



Somali Media Women Association
Women Empowering



SOMWA REPORT

SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION

**SOMALIA'S WAR ON JOURNALISM AND THE
URGENT CASE FOR PRESS FREEDOM REFORM**

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Executive Summary

Between January and April 2026, Somalia recorded more than 30 documented violations against journalists — beatings, arbitrary arrests, equipment seizures, incommunicado detentions, and the killing of at least one journalist. Women reporters endured a compounding layer of gender-based harassment and fabricated sexual slander designed to destroy their credibility and silence their voices.

Security agencies — including the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), the Somali National Army (SNA), the Puntland Special Forces, and municipal police — are the primary agents of press suppression. Impunity is near total: offenders are almost never investigated, charged, or brought to justice.

In parallel, a coordinated digital extortion scheme is weaponizing Facebook's copyright system to ransom the content of established media houses. The platform's automated claims process has become a tool in the hands of bad actors.

SOMWA calls on the Federal Government of Somalia, regional administrations, the African Union, the United Nations, and international partners to act without delay. A free press is not a luxury. It is the oxygen of democracy.



Maryan Seylac
Executive Director, SOMWA



Introduction:

The hook

In the first four months of 2026, a journalist in Somalia was arrested, beaten, or had their equipment destroyed roughly every three days. One was killed. A woman journalist was smeared with fabricated rape allegations as punishment for covering a political rally. Another journalist had his hair forcibly shaved by soldiers and was made to sign a written pledge never to report on the military again. He was released only after agreeing.

This is not a distant authoritarian story. This is Somalia in 2026 — a country with a federal constitution that guarantees freedom of expression, a media law passed in 2016, and a government that regularly speaks of democratic progress on the world stage.

“Unfortunately, right now there is no free press in Somalia. Journalists are silenced through intimidation and harassment, and as a result, they avoid reporting on critical issues that the public deserves to know. — Mohamed Deeq Abdalla, Deputy Chair, Puntland Media Association (MAP).”

World Press Freedom Day — observed every 3 May — is a moment for the international community to ask hard questions about the gap between rhetoric and reality. For SOMWA and for the Somali journalists whose stories this paper tells, that gap is not a policy footnote. It is a matter of life and death.



Issue background

A. The State of Press Freedom in Somalia

Somalia consistently ranks among the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. The 2025 World Press Freedom Index, published by Reporters Without Borders, places Somalia firmly in the category of nations where journalism is practiced at extreme personal risk (RSF, 2025). The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has documented dozens of unresolved journalist killings in Somalia going back over two decades, with impunity the norm rather than the exception (CPJ, 2025).

SOMWA's own monitoring data, published in its 2025 State of Women's Press Freedom Report, recorded over 60 violations against journalists in Somalia in the past year, with more than half occurring online (SOMWA, 2025a). This position paper focuses on the acute crisis that escalated in January through April 2025 — a period during which violations reached an alarming intensity, targeting both male and female journalists across multiple regions.

B. The Legal Framework: Promises on Paper

Somalia's Federal Constitution (2012) guarantees freedom of expression and press freedom under Article 18. The National Media Law (2016) establishes the legal parameters for an independent press. The country is also a signatory to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which enshrine press freedom as a fundamental right.

Despite this, the laws remain largely unimplemented. There is no functioning independent broadcast regulator, no journalist protection protocol agreed between media organizations and the government, and no track record of successful prosecution of perpetrators of violence against journalists. The legal framework, as it stands, offers journalists paper protection while leaving them physically exposed.

C. The Role of SOMWA

The Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA), established in 2006 and based in Mogadishu and Baidoa, is one of Somalia's leading non-governmental media organizations. It is the principal representative body for female journalists in Somalia. SOMWA works to promote media freedom, monitor and document violations against journalists, provide safety training, advocate for legal reform, and amplify the voices of women in Somali media.

