

H.E President Ahmed Mohamed Mahmoud Silanyo  
President, Republic of Somaliland  
(cc: Mr Abdullahi Mohamed Dahir, Information Minister)

16<sup>th</sup> November 2014

**Re: Media freedom in Somaliland: the arrest of reporters from Horn Cable TV and SomSat TV**

Dear Mr President,

I write once again as the Vice-Chair of Somaliland Focus (UK) concerning the arrest in Gabiley on the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> October of reporters Mukhtar Nouh Ibrahim from Horn Cable TV, and Mohamed Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud from SomSat TV. Since 2005 Somaliland Focus (UK) has been making the case for wider international awareness of Somaliland and its democratic process. We have done this by acting as joint coordinators of the international observers to Somaliland's elections in 2005, 2010 and 2012, and through our involvement with UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for Somaliland and Somalia. All these years we've been proud to be associated with the achievements of Somaliland, and we hope to continue to be involved in the 2015 elections and beyond.

Over the last two years we have written a number of open letters to you and to Somaliland government officials on the harassment and intimidation of news media members in Somaliland. Most recently, we referred to the indefinite suspension by the police of the Haatuf newspaper and its sister English-language weekly, Somaliland Times, and the targeting of the Hubaal newspaper, which saw its office in Hargeysa attacked and its staff imprisoned and released.

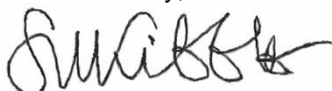
The arrest of the two reporters last month is part of a long chain of incidents, which have seen journalists arrested, imprisoned and intimidated for reporting unfavourably on the government. In this case, the journalists had allegedly reported on an anti-government rally in Gabiley which coincided with the Kulmiye party conference. As in previous cases, the reporters from Horn Cable TV and SomSat TV were arrested, charged with making false accusations and defamation, and their report denied. Once again, these incidents of harassment and intimidation of the media constitute a major breach of the freedom of the press explicitly protected by law in Somaliland. We note and support the statements made against the arrests by both the Somaliland Journalists' Association and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

These events cast doubt on the independence of the judiciary, and are contrary to the constitution and some of the hard gains Somaliland has made since independence. In view of the elections scheduled for June 2015, the incidents damage the country's international credibility and reputation, as well as its claims for international recognition. If continued, the harassment of the media might also undermine the campaign leading up to the elections themselves. They jeopardise Somaliland's continued transition to a multi-party democracy to which you have committed yourselves.

News in recent days of the deployment of the Rapid Response Unit to Parliament at a time of heightened tension over a proposed removal of the Speaker of the House adds further to the creation of a perception that Somaliland is taking retrograde steps.

With the journalists' court case due to resume on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> November we urge you to release the journalists, and to conduct a proper investigation into the allegations of defamation and false accusation. We further urge you to insist that your government pays full heed to the need to act with due process and proportionality in political dealings. A free media, an independent judiciary and an effective parliament are each key to a vibrant and democratic society; a fact that is particularly important in the lead up to what we hope will be free and fair elections in 2015.

Yours faithfully,



**Dr Steve Kibble**  
**Vice-Chair, Somaliland Focus (UK)**