extends its deepest appreciation to all Somali journalists—particularly women—who continue to speak truth to power despite fear and repression. We recognize the courage of those who shared their testimonies for this report, often at great personal risk.

SOMWA also honors the memory of journalists Ayub Wardhere and Mohamed Abukar Dabaashe, killed on March 18, 2025, near the presidential palace while covering the bombing that targeted President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud’s convoy. Their deaths—within one of the most secure zones in the country—exposed the complete breakdown of journalist protection mechanisms.

This report is dedicated to every Somali woman journalist who continues to inform, inspire, and empower through her work.

We thank our partners and allies—UNESCO, the Royal Norwegian embassy, United Nation Transitional Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), the International Women Media Foundation (IWMF), the Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD), Global Democracy Development (GDC) and local civil society organizations—for their collaboration in advancing press freedom and gender equality.

Special recognition is extended to SOMWA’s field researchers, digital monitors, and advocacy teams across Somalia for their tireless documentation of the cases included herein.

## Executive Summary

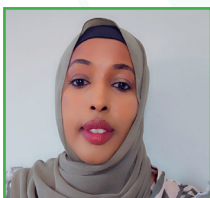
The Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) reports that 2025 has been one of the most dangerous years for women journalists in Somalia. Between November 2024 and October 2025, SOMWA documented **over 60 violations** against journalists, including **arbitrary arrests, physical assaults, and workplace discrimination**, as well as **30 cases of digital censorship** targeting women.

A third of these violations involved **arrests or detentions**, 36% were **physical assaults or intimidation**, and the rest included online harassment and content take-downs. Nearly 40% of female journalists surveyed faced gendered digital abuse, including doxxing and smear campaigns, often linked to misuse of Meta’s moderation policies.

SOMWA’s 2025 Gender Audit also exposes severe structural inequality: women earn 50–60% less than men in equivalent roles, remain underrepresented in leadership, and are excluded from covering governance and security. Despite legal protections, maternity rights are widely ignored, forcing many to return to work shortly after childbirth.

SOMWA warns that these trends pose a grave threat to press freedom and gender equality. The organization calls on Somali authorities, media owners, digital platforms, and the international community to reform repressive laws, enforce labor rights, and protect women’s voices in journalism.

***Protecting women journalists is essential for democracy and peacebuilding in Somalia.***



**Maryam Seylac**  
Executive Director  
Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Seylac', positioned below the printed name and title.

## Background and Context

In Somalia, journalism is not just a profession—it is an act of courage. Despite Article 18 of the Provisional Constitution, which explicitly guarantees freedom of expression and access to information, the daily reality for journalists—especially women—is defined by intimidation, censorship, and fear. Somalia consistently ranks among the most dangerous countries in the world for media professionals, where the cost of truth-telling can be one’s freedom—or life. Laws meant to regulate the press have instead become tools of suppression. The Media Law of 2020, while initially presented as a reform milestone, contains vague and punitive provisions that criminalize so-called “false news” and grant the Ministry of Information broad licensing powers over journalists and media houses.

Even more concerning, provisions within the 1962 Somali Penal Code—particularly Articles 328 (“Publication or Circulation of False, Exaggerated, or Tendencious News”) and Articles 219–220 (“Insults to Public Authorities” and “Contempt Against the State”)—have been weaponized to arrest, prosecute, and silence journalists under the guise of national security and public order. These laws, relics of an era of authoritarian control, continue to clash with international standards on press freedom, including Article 19 of the ICCPR and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights.

Within this shrinking civic space, women journalists bear a double burden. They face the same threats as their male counterparts—arbitrary arrests, raids, and harassment—and an added layer of gender-based discrimination. Many are excluded from covering “hard news” such as politics or security, and those who persist are often labeled as “unfit” or “unfeminine.”

The Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA), founded in 2006, has become a lifeline for these women—providing legal aid, advocacy, and training while amplifying their voices nationally and internationally. Grounded in Somalia’s constitutional guarantees and global frameworks such as CEDAW (1979), UNSCR 1325 (2000), and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists (2012), SOMWA champions a simple but powerful vision: a media landscape where women can speak without fear, work with dignity, and lead with integrity.