SOMWA's work spans national and international advocacy, including partnerships with UNESCO, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the UK Government, UNTMIS, and the national media organizations. It has collaborated directly with Meta/Facebook to challenge false copyright claims targeting Somali media content. It holds a recognized position within Somalia's civil society architecture and within the global democracy coalition (SOMWA, 2025b; Global Democracy Coalition, 2024).

THESIS STATEMENT

Somalia cannot credibly claim to be building democracy while its security agencies systematically assault, arrest, and silence journalists. The Federal Government, regional administrations, and international partners must urgently translate legal commitments into enforceable protections — including the prosecution of those responsible for press freedom violations, a dedicated legal shield for women journalists facing gender-based attacks, and a binding framework for platform accountability against digital extortion of Somali media.



The crisis in numbers

The data below captures documented violations between January and April 2025. SOMWA notes that, due to fear of reprisal, self-censorship, and the collapse of reporting channels in certain regions, the actual number of incidents is almost certainly higher than what is recorded here.



Sources: SOMWA (2025a); SOMWA (2025b); CPJ (2025); RSF (2025).



Chronological record of violations: January–April 2026

The following table presents the documented chronology of press freedom violations in Somalia from January to April 2026. Each incident has been verified by SOMWA through its monitoring network, press statements, and direct testimonies from journalists and media houses.

Date	Location	Incident Summary
11 Jan 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Zakariye Ahmed Muse & Mowlid Osman Bootan (Shabelle TV) arrested, beaten, footage forcibly deleted.
12 Jan 2026	Cadaado, Galmudug state	Independent journalist Sayid Omar arrested by Galmudug security forces while covering a public event.
13 Jan 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Journalists denied access to high-level international delegation visit after being invited and travelling long distances — no prior notice given.
18 Jan 2026	Baidoa, Southwest state	Deputy Director of Arlaady Media, Amina Ibrahim Amiish, arrested at Shaati Gaduud Airport; threatened and interrogated on unrelated matters.
19 Jan 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Journalist Abdirahman Waaberi arrested while covering a protest in Hamar Jajab district.
19 Jan 2026	Laasaanood	Northeastern state Special Forces beat three journalists: Zakariye Wadani, Abdalle Ahmed Sahal (Dhulmar Media), and Abdiqani Abdirahman Mohamed.
27 Jan 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Editor of Nation TV arrested and held for hours at CID headquarters — no warrant, no formal charges.
28 Jan 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Journalists threatened inside Somali Parliament; security forces deployed to prevent recording of proceedings.
31 Jan 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	NISA officer shut down Risala Media in Hamar Jajab — staff locked out, all operations halted.
2 Feb 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Somali Parliament banned selected journalists from entering parliament building to carry out their professional duties.
11 Feb 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Journalist Abdullahi Mohamed Saaweey (Himilo Media) arrested near Daljirka Dahsoon monument; held and interrogated at Hamarweyne police station.
16 Feb 2026	Dhuusamareeb, Galmudug	Journalist Abdullahi Abdi Hersi (Somali Cable TV) unlawfully arrested in a military vehicle, detained for hours, mistreated.
12 Mar 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Journalist Hussein Mohamed Mohamud (KAAB TV) arrested; equipment confiscated.



15 Mar 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Four journalists arrested at Taleex junction: Mohamed Hassan Ali, Mohamed Abdukadir (Arlaadi Media), Hussein Mohamed Abdi, Abdirisak Hussein (COSOB TV) — forcibly taken to Waaberi police station.
17 Mar 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Police arrested and beat: Abdirahman Hasan Haji (Ogaal TV), Faysal Abdi Farah, Ibrahim Abdullahi (Kalsan Media).
18 Mar 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Two female journalists arrested: Amiira Sa-laabeen (KAAB TV) and Iqra Abdullahi (Five TV) — equipment confiscated.
26 Mar 2026	Laasaanood Northeastern state	Journalist Cabdiqani Dhulmar (Puntland) arrested and detained for nearly a week — no legal basis.
1 Apr 2026	Baidoa, Southwest state	Security guards of the Speaker of the Federal Parliament assaulted more than ten journalists covering an official visit to South West State.
1 Apr 2026	Mogadishu, Banadir	Journalist Abdihafid Nor re-arrested; held for nearly a week without charges or due process.
3 Apr 2026	Baidoa, Southwest state	Presidential guards blocked journalists from entering Shaati Gaduud Airport during a presidential visit — obstruction during political transition.



