

Djibouti: The Union for National Salvation (Union pour le salut national, USN) coalition, including the parties in the union, its objectives and its activities; the treatment of USN members and supporters by the state (2011-February 2014)

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1. USN

The USN is a coalition of Djiboutian opposition parties (FIDH 17 July 2013; IFES n.d.a; IPU 16 June 2013). According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international organization of parliaments established in 1889 for worldwide parliamentary dialogue and co-operation among people (ibid. n.d.), the USN was created in 2013 when the opposition forces came together under

the same banner to take part in the legislative elections of 22 February 2013 (ibid. 16 June 2013). The opposition had not participated in any legislative election since 2003 (ibid.; AU [2013], 7).

International observers, including the African Union, the Arab League and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, described these legislative elections as [translation] "transparent" (Jeune Afrique 5 July 2013; AllAfrica 26 Feb. 2013). The opposition disputed the results (Sabahi 1 March 2013; FIDH 28 Feb. 2013; AFP 28 Feb. 2013).

According to some sources, the USN won 10 seats in those elections (IPU 16 June 2013; EHAHRDP Apr. 2013, 7; Djibouti n.d.). However, the United States Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook states that the USN won 16 seats (US 24 Jan. 2014), while the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), an international non-profit organization that supports the emergence of democratic societies in more than 20 countries (IFES n.d.b), states that the USN won 21 seats (ibid. n.d.a).

According to the IPU, which states that the USN won 10 seats, the 10 elected refused to [IPU English version] "take up their parliamentary seats" (16 June 2013). Similarly, an article published on 5 July 2013 by Jeune Afrique states that the 10 USN members still refused to take up their seats.

1.1 USN Composition

According to sources, the USN is made up of the following parties:

Republican Alliance for Development (Alliance républicaine pour le développement, ARD) (US 24 Jan. 2014; IFES n.d.a);

Union for Democracy and Justice (Union pour la démocratie et la justice, UDJ) (ibid.; US 24 Jan. 2014);

National Democratic Party (Parti national démocratique, PND) (ibid.; IFES n.d.a);

Djibouti Development Party (Parti djiboutien pour le développement, PDD) (ibid.; US 24 Jan. 2014);

Movement for Development and Liberty (Mouvement pour le développement et la liberté, MoDeL) (FIDH 21 Mar. 2013; IFES n.d.a);

Movement for Democratic Renewal and Development (Mouvement pour le renouveau démocratique et le développement, MRD [or MRDD]) (ibid.);

Democratic Renewal Party (US 24 Jan. 2014);

Unified Democratic Centre (Centre démocrate unifié, CDU) (USN 17 March 2013);

RAAD (Somalilandpress n.d.a).

1.2 USN Leaders and Members

Sources provide the following information about leading members of the USN and the constituent parties:

Ahmed Yousseuf Houmed is the president of ARD (US 24 Jan. 2014; PHW 2013, 400). According to the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH), an organization for the defence of civil and political rights (FIDH n.d.a) founded in 1922 (ibid. n.d.b), Ahmed Yousseuf Houmed is also the president of the USN (ibid. 17 July 2013).

The FIDH states that an official of ARD, Ali Mohamed Ali, is a member of the USN (17 July 2013).

The president of the UDJ is Ismail Guedi Hared (US 24 Jan. 2014; PHW 2013, 400).

Aden Robleh Awaleh is the president of the PND (US 24 Jan. 2014; PHW 2013, 400).

Mohamed Daoud Chehem is the president of the PDD (US 24 Jan. 2014; PHW 2013, 400).

Daher Ahmed Farrah is the president of the MRD (FIDH 17 July 2013; Xinhua 14 Jan. 2013; PHW 2013, 400). Ahmed Farrah is also the spokesperson of the USN (FIDH 17 July 2013; IPU 16 June 2013). Daher Ahmed Farrah returned to Djibouti in January 2013 after about ten years in exile in Europe (IPU 16 July 2013; Xinhua 14 Jan. 2013).

According to the FIDH, Yacin Doualeh Galad and Hassan Osman Allaleh are MRD and USN activists (17 July 2013).

According to the World Factbook, the president of MoDeL is Sheikh Guirreh Meidal (US 24 Jan. 2014). According to FIDH, Mr. Guirreh Meidal is also a senior USN official (13 June 2013). The FIDH also states that Adburahman Barkat God and Abdourhamn Souleiman Béchir are leaders of MoDel (28 Feb. 2013).