Today, as the state continues to misuse the Penal Code and Media Law to muzzle dissent, SOMWA’s mission has never been more urgent—transforming journalism in Somalia from an act of survival into an exercise of freedom.

## Methodology

Building on the legal and socio-political realities outlined above, this report was developed through a rigorous, participatory, and rights-based documentation process led by the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) between November 2024 and October 2025. The methodology was designed to not only record violations but also to situate them within Somalia’s existing legal and policy frameworks—including the Provisional Constitution (Article 18), the Media Law (2020), and the Somali Penal Code (1962), particularly Articles 328, 219, and 220, which are often invoked to criminalize journalistic work under charges of “false news,” “insults to authorities,” and “defamation.”

SOMWA employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. Field monitors were deployed across all five Federal Member States and Banadir region, —to verify reports of arrests, assaults, dismissals, and online violations. Each case was corroborated using survivor’s statement, eyewitness accounts, and photographic or digital evidence.

The team further analyzed national and international laws—such as the Labour Code (2025), National Gender Policy (2021), CEDAW, and UNSCR 1325—to evaluate Somalia’s compliance with its obligations toward gender equality and press freedom. Throughout the process, strict confidentiality and data protection protocols were maintained, ensuring that sources—many of whom risk state retaliation—remained secure and anonymous.

This combination of legal analysis, field verification, and survivor testimony provides an authentic, evidence-based account of how Somalia’s media and legal systems intersect to both enable and endanger women journalists.

## Field Verification and Case Documentation

SOMWA deployed its trained field monitors and correspondents across the five Federal Member States—Banadir —to verify reported violations. Each monitor conducted on-site assessments of incidents involving arrests, assaults, dismissals, and censorship.

Eyewitness accounts, and photographic or digital evidence were used to confirm events wherever possible. Verification was guided by SOMWA’s internal documentation manual, which aligns with international standards on human rights monitoring and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (2012).

### **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**

In-depth interviews were conducted with female journalists, editors, and media managers representing both public and private media houses. These interviews explored gender-based discrimination in newsrooms, unfair dismissal, digital harassment, workplace conditions, and access to assignments related to politics and security. Additional key informants included representatives from civil society organizations, human rights lawyers, and members of media unions. Interviews were conducted either in person or via encrypted digital platforms to ensure safety and confidentiality.

### **Collaboration and Data Triangulation**

To enhance reliability, SOMWA cross-checked findings with established media and human rights partners. These organizations provided incident verification, contextual data, and comparative insights that enriched the analysis. Triangulation ensured consistency between field reports, media coverage, and secondary data.

### **Legal and Policy Review**

Researchers conducted an extensive desk review of Somali national laws and international treaties relevant to press freedom and gender equality. These included the Somali Media Law (2020), Labour Code (2025), Provisional Constitution (Article 18), National Gender Policy (2021), and international instruments such as the ICCPR, CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. The analysis focused on identifying protection gaps and state obligations related to women journalists.

### **Ethical Considerations and Data Security**

SOMWA adheres to strict ethical standards to protect its sources. All interviewees participated voluntarily and were informed of the purpose of the report. No identifiable personal data was published without consent. Confidential sources were anonymized to prevent retaliation or harm. Sensitive files were encrypted and stored securely.

This mixed-methods approach ensured that the findings presented in this report are factual, gender-sensitive, and verifiable, capturing both the lived realities of women journalists and the systemic structures that endanger their freedom.

## Objectives of the Report

The State of Women’s Press Freedom 2025 Report by the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) seeks to go beyond documentation — it aims to illuminate, empower, and mobilize. In a country where truth-telling can cost a life and where gender continues to shape access to opportunity, this report provides a critical evidence base to advance both press freedom and gender equality.

### **1. To Document Violations Against Somali Journalists, with an Emphasis on Gender-Specific Repression**

The first objective is to comprehensively record and analyze the growing number of violations against journalists, particularly women. Through verified field reports, survivor testimonies, and cross-referenced data, SOMWA documents the physical, psychological, digital, and institutional threats faced by women in Somalia’s media sector.

The documentation highlights not only overt abuse such as arrests, assaults, unfair dismissal, and online censorship but also subtle, systemic forms of exclusion—like denial of assignments, gendered newsroom hierarchies, and silencing through intimidation. By disaggregating violations by gender, region, and type, this report provides a nuanced understanding of the intersection between press freedom and women’s rights in Somalia.