Analysis: structural patterns and root causes

A. The State as the Primary Violator

What the January–April 2026 data reveal most starkly is not a random pattern of abuse, but a systematic, state-directed campaign to control information. The actors responsible for the documented violations are not non-state armed groups or terrorist organizations. They are organs of the Somali state itself — NISA, the Somali National Army (SNA), the Puntland Special Forces, the Southwest State administration, and regular municipal police forces.

When a NISA officer physically shuts down Risala Media and locks staff out of their own premises, that is not a rogue action. When the SNA shaves a journalist's head and forces him to sign a written promise never to cover the military again, that is not undisciplined behaviour. These are deliberate acts of intimidation designed to shrink the space in which independent journalism can operate.

The deployment of security forces to block journalists from recording parliamentary proceedings is particularly alarming. Parliament is the people's institution. What Somalia's government does not want recorded in parliament is, almost by definition, what the public most needs to know.

B. The Gendered Dimension: Women Journalists Are Doubly Targeted

SOMWA's data and the cases documented in this paper confirm that women journalists face a distinct and compounding threat profile. They are subjected to the same physical violence, arbitrary arrests, and equipment seizures as their male colleagues. But they also endure a second category of attack that is explicitly gendered: fabricated sexual slander, coordinated online defamation, and institutional exclusion.

The targeting of Amina Ibrahim Amiish is a case study in weaponized misogyny. When she covered a political gathering calling for the Southwest President to resign, opponents of those politicians responded not by challenging her journalism, but by fabricating and circulating false rape allegations against her. The intent was transparent: damage her credibility, shame her publicly, and intimidate any other woman journalist watching.

“When we speak up, we are ashamed; when we push boundaries, we are threatened; and when we reject advances, we are punished. — Maryan Seylac, Executive Director, SOMWA.”

As UNESCO's representative noted at a recent SOMWA event, since 2006 more than 1,800 journalists have been killed worldwide and 90% of those cases remain unresolved. Somalia is one of the countries that consistently contributes to that statistic (UNESCO, as cited in SOMWA, 2025c).

C. Digital Extortion: Facebook as a Tool of Silencing

Beyond physical violence, a sophisticated digital threat has emerged: an organized group of online extortionists using Facebook's automated copyright claims system to hold Somali media hostage. The mechanics are straightforward and deliberately exploitative. Bad actors

file false copyright claims against original content produced by Somali media outlets and journalists. Facebook's automated systems flag the content. The extortionists then demand ransom payments to withdraw the claims.

Media organizations and individuals targeted in documented cases include Dalsan Media, Shabelle Media, RTN TV, SBC, Idris Alteso, Abdirisak Atoosh, Farah Geylan, and Munasar Mohamed. These are not marginal players. They are among the most influential voices in Somali media.

SOMWA has worked directly with Facebook to remove some of the false claims from certain pages. However, the problem persists. Platform policies are not calibrated for the Somali context, and the automated claims system offers no efficient mechanism for verified media organizations to dispute fraudulent takedowns in real time. The net effect is that organized criminals have found a way to extort legitimate journalists using the tools of a global technology company.



D. Impunity: The Engine That Drives the Crisis

The reason violations continue to escalate is not complexity. It is impunity. Security forces beat journalists and are never disciplined. NISA shuts down media houses and faces no legal consequences. A journalist is killed in Kismayo and the investigation, if any, goes nowhere. When perpetrators face no consequence, the message to every abusive officer, every corrupt official, every political operator is the same: go ahead.