According to the World Factbook, the "Democratic Renewal Party" (PRD) is led by Abdillahi Hamariteh (US 24 Jan. 2014).

Omar Elmi Khaireh is the president of the CDU (FIDH 17 July 2013; USN 22 Nov. 2013). In an article published on 17 July 2013, the FIDH states that Mr. Khaireh is a [FIDH English version] "member of the leadership" of the USN. In a news release dated 22 November 2013, the USN states that Omar Elmi Khaireh is the vice-president of the coalition (USN 22 Nov. 2013).

Abdourahman Mohamed Guelleh is the president of the opposition party, RADD (FIDH 17 July 2013; Somalilandpress n.d.). He is also the USN secretary general (ARD 17 Nov. 2013; FIDH 17 July 2013). In the 17 July 2013 article, the FIDH states that two other members of the RADD leadership, Ali Mohamed Dato and Aden Dalieh Dirieh, are leaders of the USN.

The FIDH notes that Omar Yousseuf Moutena is a [FIDH English version] "USN MP" (17 July 2013).

1.3 USN Program

The objectives of the USN program are to

- combat social deprivation;
- rebuild the national economy and state finances;
- restore good governance and democracy;
- develop the regions;
- improve regional integration;
- adopt a responsible foreign policy (ARD 12 Feb. 2013).

2. Treatment of USN Members and Supporters

2.1 February-March 2013

In an undated article, the Association of Culture and Progress (Association cultures et progress, ACP), an organization that aims to use foreign policy and development cooperation to [translation] "contribute to improving living conditions for men and women" (ACP n.d.b), states that, on 5 February 2013, Daher Ahmed Farah was summoned to appear by the Intelligence and Documentation Services (services de renseignement et de documentation, SDR) of the police and was transferred to the Gadobe prison (ibid. n.d.a). The FIDH points out that, on 6 February 2013, nearly 300 people demonstrated for Ahmed Farah's release (13 June 2013). Demonstrators were arrested and released the same day (FIDH 13 June 2013). The FIDH states that at least five of those demonstrators remained in custody for two days (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

According to the FIDH, on 15 February 2013, one week before the legislative elections, three senior USN officials were arrested and questioned by the police before being released (ibid.). Those three MoDeL activists and USN members were [FIDH English version] "remanded by Djiboutian courts and condemned to 3 months of imprisonment" "for incitement to insurrection"; they were transferred to Gabode's prison (ibid. 28 Feb. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

A letter signed by the USN president and posted on the website of La Voix de Djibouti, a [translation] "free and independent radio station" that "aims to give a voice to people without voice in Djibouti" (La Voix de Djibouti n.d.), states that, during the legislative election voting on 22 February 2013, USN representatives were prevented from accessing the Obock constituency voting offices (USN 23 Feb. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Following the legislative elections, opposition supporters clashed with police (AFP 28 Feb. 2013; IHS Global Insight 27 Feb. 2013; Reuters 26 Feb. 2013). The Djiboutian government stated that, for security reasons, opposition members had not been authorized to demonstrate after the election (UN 8 July 2013). According to the president of the Observatory for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights (Observatoire pour la promotion de la démocratie et des droits de l'homme, ODDH),

an association created on 8 January 2012 to promote democracy (La Voix de Djibouti 15 Apr. 2012), quoted in a 27 February 2013 article, there was a strong police presence in Djibouti (Ouest France 27 Feb. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

An article in Le Monde on 9 March 2013 states that several opposition activists were killed by the police during demonstrations after the elections (9 Mar. 2013). Similarly, an article published on 29 March 2013 by the online magazine Think Africa Press points out that at least six demonstrators were killed since the beginning of the demonstrations and that hundreds of Djiboutians, including opposition leaders, have been arrested. The FIDH points out that 120 opposition supporters were arrested on the night of 24-25 February 2013 (21 Mar. 2013). They were detained at the [FIDH English version] Nagad "administrative detention centre" (FIDH 21 Mar. 2013). Seven other opposition activists arrested that same night could not be located, according to the FIDH (ibid.). Another article published by the FIDH on 18 March 2013 states that 90 political activists and supporters were still detained at the Gabode central prison in connection with the protests (ibid. 18 Mar. 2013, 2). The same article states that six people, including five opposition activists, were shot and killed by the Djiboutian authorities on 25 and 26 February 2013 (ibid.). One of the protesters killed was Youssouf Mahmoud Ahmed, of the USN (ibid. 28 Feb. 2013). Reuters states in a 12 April 2013 article that 14 members of the USN, who had been imprisoned following protests about the outcome of the elections, were released (12 Apr. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources state that key opposition figures were arbitrarily arrested (EHAHRDP Apr. 2013, 7; FIDH 21 Mar. 2013). The FIDH states that many USN representatives faced [FIDH English version] "arbitrary arrest ... acts of harassment and other kinds of intimidation" (21 Mar. 2013). The members of the opposition arrested and released that same day include Ahmed Youssouf Houmed, president of the USN, and Ismaël Guedi Hared, president of the UDJ and [FIDH English version] "head of the USN list for the ward of Djibouti-ville" (ibid.). An article posted on Sabahi, a news website about the Horn of Africa region and sponsored by the United States Africa [military] Command (Sabahi n.d.), points out that the two presidents were placed under house arrest (27 Feb. 2013).