### **2. To Provide Evidence-Based Advocacy for Media Law and Policy Reform**

A second key objective is to strengthen advocacy for reforming Somalia’s Media Law (2020) and related regulatory instruments that continue to criminalize journalism under vague provisions.

By aligning Somalia’s legal framework with international human rights standards, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), CEDAW, and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists, SOMWA aims to foster a more protective and gender-sensitive legal environment. The report’s evidence base serves as an advocacy tool for national and regional decision-makers to enact reforms that safeguard journalists—especially women—from harassment, arbitrary detention, and discrimination.

### **3. To Amplify Women Journalists' Voices in National and International Discourse.**

The report serves as a platform for women journalists' lived experiences to be heard and validated. By featuring their testimonies and stories of resilience, SOMWA ensures that women's perspectives on media freedom, democracy, and peace-building are reflected in both national and global conversations. This aligns with UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, which underscores the importance of women's participation in decision-making and public life. The report thus functions as a bridge—connecting Somali women journalists to international partners, donors, and advocacy networks committed to defending free expression and gender justice.

### **4. To Encourage Solidarity, Accountability, and Public Awareness**

Lastly, the report aims to catalyze solidarity among media practitioners, civil society, and the international community by exposing the cost of silence and impunity. Public awareness of violations against women journalists is essential for building collective accountability.

By sharing data, policy recommendations, and narratives of resistance, SOMWA seeks to inspire coordinated advocacy, foster a culture of protection, and reaffirm the moral and democratic imperative of free and safe journalism.

In essence, this report is not only a chronicle of repression—it is a call to action. It urges Somali institutions, digital platforms, and global stakeholders to recognize that the safety and equality of women journalists are inseparable from the broader struggle for freedom, peace, and justice in Somalia.

## Between Fear and Freedom: The Struggle of Somali Women Journalists

### 1. The Shrinking Space for Press Freedom

Somalia's media environment has steadily deteriorated as the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), police department, and other state organs weaponize legal instruments—particularly the Media Law of 2020—to criminalize independent journalism. Under the guise of combating “false information” and “threats to national security,” reporters are routinely detained, interrogated, and released after enduring intimidation and coercion. Many are compelled to delete published materials or reveal sources, eroding the foundational principle of press autonomy.

This culture of surveillance and fear has triggered widespread self-censorship, especially among female journalists who already contend with patriarchal newsroom structures.

Women are disproportionately excluded from covering high-stakes beats such as security, governance, and economics, under the pretext of safety or “cultural appropriateness.” This marginalization reinforces entrenched gender hierarchies, confining women to “soft” news. In essence, the shrinking civic space in Somalia mirrors a dual repression—of truth and of women's voices. Without legal safeguards and institutional accountability, journalism has become not only dangerous but selectively silenced.

### 2. The Ramadan Crackdown: Journalism Criminalized

During the holy month of Ramadan, Somalia witnessed one of the most aggressive crackdowns on press freedom in recent memory. Journalists covering a car bomb explosion near the presidential convoy were met with force, arrest, and censorship after images showing the damaged convoy circulated online.

Authorities claimed the footage endangered national security; in reality, it exposed the vulnerability of state leadership and the extent of insecurity in Mogadishu.

Over 15 journalists were detained, among the victims were Rowdo Hassan Abdi (Goobjoog TV) and Hamda Hassan Ahmed (Risaala), both detained after reporting from the scene.

Their arrests epitomized a broader campaign of intimidation in which media centers were raided, footage was forcibly deleted, and journalists were threatened into silence. [See: SOMWA Condemnation, 2025 – [somwa.org/somwa-condemns-arbitrary-arrest-and-intimidation-of-journalists-by-somali-intelligence-agency](http://www.somwa.org/somwa-condemns-arbitrary-arrest-and-intimidation-of-journalists-by-somali-intelligence-agency)]

The Ramadan Crackdown marked a historic regression for Somalia’s media freedom. It blurred the line between national security operations and state censorship, establishing a precedent where truthful reporting is treated as subversion. The episode also underscored the vulnerability of women journalists, who, though integral to frontline reporting, are often the first to be scapegoated or silenced under pressure.