There is an urgent need for institutional reform so that journalists can work in a safe and independent environment (SOMWA, 2025). The absence of that reform is not accidental. It reflects a political choice by those in power to leave the architecture of press suppression intact.

Addressing counterarguments

Counterargument 1: "Arrests Are Security Measures in a Conflict Zone"

Some government officials have argued that journalist arrests and media restrictions are necessary security precautions given Somalia's ongoing conflict with Al-Shabaab and other armed groups. SOMWA does not dismiss the genuine security challenges Somalia faces.

However, this argument fails on the evidence. The majority of documented violations in this paper occurred at peaceful protests, political events, parliamentary sessions, and airport arrival areas. Journalists were not embedded with armed groups. They were doing their jobs in civilian settings. The security argument, used selectively and without judicial oversight, is not a defence of national security. It is a justification for censorship.

Counterargument 2: "Somalia Is Making Progress — Give It Time"

Progress arguments are often heard from government representatives and some international donors. Somalia has indeed made institutional advances since 2012 and a federal constitution is in place. The Ministry of Information has expressed willingness to review media laws (SOMWA, 2025c).

The 40-plus violations recorded in just four months of 2025 are not the fingerprints of a government making steady progress. They are evidence of an acceleration in press suppression. Goodwill statements from ministries mean very little when NISA officers are physically locking journalists out of their newsrooms.

Counterargument 3: "Facebook Has Processes — Use Them"

Representatives of large technology platforms have argued that existing dispute resolution mechanisms are sufficient for addressing false copyright claims. SOMWA's direct experience refutes this. The existing processes are slow, not calibrated for the Somali context, and place an undue burden on the victim rather than the abuser. Verified Somali media organizations should not need to fight through generic global appeals processes designed for the entertainment industry while their content is held hostage.



Solutions: a strategic framework for press freedom reform

SOMWA does not present problems without pathways forward. The following six-pillar framework is designed to be actionable, measurable, and owned by multiple stakeholders — from the federal government to technology companies to the international community.

#	<i>Strategic Pillar</i>	<i>Key Actions</i>
1	End Impunity Through Independent Accountability	Establish an Independent Press Freedom Oversight Commission with binding powers to investigate, prosecute, and report on violations. Require prosecutorial action within 30 days of any verified journalist arrest.
2	Enshrine Press Freedom in Practice, Not Just Law	Conduct a comprehensive review and full implementation of Somalia’s Media Law. Align all federal and regional media regulations with Article 18 of the Federal Constitution guaranteeing freedom of expression.
3	Protect Women Journalists by Design	Mandate gender-sensitive journalist safety protocols at all federal and regional police commands. Establish a dedicated hotline and rapid-response unit for female journalists under threat — staffed 24/7.
4	Reform Digital Platform Accountability	Negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding between Somali civil society leading SOMWA, and Meta/Facebook for a fast-track claims review channel for verified Somali media entities. Push for national cybercrime legislation that criminalizes digital extortion and fraudulent copyright claims.
5	Build a National Journalist Safety Architecture	Develop a National Journalist Protection Protocol (NJPP) a, multi-agency safety framework co- designed with media organizations like SOMWA and international partners including UNESCO and CPJ.
6	Strengthen International Advocacy	Engage the African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights for cases of unresolved journalist killings, including Abshir Khaliif Shidane.



Detailed Recommendations

1. End Impunity — Establish an Independent Press Freedom Oversight Commission

The Federal Government of Somalia should, within six months, establish an Independent Press Freedom Oversight Commission (IPFOC) with a mandate to:

- Receive, investigate, and adjudicate complaints of violations against journalists.
- Refer cases for prosecution to the Attorney General's office.
- Issue binding recommendations to security agencies implicated in violations.
- Publish quarterly public reports on the state of press freedom.

