

Press freedom is limited in Somaliland, which has declared independence from Somalia but lacks international recognition. Although security conditions in the region were far better than in the rest of the country in 2014, the Somaliland government carried out several arrests and detentions of journalists, and shuttered multiple media outlets for their critical reporting.

Legal Environment

The Somaliland constitution guarantees freedoms of speech and of the press. According to the 2004 Press Law, defamation and libel are not criminal offenses; aggrieved parties may seek redress in civil courts, and disputes are sometimes settled through a clan-based system of arbitration. However, authorities have ignored this legislation and prosecuted journalists for defamation and libel under the penal code.

In May 2014, as part of a broader crackdown on the Haatuf Media Network, police detained Yusuf Abdi Gabobe and Ahmed Ali Igeh—the chairman and a chief editor, respectively—on charges of publishing false news and insulting officials through a series of reports that alleged corruption in government ministries. In June, Gabobe was sentenced to three years in prison, while Igeh received four years. Both were released in July under a presidential pardon.

Ahmed Adan Robleh, editor of Baligubadle Online Media, was arrested in July and accused of spreading false information about the president's health; he was released on bail after several days in detention. In October, authorities arrested two journalists from the television stations SomSat TV and HornCable TV and charged them with defamation and publishing false information in their coverage of a protest in the northwestern town of Gabiley, during which participants set the flag of the ruling party on fire. Both were freed on bail in November.

There is no access to information law in Somaliland, and public officials often withhold information that is unfavorable to the government, though some journalists gain access through close relationships with politicians.

Government officials have argued that the Press Law—drafted by journalists—is excessively lax. In 2013, the government proposed a new version that was condemned by the private media and human rights advocacy groups, who said it had been drafted without sufficient public consultation. No progress on this legislation was reported in 2014.

Political Environment

Somaliland media outlets tend to be aligned with particular political or individual interests, though they generally share a proindependence agenda.

The Somaliland government under President Ahmed Mohamed Mahamoud Silanyo, who took office in 2010, has been accused of dealing harshly with the media, often summoning journalists for questioning at the Central Investigations Department, closing media outlets, or arresting journalists under various pretexts for relatively short periods of time.

In February 2014, the Ministry of Information revoked the license of the popular Universal TV for allegedly insulting the president. The London-based station's owner and press freedom advocates said the order was not issued legally, but the outlet nevertheless ceased broadcasting in Somaliland pending negotiations with the government. Mohamed Aabi, the Somaliland director of Universal TV, was arrested in July without explanation and released several days later.

In March, police raided and shut down *Haatuf*, the Somali-language newspaper of the Haatuf Media Network. Under a court order in April, telecommunications companies blocked the paper's website, along with that of its English-language sister paper, *Somaliland Times*. The media group's license was revoked in June.

Despite such harassment by the authorities, violence against journalists in Somaliland is relatively rare, and no deaths or serious injuries were reported in 2014.

Economic Environment

The number of newspapers in Somaliland fluctuates, as some publish intermittently, although there are usually about 10 in regular operation. Newspaper reporting is often critical of the government but has limited reach due to the relatively high cost of papers and low levels of literacy.

Radio remains the most accessible and widely used medium for news in Somaliland. The establishment of independent radio stations is banned, and the region's government has been reluctant to liberalize the sector, citing the danger that stations could instigate clan violence; some people in Somaliland support this argument, given the role of radio in the conflict in south-central Somalia. The government has long maintained that it will issue licenses as soon as the proper legislation is in place.

Government-owned Radio Hargeisa is the main FM station, although the British Broadcasting Corporation is available. There has been a small but notable growth in internet-based radio stations operating both within Somaliland and among the diaspora. There is one government-owned television station, Somaliland National Television. A number of Somali-language satellite stations, such as HornCable TV and Universal TV, broadcast from the Middle East and London, as do private terrestrial stations, which are both accessible and influential.

Internet penetration and especially mobile-phone usage have been on the rise in recent years. In Somalia as a whole, only about 1.6 percent of the population accessed the internet in 2014, but there were nearly 51 mobile subscriptions for every 100 residents, raising the prospects of future growth in mobile internet services.

Given the small advertising market, most local media outlets are not self-sustaining and must be heavily subsidized by the diaspora, political parties, or businesses. Many journalists and outlets are not transparent about their sources of funding.