### **3. Death and Violence: The Human Cost of Truth**

The year 2025 has exacted a devastating toll on Somali journalists, exposing the fatal risks of pursuing the truth. On March 18, 2025, journalists Mohamed Abukar Dabaashe and Ayub Wardhere were killed during a bombing that targeted the convoy of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud near Villa Somalia—one of the nation’s most fortified zones.

Their death sent shockwaves across the media fraternity, symbolizing the collapse of protective mechanisms that should safeguard press workers even in secure areas.

## Recorded Incidents: The Faces Behind the Figures

Behind every statistic lies a human story—a voice nearly silenced but not forgotten. These stories embody the courage and vulnerability of Somali women journalists—whose commitment to truth persists even as they face surveillance, arrest, and intimidation.



**December 18, 2024**, Risaala Media Station's Shukri Caabi and her cameraman were covering a demonstration involving families protesting the destruction of their properties by the government.

During their reporting, Shukri was attacked by three plainclothes officers, who used a pistol and a strong stick to beat her.

Two additional officers arrived by car and joined the assault, resulting in five male officers violently attacking one female journalist. Shukri sustained visible bruises from the attack, leaving her injured and traumatized.

Furthermore, after her ordeal, Shukri lost her job and didn't get the support she deserved; she is now working for another media centre, called Sabelle Media Network.



**On March 15, 2025**, NISA officers raided the home of journalist Bahjo Abdullahi Salad after she reported on environmental malpractice near a government event, detaining her for hours before releasing her under pressure.

**On 29 April 2025**, police in Dayniile District arrested Shukri Abi Abdi, a journalist with Shabelle TV, along with three male colleagues, while they were covering protests against forced evictions in the area. Shortly after the demonstration started, Dayniile district police intervened, forcibly dispersing the crowd and detaining the four journalists present at the scene.

The journalists were interrogated for several hours, during which their recorded footage was deleted, before being released. This incident marks Shukri's second arrest within a year.



**On 30 April 2025**, Nimco Cardoofe, a female journalist with Somali Cable and a member of the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA), along with five other journalists, was physically assaulted during a chaotic incident in the lower house parliament.

Nimco and her colleagues were forcibly removed from the hall by the president guards and the police at the parliament hall.

She later informed SOMWA that the manner in which they were treated made her feel dehumanized and deeply humiliated.



**On 24 May 2025**, eleven journalists, including two female reporters, Shukri Hashi (Shacni) and Sundus Ali Botan, were arrested by the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) while conducting public interviews with opposition politicians regarding the 2026 elections along Maka Al-Mukarama Street in Mogadishu.

Security agents issued threats, warning the journalists against returning to the area, and NISA officers forcibly deleted the recorded footage from their equipment.

Furthermore, the journalists' photographs were taken by security personnel as though they were criminals—an act widely perceived as an attempt to intimidate, harass, and unlawfully profile members of the press.



On 24 June 2025, Puntland TV unlawfully dismissed veteran journalist Suweys Ga'ate from her position. The station's director abruptly terminated her employment via a WhatsApp message, despite her over eight years of dedicated service to the state broadcaster—an action widely condemned as illegal and a violation of press freedom.

Suweys claims that her independent media platform, Suweys Media, where she regularly shares reports and interviews, prompted her dismissal. She alleged that Puntland TV's General Director, Ali Kimiko, ordered her to shut down the platform or face termination.

*"I have not broken any law to deserve losing my job. The public needs an independent space to express themselves freely,"* Suweys stated.

The Puntland Parliament subsequently raised the matter during a parliamentary session, with several Members of Parliament urging the Minister of Information to reinstate Suweys and issue a public apology. However, Minister Ceydiid Dirir has reportedly ignored these calls.

Under Puntland labour law, termination is only permissible under three conditions:

- 1. A final court ruling,**
- 2. One month's absence without valid excuse, or**
- 3. A decision by a disciplinary committee.**

As none of these conditions apply to Suweys' case, her dismissal constitutes an unlawful act and a clear abuse of authority.

**On 27 August 2025**, Anisa Ahmed Mohamud, a female journalist with Dalbile TV, was arrested for reporting on an alleged armed robbery involving men in uniform.