The commission should include representation from civil society leading SOMWA, independent legal practitioners, and international observers. It must be explicitly independent of the Ministry of Information and of NISA.

2. Fully Implement Somalia's Media Law — No More Partial Compliance

Somalia's National Media Law should be the floor, not the ceiling, of press protection. The following steps are required for genuine implementation:

- A formal government directive to all security agencies prohibiting the arrest, intimidation, or assault of journalists in the course of their professional duties.
- Establishment of a joint Media-Police-Judiciary Coordination Committee to manage disputes and respond to violations.
- Alignment of all regional media laws with the federal framework to close jurisdictional gaps exploited by federal member states.

3. Protect Women Journalists — A Gender-Responsive Safety Protocol

Protecting women journalists requires dedicated mechanisms, not just gender-neutral policies. SOMWA calls for:

- A 24/7 emergency response hotline for women journalists under threat, co-managed by SOMWA and other women led media organizations.
- Mandatory gender-sensitivity training for all police units deployed to political events, protests, and public gatherings.
- A national policy on online gender-based violence against journalists.
- Legal aid support for women journalists facing defamation, fabricated accusations, or cyberstalking.

4. Digital Platform Accountability — Reform Facebook's Broken Claims Process

SOMWA calls on Meta/Facebook to:

- Establish a dedicated, fast-track copyright claims review channel for verified Somali media organizations — with a response commitment of 48 hours for urgent cases.
- Introduce escalating penalties, including permanent account suspension, for users who repeatedly file false copyright claims.
- Provide direct support for metadata tagging, and digital archiving tools for small and independent Somali media outlets.

SOMWA calls on the Federal Government of Somalia to:

- Enact national cybercrime legislation that explicitly criminalizes digital extortion and fraudulent copyright claims.
- Engage international law enforcement partners on cross-border digital extortion schemes targeting Somali media.



5.A National Journalist Protection Protocol (NJPP)

SOMWA and other Somali media organizations — with the support of international partners — should jointly develop and formally adopt a National Journalist Protection Protocol within 12 months. The NJPP should include:

- A national risk registry for journalists facing documented threats.
- A dedicated prosecution track for cases involving physical violence against journalists, with mandatory 90-day reporting on case progress.

6. International Accountability

The international community cannot continue to provide budget support and democratic governance funding to Somalia while simultaneously receiving reports of journalists having their hair forcibly shaved and being made to sign pledges of silence by the national army. SOMWA calls for:

- Conduct a formal assessment on press freedom and submit the findings to the Human Rights Council and international human right advocates.
- A formal request to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights to hear cases involving the unresolved killing of journalist Abshir Khaliif Shidane and others.
- Conditionality in international funding agreements — sustained press freedom violations should trigger formal diplomatic review of bilateral and multilateral partnerships.

Conclusion

Between January and April 2025, Somalia's journalists did not fail their country. The country's institutions failed them. Journalists were beaten in the streets, locked out of newsrooms, humiliated in custody, and killed. Women journalists were smeared with fabricated sexual allegations for doing nothing more than covering a political event. And on Facebook, extortionists ran a coordinated ransom operation against the country's most trusted media brands.

SOMWA is not here to repeat these facts as a monument to despair. We are here because we believe Somalia can do better — and because we know what doing better looks like. It looks like independent oversight commissions with real power. It looks like security forces that protect journalists instead of beating them. It looks like technology companies take seriously their responsibility not to be weaponized against the free press. It looks like an international community that holds its partners to account.

World Press Freedom Day is not a celebration. Not yet — not in Somalia. It is a deadline. For the government, for the security agencies, for the technology platforms, and for the international community: the time for statements has passed. What Somali journalists need — what they deserve — is action.

Silence is not an option. Not for SOMWA. Not for Somali journalists. And not, any longer, for those who have the power to protect them.



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