



DEFEND DEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

UN Human Rights Council – 45th regular session Item 10: Interactive dialogue with the Independent Expert on Somalia Oral statement

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Thank you, Madam President.

Madam Dyfan: we welcome you and wish you all the best in your new role. Somalia needs the ongoing support of the Independent Expert. We stress the importance of your proposed transition plan and encourage a detailed benchmarking effort on the seven priority areas identified, as well as enhanced public advocacy on women's and girls' rights, civic space, and justice and accountability.

We agree with the analysis of positive developments and ongoing challenges, as well as emerging ones, such as COVID-19 and natural disaster, outlined in your report. We welcome the high level of cooperation of the Somali authorities with the UN system and their constructive engagement regarding Council resolutions. This is the right signal to the international community.

We would like to highlight a number of issues that require the Council's attention. First, human rights defenders (HRDs), journalists, and other independent actors face risks and threats, some of them deadly, deriving both from the security situation and from deliberate attacks on civic space. We urge authorities to stop using vague and overly broad provisions of the Criminal Code to stifle independent reporting. Instead, we stress that the public commitment of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo" to reform outdated criminal law provisions and to end the administration's use of criminal law against journalists should be fulfilled. We urge a review of the Media Law Amendment Bill.

Second, regarding the cross-cutting issue of access to justice, we highlight the findings of our December 2019 [report](#), "Navigating Justice." Lawyers play a vital role in ensuring that citizens can claim their rights and access redress, especially as they navigate formal and informal/traditional legal systems. Here too, an open civic space that guarantees respect for the rights to free opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association is key. Somali authorities must conduct thorough investigations into all allegations of human rights violations.

Lastly, we follow up on the [open letter](#) our Executive Director sent at the end of 2019: we encourage Somalia to reflect on its voting record and reconsider choices, including on country-specific resolutions and on thematic issues, starting with amendments to Council resolutions on women's and girls' rights.

Thank you.