According to Anisa, who spoke to SOMWA, she received a phone call late on 26 August from the Waaberi Police Station Commander, informing her that allegations had been made against her and instructing her to report to the station.

Upon reporting to the Waaberi Police Station the following day, Anisa was detained for over an hour before being forcibly transferred to the Deyniile Police Station, where she was held in a dark, extremely unhygienic cell adjacent to male detainees. She reported nearly losing consciousness due to the heat and poor ventilation in the cell.



Police officers at the station forcibly unlocked her phone using facial recognition technology. Following public outcry on social media regarding her detention, Anisa was subsequently released.

**On 14 September 2025**, Anisa Ahmed Mohamud, a journalist with Dalbile TV, was threatened by officers from the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) in Deyniile while reporting on the forced eviction of residents in Oodweyne, a neighbouring district of Deyniile.

Speaking to SOMWA, Anisa recounted that the NISA commander in Deyniile approached her and asked whether she recognized him. When she replied that she did not, he identified himself and began to intimidate her, saying, “You were banned from coming here. What are you doing here?” He then added, “If you ever come back here, no one will ever see you”—a statement clearly interpreted as a death threat.

Fearing for their safety, Anisa and her cameraman immediately left the area. She later shared her experience on Facebook, drawing significant attention and public condemnation from both media organizations and citizens. This incident marks Anisa’s second violation of her rights with police and NISA officers in 2025.

Anisa further informed SOMWA that she subsequently received a phone call from the Minister of Information, Mohamed Kaafi, during which NISA Banadir Commander Salah joined the conversation. According to Anisa, Commander Salah apologized for the incident, assuring her that such behavior would not be repeated and that appropriate action would be taken against the Deyniile NISA commander responsible for the threat.



**On 24 September 2025**, a violent clash occurred between the security guards of Somali opposition leaders and the police at the Warta Nabadda Police Station, endangering the lives of journalists who were accompanying the opposition delegation.

Among those affected were Shukri Caabi and Nimco Cardoofe, both of whom sustained minor injuries and bruises when gunfire erupted, resulting in the deaths of two individuals.

Speaking to SOMWA, Cardoofe recounted that she fell to the ground amid the chaos and was trampled by people fleeing the scene, sustaining minor injuries before crawling to safety.

These cases, among many others, illustrate a deliberate erosion of journalistic safety and the normalization of violence as a tool of control.

For women journalists, such hostility is amplified by gender-based targeting—turning the pursuit of truth into a high-risk act of defiance.

## The New Digital Battlefield Censorship

### SOMWA's Digital Space Monitoring

Given the growing threat of online censorship, SOMWA's digital rights unit systematically tracked incidents of Facebook account suspensions, content removals, and page hijackings. Using digital forensics and direct communication with affected journalists, the team documented over 30 verified cases of restriction, suspension, or manipulation of journalist accounts, including high-profile cases such as Bushaaro Baanday, Nimco Omer Hussein, Geylan Media, Munasar Mohamed, Mohamed Bakeyle, Shiine Culey, Cabdimalik Muse Coltoon, and Goobjoog Media.

Bushaaro Baanday, one of Somalia's most followed female journalists, had several of her videos removed under Meta's Dangerous Organisations and Individuals (DOI) policy.

Similarly, Nimco Omer Hussein's account—widely recognized for its balanced coverage and advocacy for women's rights—was suspended despite no verified violation. In both cases, subsequent reviews by SOMWA and digital rights monitors confirmed that the allegations against them were invalid and reflected a misuse of Meta's content moderation policies, effectively silencing independent women's voices.

These restrictions cripple journalistic outreach, suppress critical reporting, and disproportionately marginalize female-led media platforms that already operate within a fragile civic space.