The East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (EHAHRDP), an organization created in 2005 that seeks to support the work of human rights defenders (EHAHRDP n.d.), states that leaders of MoDeL were arrested following protests that took place after the elections (EHAHRDP Apr. 2013, 7). The president of MoDeL, Sougued Ahmed Robleh, was detained at the police station in the city of Hodane [in Djibouti-ville] with 30 other USN supporters (FIDH 21 Mar. 2013). An article published by Sabahi states that two other MoDeL leaders, Sheikhs Abdirahman Bashir [or cheikh Bachir Abdourahim] and Abdirahman God, were arrested on 25 February 2013 for "disturbing public order" (27 Feb. 2013). According to Reuters, police used tear gas to disperse protesters demanding the release of Sheikhs Abdirahman Bashir (26 Feb. 2013).

Radio France internationale (RFI) states that Daher Ahmed Farah was arrested on 4 March 2013 and accused of [translation] "provoking and inciting the rebellion" (17 Mar. 2013). According to the Belgian news agency Belga News Agency, Farah was sentenced in March 2013 to two months in prison following protests connected with the legislative elections (22 Mar. 2013). Similarly, the FIDH states that he was [FIDH English version] "sentenced to [two] months in prison" (18 Mar.

2013, 2-3). His lawyers announced that they would appeal the decision (FIDH 18 Mar. 2013, 3). Mr. Farah was released on 11 April 2013 (Sabahi 15 Apr. 2012). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 May-July 2013

Sources state that the USN communications officer, Maydaneh Abdallah Okieh, was sentenced to 45 days in prison and fined after being charged for posting a photograph of protesters on his Facebook page (RFI 30 May 2013; RSF 30 May 2013).

According to the FIDH, between 13 January 2013 and 13 June 2013, Mr. Ahmed Farah was arrested four times (13 June 2013). On 19 June 2013, he appeared before the Court of Appeal in Djibouti following an [FIDH English version] "appeal by soldiers close to ... the Army's second in command, regarding a 2003 libel trial that had been quashed and set aside by the Supreme Court in 2004" (FIDH 17 July 2013). According to Reporters without Borders (Reporters sans frontières, RSF), Mr. Farah is a victim of "politically-motivated harassment" (29 Apr. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the FIDH, on 23 June 2013, hundreds of USN supporters who had come to protest in support of three [FIDH English version] "political prisoners" were charged by a "large police presence" (FIDH 17 July 2013). The article also mentions the case of UDJ president, Ahmed Hoche Guedi, a USN member of parliament who it describes as a [FIDH English version] "prisoner... of conscience"; Ahmed Hoche Guedi served a sentence of "25 days in jail, and 11 month and 5 day suspended sentence" and paid a "heavy fine" following his conviction on 28 May 2013 (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the FIDH, USN activists Yacin Doualeh Galab and Osman Hassan Osman were arrested and sentenced to [FIDH English version] "shorter prison terms or suspended sentences" (ibid.). Mr. Doualeh Galab, an MRD and USN activist was arrested on 15 June 2013 by the police and sentenced three days later to a six-month suspended sentence (ibid.). During his detention, Mr. Doualed Galab was denied the assistance of counsel (ibid.). Osman Hassan Osman was arrested on 16 June 2013 by [FIDH English version] "forces looking for" his father, Hassan Osman Allaleh, an "active MRD and USN activist" (ibid.). Osman Hassan Osman was released on 18 June 2013 (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Sabahi, 13 members of the USN, including the USN president, were arrested in the neighbourhood of Warabaley, in the district de Balbala, during a coalition meeting on 2 June 2013 (6 June 2013). Two people were injured in the arrest (Sabahi 6 June 2013). The FIDH states also that, on 1 and 2 June 2013, 7 leaders and 18 activists of the USN were arrested in that same neighbourhood during internal political meetings in private homes (FIDH 17 July 2013). The following leaders were arrested:

Ahmed Youssouf Houmed

Omar Elmi Khaireh

Abdourahman Mohamed Guelleh

Ali Mohamed Dato

Aden Dalieh Dirieh

Omar Youssouf Moutena

Ali Mohamed Ali (ibid.).

