



**ASSESSMENT OF MEDIA DEVELOPMENT AND FREE
EXPRESSION MONITORING ACTIVITIES IN
SOMALIA**

&

**Recommendations of a strategy and outline of a
workplan for cooperation among Somalia-based
press freedom, media and human rights
organizations.**

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1.0 Introduction

Under an agreement of collaboration, the International Media Support (IMS), the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), and the Media Foundation for West Africa, are to work with Somalia-based press freedom, media, and human rights organisations for the development of a long-term free expression and press freedom strategy for Somalia.

The object of the collaboration is to assist the Somali organisations produce a strategy and workplan for cooperation among them so they can develop a sustainable, inclusive free expression monitoring activity. The IMS, the IFEX and the MFWA are also to work with the Somali organisations to formulate an advocacy strategy and a programme for developing a framework for a democratic media law and policy for post-conflict Somalia.

Since 2002, the three organisations have collaborated with the East Africa Media Institute, Somalia branch, to implement a media rights monitoring project which started in May of 2003. One of the mission's concerns was to make an assessment of the progress of this project, and of the EAMI-S's capacity to expand and sustain it.

1.1 The mission's assignment

To obtain information based on which to make recommendations for strategies and work plans to pursue these objectives, the MFWA visited Mogadishu on July 24-29, 2004. The visit provided an opportunity to meet people working hard for peace and for rights and freedoms, and to discuss with them the state of existing organisations, their strengths and limitations, their current activities, media rights monitoring projects, and the grounds for collaboration.

In summary, the mission's assignment was to:

- i. Assess current media development in Somalia (precisely Mogadishu, the capital)
- ii. Assess the free expression monitoring project of the EAMI-S
- iii. Assess free expression monitoring activities of other organisations in Somalia
- iv. Observe current and potential roles of human rights, media and other civil society organisations in promoting freedom of expression in Somalia
- v. Possibilities of expanding monitoring activities to other parts of the country beyond Mogadishu
- vi. Discuss with Somali organisations possibilities and strategy for cooperation in monitoring and in advocacy and other activities to promote freedom of expression in Somalia, and to
- vii. Work with the EAMI-S and other organisations to develop work plans to pursue the tasks and objectives outlined.

The mission covered only Mogadishu, principally because of the short period of time. This report therefore has no first-hand information regarding the other parts of the country where dominant political actors have declared autonomous "self-governing" authorities. References, however, will be made to these provinces regarding the expansion of the programmes and activities for freedom of expression to encompass all of Somalia.

2.0 Political background

The political situation in Somalia continues to be characterised by division and factional tensions and intense contest for political power. Overall, the war has abated considerably and there is a prevailing cessation of armed hostilities over most parts of the country. Occasional sporadic armed clashes erupt between militias and factional forces, but these are usually isolated incidents. However, in the absence of a central government, formal peace and political solutions, the security situation continues to be precarious, dangerous and unpredictable.

2.1

In Somaliland, according to all the people spoken to, including the authoritative Centre for Research and Dialogue and human rights organisations, a generalised atmosphere of peace prevails and some sense of order has been restored since the secession in 1991. In Puntland also, a modicum of order and some peace exist, and organized armed violence is minimal or not a regular occurrence.

2.2

In both, however, democratic governance does not exist institutionally and in day-to-day management of public life is not much to write home about. Very little by way of development reconstruction and rebuilding of public institutions takes place. In both, therefore, very little structural and political foundations exist to maintain and expand the peace and to prevent the regions from future violent and political breakdown. The authorities are arbitrary establishments.

2.3

The important difference between the two self-proclaimed autonomous regions is that, the Puntland administration welcomes reintegration for national unity, while the political leadership of Somaliland insists on secession.

3.0 The search for peace (talks)

3.1

It is recorded that since 1991, thirteen conferences have been held to find peace and reconciliation for Somalia. Not only has there been no reconciliation and peace among the warlords and factional political leaders, most of the talks have resulted in various kinds of division and tensions. For example: in 1991 the secession of the Somaliland republic followed a peace conference in Djibouti, and the Puntland self-proclaimed autonomous administration was established soon after a national reconciliation conference in Cairo.