#### **More Affected Journalists:**

Abdiaziz Mohamed Golf, Salman Jamal Said, Mohamed Salh, Kilwe Aden, Sakariye Maxamed Isticmaar, Habib Farah, Mohamed Bakeyle, Cali Aadan Muumin, Mohamed Abdiweli Toxow, Idris Alteeso, Mowlid Daqaf, Cali Yare Cal, Ahmed Abdikadir Ibrahim (Suxufi), Shucayb Dad Mohamed, Mukhtar Abdi Jama, Mohamad Hassan (Dhalo), Abdulkadir Abdulaahi, Abdinur Faarax Hassan (Yaame), Munasar Mohamed, Axmed Saciid Axmed, Abukar Awale, Fahad Karie, Cabdimaalik Muuse Coltoon, Ali Samatar, Nawad Abdi Ibrahim, Bushaaro Baanday, Nimco Omer Hussein, Goobjoog Media, Wariye Indhoos, Safa Osman, and Geylan Media.

SOMWA documented over 30 cases of Facebook account restrictions, suspensions, or hijackings in 2025.

## Story of Sagal and Bishaaro

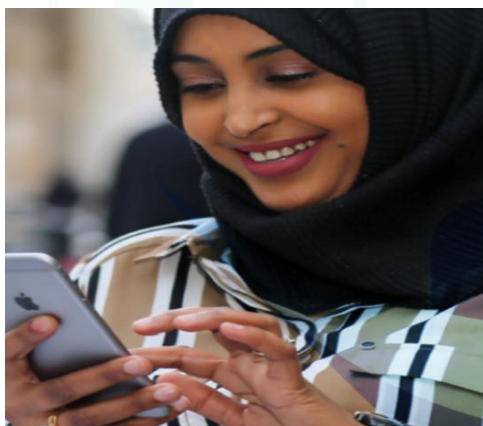


**Somali journalist Sagal Mustaf Hassan Nur has voiced concern over growing online harassment targeting media professionals and young social media users.**

Sagal, one of the Somali women working in the media, says journalists are often “falsely memorialised” — harassed and falsely reported on Facebook for what they post or write.

She explained that many users are wrongly accused of copyright violations or spreading extremist content, leading to suspended or blocked accounts.

“When large groups report your account, it becomes a serious challenge,” Sagal said. “It prevents young people from working, progressing, and achieving their goals.” Sagal is calling on Facebook (Meta) to take stronger action against coordinated reporting campaigns that silence journalists and youth voices online.



**Bishaaro Baanday, one of the Somali media professionals called on Meta to address what she describes as unfair restrictions and false reports on Facebook pages and profiles.**

She said Facebook’s automated systems often remove or flag her content without valid reason — sometimes labeling her as dangerous or violating copyright laws. She believes the system is being misused by individuals who disagree

with their work. “Today, silencing the press doesn’t always happen through threats or prison. It happens online,” said Bishaaro.

She finally urges Meta to make Facebook safer and more reliable for journalists, ensuring freedom of expression is protected for all users.

## Gendered Repression: Women Journalists Under Siege

SOMWA's field interviews and testimonies expose the gendered dimensions of media repression in Somalia. Women journalists face a unique intersection of risks—professional discrimination, sexual harassment, online vilification, unlawful dismissal, and institutional neglect. Many are denied assignments related to politics, conflict, or governance, with editors citing “protection” as justification for their exclusion. Yet this exclusion perpetuates stereotypes and sidelines women from the narratives that shape national identity and policy.

The harassment is not limited to the newsroom. In the field, women reporters are subjected to verbal abuse, threats, and, in some cases, physical assault. Online, they face defamation campaigns targeting their personal integrity rather than their professional output. Such encounters reflect deep-seated patriarchal attitudes that trivialize women's professional capacity and deny them equal standing in the media space.

This gendered censorship not only undermines women's careers but also weakens Somalia's democratic development. By silencing women journalists, society loses diverse perspectives essential to truth, reconciliation, and peacebuilding. Ensuring women's inclusion in media freedom efforts is therefore not a matter of representation alone, it is a cornerstone of sustainable democracy.

Legal and Institutional Threats.

Somalia's Media Law (2020) remains one of the most contentious legal instruments affecting journalists' safety and independence. Ostensibly designed to regulate the profession, its broad and ambiguous clauses—particularly the criminalization of so-called “false news” and the requirement for government licensing—have become convenient tools for state agencies to silence dissent. Even more troubling, authorities continue to invoke the Somali Penal Code of 1962, a colonial-era law that criminalizes defamation, insult, and publication of “false information,” to prosecute journalists under criminal rather than civil procedures.