The activists and leaders were released on 3 June 2013 (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to an article published by Sabahi, Daher Ahmed Farah, who had been arrested on 2 July 2013 for refusing to comply with a court order, was released on 14 August 2013 (19 Aug. 2013).

In a 17 July 2013 article, the FIDH points out that, since the legislative elections of 22 February 2013, the authorities had [FIDH English version] "severely repressed" opposition demonstrations and "arrested dozens and even hundreds of activists" (17 July 2013). In addition, [FIDH English version] "most" of the opposition leaders would face legal proceedings (FIDH 17 July 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.3 August-October 2013

According to two sources, a USN activist, Mohamed Elmi Rayale, died in Gabode prison on 29 August 2013 (FIDH 27 Jan. 2014; PR Newswire 30 Aug. 2013). According to PR Newswire, an international news agency (ibid. n.d.), the Gabode prison is [translation] "known for practising torture" (ibid. 30 Aug. 2013). Similarly, the FIDH states that [FIDH English version] "[a]cts of torture, as well as other inhuman and degrading treatment, are regularly reported in detention centres in Djibouti" (FIDH 27 Jan. 2014). The FIDH also states that, in recent years, [FIDH English version] "several" activists have died while in detention in Djibouti prisons (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.4 November 2013-January 2014

In a news release issued on 22 November 2013, the president of the USN stated that two members of the USN, MP Mohamed Daoud Chehem and Me Djama Amarreh Meidal, spent the night of 19 to 20 November 2013 in a detention centre of the Documentation and Security Service (Service de documentation et de sécurité, SDS) (USN 22 Nov. 2013). In the news release, the president of the USN stated that Omar Elmi Khaireh, president of the Unified Democratic Centre (Centre démocratique unifié, CDU) and vice-president of the USN, had been arrested on 21 November 2013 by SDS agents (ibid.). Information on whether these individuals were still detained could not be found

among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

An article published on 6 December 2013 by the website La Lettre de l'Océan indien states that the USN leaders had been [translation] "repeatedly" arrested and subjected to "various forms of pressure" (6 Dec. 2013). In addition, the Djiboutian government banned a public meeting of the USN that was supposed to be held on 6 December 2013, in front of the UDJ office (La Lettre de l'Océan indien 6 Dec. 2013).

Two media sources state that, on 16 January 2014, members of the USN were arrested and imprisoned in the Nagad detention facility (APO 17 Jan. 2014; RFI 17 Jan. 2014). During these arrests, there were altercations between the police and some USN activists; several people were injured (APO 17 Jan. 2014; RFI 16 Jan. 2014). According to RFI, the people arrested were released that same day (ibid.). Following those arrests, the USN headquarters was [translation] "vandalized by unidentified individuals" (APO 17 Jan. 2014).

The FIDH states that, on 23 January 2014, two USN elected members, Mahdi Ali Waberi and Ibrahim Dirir Farah, were arrested by police and released the same day (FIDH 31 Jan. 2014). According to the FIDH, those arrests occurred in a [FIDH English version] "climate of increased police and judicial repression against opposition parties"; the FIDH points out that, since December 2013, "dozens of opposition leaders and activists have been arrested and some even sentenced" (27 Jan. 2014). RFI states in a 7 February 2014 article that, in the preceding days, about 20 members of the opposition had been arrested and detained.

The president of the FIDH stated in a 27 January 2014 article that the Djiboutian [FIDH English version] "regime condemns, imprisons and harasses political opponents ... in alarming proportions" (27 Jan. 2014).

Two sources state that, on 1 February 2014, the Djiboutian president welcomed the USN vice-president, Adan Mohamed Abdou, in order to try to pull the country out of the [translation] "political crisis" affecting the country since the legislative elections (AllAfrica 6 Feb. 2014; AFP 5 Feb. 2014).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following organizations were unsuccessful: Association pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des libertés; Association pour le respect des droits de l'homme à Djibouti; Ligue djiboutienne des droits humains; Union pour le salut national.

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