

## **Declaration by a Forum Discussion on Freedom of Media in Somaliland**

On 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017, a Forum Discussion on freedom of media has taken place in Hargeisa, the capital of the Republic of Somaliland. Journalists, civil society organizations, professionals, the three political parties (Kulmiye, Waddani and UCID) and government officials participated the forum. The participants were sixty people representing all the regions of Somaliland, namely Hargeisa, Togdheer, Sanaag, Sool, Awdal and Sahil.

The Forum extensively and deeply analysed the legal, economic and professional challenges facing freedom of media in Somaliland. After two days of candid discussions, the participants agreed the decriminalization of media, and acknowledged that media issues are complex and require all stakeholders to take their part in its development. The forum was hosted by Human Rights Centre with the support of the International Media Support (IMS). Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA) helped in organizing the event.

Finally, the Forum made the following recommendations:

1. The Constitution which is the supreme law of the land and the Press Act shall be applied on all media related issues;
2. The outdated Penal Code which is incompatible with the constitution and the democratic system of Somaliland shall not be applied on the media;
3. Any case against a journalist shall be initiated and handled in accordance with the civil laws;
4. An independent commission formed by a law shall be established to hear complaints against journalists;
5. The Press Act shall be amended;
6. The independence of the media shall be fully respected;
7. A mechanism and procedure of registration of journalists shall be established to provide certifications to the journalists;
8. The current registration of media houses shall be made in a good faith and all obstacles shall be removed;
9. A school or university faculty teaching journalism shall be established;
10. The journalists and media houses shall respect the rights of other citizens, professionalism and ethics of journalism;
11. A dialogue between the government and the journalists shall be made to resolve and clarify the misunderstanding between the government and the journalists;
12. The media owners shall give salaries to the journalists who work for them, and the rights and protection granted by the Labour Law to employees shall be given to the journalists;
13. The awareness of the society on the freedom of media shall be increased;
14. The civil society organizations shall fully support the freedom of media and journalists which are cornerstone for civic space;
15. The international community shall support the freedom of media and the journalists;
16. The Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA) shall be supported to capacitate to carry out its work;
17. The challenges specially facing female journalists shall be removed and better friendly environment shall be created for female journalists;

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