The combined use of the Media Law (2020) and the Penal Code (1962) has entrenched a culture of legal repression, where reporting on matters of public interest can lead to arrest, prosecution, or imprisonment, undermining both press freedom and constitutional guarantees of free expression. Security organs, particularly the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), and the Somali National Police continue to interpret these provisions subjectively, detaining or harassing journalists who report on governance failures, security operations, or corruption.

The result is a climate of fear, where reporters practice self-censorship to avoid reprisals.

Although Somalia adopted a new Labour Code in 2025 that explicitly prohibits gender discrimination and mandates fair employment practices, enforcement remains weak in the media sector. Women journalists are routinely paid less than their male counterparts and mostly, denied maternity protections or leadership opportunities. The case of journalist Suweys, unlawfully dismissed from Puntland TV after questioning editorial bias, highlights the institutional vulnerability of female media workers.

Without gender-responsive grievance mechanisms or a functioning Independent Media Council, many victims have no path to justice other than media organizations like SOMWA. Structural reform is urgently needed to align national legislation with Somalia's constitutional guarantees and international human-rights obligations.

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## **Impunity and Erosion of Trust**

A defining feature of Somalia’s media landscape is the entrenched impunity surrounding attacks on journalists. Perpetrators—often Al-shabaab and state security agents—operate without consequence, eroding public confidence in the rule of law and further endangering those who report the truth. Despite repeated calls by civil-society groups, investigations into killings, assaults, and arbitrary arrests remain either stalled or closed without explanation. The absence of an Independent Media Commission, as envisioned under the Media Law, denies journalists an impartial mechanism for redress and accountability.

SOMWA’s monitoring reveals that many survivors of violence withdraw their complaints under intimidation or social and judicial pressure, fearing retaliation against themselves or their families. Female journalists, in particular, face compounded stigma when reporting sexual harassment or gender-based threats from colleagues or authorities. This silence reinforces a culture of acceptance where abuses are normalized. Restoring trust in Somali institutions therefore requires visible justice—prosecutions of offenders, public acknowledgment of wrongdoing, and comprehensive protections for whistle-blowers and victims. Without accountability, freedom of expression will remain hollow, and the cycle of fear will persist.

## **SOMWA’s Response and Interventions**

In response to the escalating threats, the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA) has intensified its multi-pronged protection and advocacy initiatives across the country.

**Legal Support:** SOMWA’s legal desk with their legal partners provided legal resource and advocated for their timely release. **Safety Training:** In 2025, SOMWA trained more than 100 women journalists in digital and physical safety, equipping them to navigate surveillance, online harassment, and field-based risks.

**Advocacy and Policy Engagement:** SOMWA actively engages with the government and international human right organizations to influence gender-responsive reforms in the media sector.

**Public Awareness:** Through campaigns and creative media, including the acclaimed documentary “A Voice Under Siege” released for World Press Freedom Day 2025, SOMWA continues to spotlight the resilience and plight of women journalists.

International Collaboration: Working within the framework of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, SOMWA partners with global organizations to share data, raise visibility, and channel support for Somali women in media. Together, these interventions represent SOMWA’s holistic approach—combining protection, empowerment, and policy advocacy to safeguard press freedom through a gender lens.

## International Instruments:

Somalia, as a UN member state, is bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 19), both of which guarantee the right to seek and impart information without interference.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) obliges the state to eliminate gender-based barriers in all professions, including journalism. The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace, and Security affirms women’s participation in decision-making and peace-building, directly relevant to media representation. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Article 9) and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists (2012) further reinforce the duty to protect press workers from harm.

## National Policies:

Domestically, Article 18 of the Somali Provisional Constitution enshrines freedom of expression and media independence. The Media Law (2020), however, requires urgent reform to comply with these constitutional and international norms. The National Gender Policy (2021) calls for a gender-responsive media landscape, while the Labour Code (2025) outlaws workplace discrimination and mandates equal pay. Collectively, these frameworks provide the legal foundation for SOMWA’s advocacy. Yet, without consistent enforcement and gender-sensitive oversight, their promise remains unrealized.

