

# Somaliland court suspends newspaper for one year for publishing 'false news'

The Committee to Protect Journalists has expressed deep concern about a one-year suspension imposed by a Somaliland court on the privately owned Foore newspaper, and called on authorities to drop the charges on appeal.



A young man looks through a book at the Hargeisa International Book Fair in the Somaliland capital of Hargeisa on July 21, 2018. Somaliland authorities recently issued a one-year suspension of the privately owned Foore newspaper. Credit: CPJ/Mustafa Saeed/AFP).

On February 10, a regional court in the breakaway state of Somaliland ordered *Foore* to suspend publishing for one year and fined its editor-in-chief three million Somaliland shillings (\$300), following a conviction for publishing "false news" and anti-national propaganda, according to a copy of the judgment shared with CPJ by the Somaliland Journalists Association and *Foore* Editor-in-Chief Mohamed Mohamud Yusuf, who spoke with CPJ.

The charges relate to *Foore's* coverage of the Somaliland government, including an October 11, 2018, story on the construction of a new presidential palace, according to the judgment and Mohamed.

Mohamed told CPJ that the one-year ban would severely damage the publication, which employs eight journalists and publishes five issues a week. He said *Foore* plans to file an appeal.

"Somaliland is using problematic sections of the penal code on false news and propaganda to hack away at the basic freedoms the press needs to hold government leaders accountable. The ruling against the *Foore* newspaper sets a

dangerous precedent that anyone questioning the state's version of the truth can expect to pay a heavy price," said CPJ's Sub-Saharan Africa representative, Muthoki Mumo. "We call on Somaliland authorities to uphold press freedom by dropping these charges on appeal."

The attorney general's office alleges that in its October 2018 report, *Foore* described public buildings under construction as the property of individuals, and had therefore published baseless information meant to incite the public against the government, according to court documents seen by CPJ.

The article in question was about the construction of a new presidential palace, according to Mohamed and Yahye Mohamed, executive director of the Somaliland Journalists Association, and [a statement](#) from the rights group Human Rights Center Somaliland.

Further, authorities claim that, by contrasting the palace's luxury with the poverty seen in the rest of Somaliland, *Foore* had spread "anti-national propaganda," according to court documents, Mohamed, and [a post-trial statement](#) by the president of the regional court, Judge Ahmed Dalmar Ismail, which was posted on YouTube.

In a February 11 WhatsApp message to CPJ, Ahmed said that the *Foore* had been unable to prove its critique of the government and that all procedures had been followed in the case.

The court cited not only the edition of *Foore* in which the report on the presidential palace was published, but two other earlier editions, according to a copy of the judgment. In his post-trial statement, Ahmed said that, in at least four instances over the last four years, the paper had failed to substantiate reports it published. However, Mohamed told CPJ that these old cases had long since been resolved out of court.

On February 10, Mohamed was detained for about five hours by Criminal Investigation Department police, until *Foore* paid the fine with the assistance of the Somaliland Journalists Association, he told CPJ.

Somaliland Attorney General Hassan Ahmed Aden did not respond to a CPJ email sent on February 11.

In 2017 and 2018, [CPJ documented](#) orders for critical publications in Somaliland to close; an [internet shutdown](#); and [arbitrary arrests](#) and [detentions](#) of [journalists](#).

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