3.2

However, it is generally appreciated that the March 2000 conference of Somalis in Djibouti was a major advance in the country's search for peace and political order. This conference is usually referred to as the *Arta* Conference. Though this also was followed by attempts to set up another regional administration in some southwestern districts, it produced the first important political framework that serves as a useful point of reference for many civil society advocates consulted in the mission.

3.3

The *Arta* conference, after several months, produced a Transitional National Charter. It also produced a Transitional National Government recognised by the UN and other inter-state organisations, and a Transitional National Assembly, all based in the capital Mogadishu. The TNG, however, lost its authority and political legitimacy before the end of its 3-year term. It was unable to unite the regions, establish democratic governance institutions and functioning administrative structures, and accomplish the tasks assigned and expected of it by the conference.

3.4

At the time of this mission (July, 2004) the latest round of peace talks were going on intensely in Nairobi hosted by the government of Kenya. The attitude of all the people spoken with is one of cautious "hoping". There is some expectation that some form of "government" may emerge this time. Nobody expects the self-proclaimed Somaliland republic to abandon its stance on secession. But there appears to be an anticipation for some government structure for Mogadishu and the regions generally surrounding it in the south-central provinces.

3.5

In anticipation of this, the persistent concern among the civil society movement is how the organisations can position themselves in the coming months to safeguard and protect citizens' rights and freedoms under any new political situation. For, there is a widespread apprehension that any new government will be strongly disposed to suppressing rights and to roll back what "freedoms" people enjoy as a result of the absence of a government. All the media professionals and media organisations express this sentiment very strongly.

4.0 Media development

4.1

The media situation in Somalia today is mixed, shaped primarily by the political divisions the country has. The political fortunes of the different regions also dictate the state of freedom of expression prevailing in each of the divisions.

Following the outbreak of the civil war and the disintegration of the state in Somalia, the former state-controlled media also ceased functioning. New privately owned radio stations and newspapers were set up. But these initial civil war media, according to the Centre for Research and Dialogue (CRD), "became mouthpieces for the clan-based warlords who resorted to fighting each other for power."¹

Nowadays, according to the CRD, the media, particularly in the south-central regions and including Mogadishu, have shed off their "earlier warmongering" and have contributed very well to "conflict prevention and resolution, creating a neutral political space in which communities exchange comments and views, and advocating for human rights. In general, the media in the region have played a vital role in the peace processes."

¹ Center for Research and Dialogue. *Somalia: Path to Recovery Building a Sustainable Peace*. Mogadishu. July 2004. pp.37-38.

The Internet has become a major outlet for media activity, both print and sound. The operators are both within Somalia and among the large exile communities abroad in Europe, North America or in the Gulf region. Many of these sites, according to different persons interviewed, disseminate clan-based information or push the political agenda of the clan the operators belong to.

4.2 The situation in Puntland and Somaliland

Because of very limited time, the visit was confined to Mogadishu. Therefore, the report presents no important information on developments in these regions. Any references at all are not based on first-hand information. However, recommendations making references to these areas will be made in relation to issues that concern Somalia as a united, reconciled, democratic entity.

In the self-proclaimed Somaliland republic and Puntland, attempts have been made to define the media's freedom, role and limits in legal or policy documents. Article 51 of the constitution of Somaliland provided for the freedom of the media to operate freely. The Puntland administrative authority also provided initially a proclamation for press freedom.

In practice, however, press freedom is severely limited in the two provinces. Pluralism is severely restricted. Particularly both have not allowed private radio stations to operate within their realms of control. Worse of all, the authorities in these regions regularly attack and abuse the rights of journalists with impunity. Press freedom monitoring by EAMI-S and SOJON report regularly of press freedom violations.

In 2000 the Puntland administration decreed a press law that, according to SOJON, made the province "the worst place for journalists to work in Somalia". Early this year, 2004, the Somaliland authority introduced a press law described as "repressive" by SOJON.

4.3 Mogadishu

Mogadishu is the capital of Somalia, and is located in the south central region of the country. But in the order of things, the capital's jurisdiction does not cover the entire country. In the area of Mogadishu, a Transitional National Government confronting a vibrant human rights and civil society movement has been unable to impose its will to silence expression and press freedom as it would have liked to do. In this atmosphere, no legal and policy framework, nor regulatory regimes and institutions prevail to determine for media any parameters for operation or any restrictions on their freedoms.