## 3. Recommendations

The findings of this report reveal a fragile media ecosystem where fear, gender bias, and institutional neglect continue to undermine the principles of free expression. Addressing these challenges demands a collective, multi-sectoral response that not only protects journalists but also transforms Somalia’s media landscape into one that is equitable, transparent, and inclusive. SOMWA proposes the following recommendations:

## To the Somali Government

The Somali government bears the constitutional and moral responsibility to guarantee press freedom and gender equality.

- **Reform the Media Law (2020):** Amend and harmonize the law to align with Somalia’s Provisional Constitution (Article 18) and international standards such as ICCPR and CEDAW. Introduce explicit protections for women journalists and prohibit the criminalization of journalistic work under vague “false news” provisions.
- **Investigate and Prosecute Violations:** Establish an independent judicial taskforce to investigate all cases of unlawful arrests, physical assaults, and intimidation of journalists—including the deaths of reporters such as Mohamed Abukar Dabaashe and Ayub Wardhere. Ensure public transparency and justice for victims.
- **Create an Independent Media Commission:** Operationalize a non-partisan body mandated to oversee media regulation, address grievances, and uphold professional ethics free from political interference.
- **Enforce the Labour Code (2025):** Strengthen mechanisms within the Ministry of Labour to monitor and sanction media institutions that discriminate based on gender, deny equal pay, or dismiss female staff without due process.
- **Institutionalize Safety Protocols:** Integrate journalist protection measures into Somalia’s national security strategy and provide training for security officers on the rights of media professionals.

## To Meta and Digital Platforms

Social media has become both a megaphone for truth and a weapon for suppression. Technology companies have a duty to protect, not silence, journalists who rely on these platforms to inform the public.

- **Review DOI Enforcement:** Conduct an urgent review of the Dangerous Organizations and Individuals (DOI) policy’s application in Somalia to prevent its misuse in targeting journalists.
- **Strengthen your Partnership with SOMWA for Contextual Moderation:** Collaborate Somali Civil Society and other local digital rights groups to develop context-aware content moderation guidelines that recognize Somalia’s linguistic, cultural, and political nuances.
- **Restore and Protect Journalists’ Accounts:** Reinstate suspended accounts and falsely memorialized accounts. Establish an appeal process accessible to verified journalists.

Enhance Digital Security Tools: Support Somali media workers by providing digital literacy training and stronger account verification systems to mitigate hacking and impersonation.

### **To International Partners**

Sustainable change requires international solidarity, investment, and accountability. Donors, multilateral institutions, and global press freedom organizations play a pivotal role in protecting Somali journalists and amplifying women's voices.

- **Fund Legal Aid and Trauma Care:** Allocate direct funding for legal defense, psychosocial counseling, and safety shelters for journalists under threat.
- **Invest in Women-Led Media Initiatives:** Prioritize support for organizations like SOMWA that combine gender advocacy with media development. Financing women-led journalism is an investment in peacebuilding, transparency, and democracy.
- **Promote Regional Solidarity:** Encourage African Union and IGAD mechanisms to mainstream journalist safety and gender equality within continental frameworks such as Agenda 2063 and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance.

Collectively, these recommendations envision a Somalia where the pursuit of truth is not punished but protected—where journalism thrives as a pillar of democracy and where women's voices are no longer marginalized but amplified.

## **Conclusion: She Speaks, Still**

Despite the fear, the threats, and the systematic silencing, Somali women journalists continue to speak. They do so not out of defiance alone, but out of duty—to their communities, their country, and the universal ideal that truth matters. They are mothers, daughters, and sisters who balance their safety with their commitment to tell stories that would otherwise remain buried in silence.

In 2025, as the world watches Somalia navigate fragility and renewal, the courage of these women stands as a testament to resilience. They document wars, corruption, and human rights abuses not because it is easy, but because the nation’s conscience depends on it. Their struggle is not just for visibility—it is for justice, dignity, and a voice in shaping Somalia’s destiny.

***Their freedom is Somalia’s freedom.***

***Their safety is Somalia’s stability.***

***Their voices are Somalia’s future.***

***“They can silence my microphone, but not my voice.”***

Through this report, SOMWA calls on every ally—government, digital platform, donor, and citizen—to ensure that these voices are not lost to fear. Let their courage remind us that democracy cannot exist without truth, and truth cannot survive without those brave enough to tell it.

Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA)  
Mogadishu, Somalia – October 2025

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