



# DEFENDDEFENDERS

East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project

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## The international community maintains its support to, and scrutiny of, Somalia

**Geneva-Kampala, 6 October 2020** — Through a resolution adopted at the close of the 45<sup>th</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), the international community signalled its willingness to support Somalia and maintain scrutiny of the country's human rights situation ahead of the historic 2021 elections. DefendDefenders welcomes the step taken, including the renewal of the mandate of the UN Independent Expert on the country.

**"We welcome the high level of cooperation of the Somali government with the UN human rights system,"** said Hassan Shire, Executive Director, DefendDefenders. **"Somali authorities and civil society, including human rights defenders and journalists, need the ongoing support and advice of the Independent Expert."**

The resolution, which was jointly prepared by the Federal Government of Somalia and the United Kingdom with the support of partners, highlights key human rights issues in the country. It recognises the government's efforts to improve the security and human rights situation, the key role played by the African Union Mission in the country (AMISOM), and outlines positive developments. These include, among others, the adoption of the Electoral Law, the appointment of a Special Prosecutor to investigate the killings of journalists, and the work undertaken by the Ministry for Women and Human Rights Development.

The resolution draws the attention of the HRC to ongoing grave human rights violations and challenges committed in the country, including extrajudicial killings and excessive use of force against civilians, sexual and gender-based violence, abuses committed against children, in particular girls and children recruited in armed conflict, attacks against and harassment of human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists, and undue restrictions to freedom of opinion and expression, amid insecurity due to terrorist activities by Al-Shabaab. The resolution raises specific concern over the amended Media Law, which provides for imprisonment as a punishment for media-related offences, and over the culture of impunity prevailing in the country.

Ahead of the session, DefendDefenders advocated for the HRC to extend the Independent Expert's mandate and pushed states to ensure an increased focus on the situation of HRDs, journalists, and civic space in Somalia. During the session, DefendDefenders outlined key human rights issues and [encouraged](#)<sup>1</sup> the Independent Expert to develop detailed benchmarks on the priority areas she identified as part of her "transition plan" for Somalia.



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Earlier in 2020, we [called](#)<sup>2</sup> on Somali authorities to fully uphold freedom of expression, as the working environment for journalists and HRDs has deteriorated despite a public commitment by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmaajo” to reform outdated provisions in the Criminal Code and to end the administration’s use of criminal law against journalists.

— ENDS —

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<sup>1</sup> DefendDefenders, “DefendDefenders’ oral statements at HRC45,” <https://defenddefenders.org/defenddefenders-oral-statements-at-hrc45/> (accessed on 6 October 2020). Statement on Somalia delivered on 2 October 2020.

<sup>2</sup> DefendDefenders, “Somalia: respect journalists’ work, ensure safe space for free expression,” 5 april 2020, <https://defenddefenders.org/somalia-respect-journalists-work-ensure-safe-space-for-free-expression/> (accessed on 6 October 2020).