This, however, does not assume the media enjoy unencumbered freedom. The existence of the media since the civil war started has always been threatened by the unpredictable violence of warlords and their militias. (For more information on the insecurity of media and journalists, see IMS report) An attempt by the TNG to impose a draconian press law was strongly resisted by the media and civil society groups in 2002. The law was withdrawn.

4.4 (a) Broadcasting

There are currently **** radio and *** television stations operating in Mogadishu. They all claim to be independent of the clan-based political factions and of the TNG in the capital. They are all commercial stations and were set up by private individuals in partnership ventures. Invariably, the investments in radio and television were mostly mobilized from entrepreneurs living in the diaspora.

The managers or the representatives of the stations say the economics of running broadcasting are strenuous. Radio Benadir director, Mr. ***, for example, said that his station was running about 40% deficit in recurrent expenditure. Fuel to generate electricity and staff salaries, according to the managers, appear to be the biggest expenditure. They state that their sources of income are primarily the limited advertising market and subsidies from the owners. Some of the principal advertising sources are the telecommunications and money transfer companies.

The stations employ many people. Benadir Radio for instance, according to the management, employs 25 people.

4.5 (b) Print

The A-4-size four-page newsletters going for newspapers are numerous and are operated by as many persons. Rough estimates by members of the Somali Independent Newspapers Association (SOINA) put the number of the newsletters in the dozens. Each one however brings together small groups of journalists, mostly young, who have little or no formal training.

The producers of the publications and the journalists include an encouraging number of young active and eager women. There are active women's rights organisations, and many appear to put out their own newsletters too.

The newsletters generally carry no advertising, and make virtually no money from sales. All the journalists interviewed put average circulation from below 200 to an exceptional occasional 500. Of this low circulation level, the publishers say that vendors deprive them of the cover price. According to the complaint, vendors rent out the copies of the papers and return them at the end of the day as unsold. Salaries are difficult to come by, since these operations make next-to-nothing.

4.6 (c) Training activities

Everybody acknowledges that one of the critical needs of the Somali media is training to improve the professional capacity and skills of journalists. There are reports that some training programmes have been organised for journalists in the past year or so. How many have been held and by whom were not easily ascertained. Similarly, the relevance and effectiveness of these activities were not ascertained.

Some media houses, such as HornAfrik, engaged in extensive in-house training programmes for their staffs.

The BBC also initiated a training programme which is said to be still in existence, but feedback regarding the people's assessment of it was not sought for.

The SOJON executives reported that they held eight training activities and seminars in 2003 and two so far in 2004. These included an AIDS awareness programme for media supported by the CIDA office in Nairobi, and web maintenance skills supported by NOVIB.

4.7 (d) Some new projects and plans

- i. Dr. Omar Qadi, former training director at HornAfrik and currently with the University of Mogadishu, confirmed reports from EAMI-S and others that the university was starting a Journalism Department at the undergraduate level. Dr. Qadi has been appointed the head of the new programme. The course is scheduled to start with a first batch of some 25 students in September this year.
- ii. A group of the editor/publishers of the newsletters in Mogadishu, who are also members of the EAMI-S executive and also lead the young Somali Independent Newspapers Association (SOINA), informed me that they were holding discussions among themselves to draw up plans for an investment to publish proper newspapers. These men plan to start by combining their newsletters. They would then consult business persons who might be interested in investing in the venture. They would also send their business plan to international organisations for support.

5.0 Organisations met

Meetings and discussions were held with representatives or the executives of the following media, media organisations, and human rights and civil society groups and organisations.

5.1 Media houses

1. HornAfrik Radio and Television
2. Benadir Radio
3. IQK Radio.
4. Newsletters including the following: Qaran; Xoriyadda; Ayaamaha; Mogadishu Times; Sunday Independent Sanca; Wageyska Bilan.

5.2 Media organisations

East Africa Media Institute, Somali (EAMI-S)
Somali Journalists Network (SOJON)
Somalia Independent Newspapers Association (SOINA)
Somali Women Journalists Association (SOWJA)
Somali Women's Press Association (SOWPA)

5.3 Human rights and civil society organisations

Somali Human Rights Defenders (a coalition of 9 groups)
Peace Line
Coalition of Grassroots Women's Organisations (COGWO)
Somali Law Society
Centre for Research and Dialogue

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