

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	407
Land:	Somalia
Kilde:	United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Titel:	Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report – Country updates: Somalia
Udgivet:	18. juli 2013
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	29. august 2013

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- **Source:**
FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- **Title:**
Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Somalia
- **Publication date:**
18 July 2013
- **ecoi.net summary:** Quarterly updates on human rights situation [ID 244475]
- **Countries:**
Somalia
- **Original link** <http://www.hrdreport.fco.gov.uk/human-rights-in-countries-of-concern/somalia/quarterly-updates-somalia/?showall=1>

Recommended citation:

FCO - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office: Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Somalia, 18 July 2013 (available at ecoi.net)
http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/244475/366677_en.html (accessed 26 August 2013)



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Human Rights and Democracy: The 2012 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report - Country updates: Somalia

Latest update: 30 June 2013

The human rights situation in Somalia remains poor. However the Somalia Conference on 7 May, co-hosted by the Federal Government of Somalia and the UK, has led to renewed international focus on Somalia. We welcomed the Somali government's commitments, outlined in the Conference communiqué. This included:

- building accountable and professional military that respect a civilian chain of command, the rule of law, and human rights;
- equal access for all to a robust, impartial and effective justice system;
- an accountable, effective and responsive police service for Somalis;
- an effective and secure criminal justice system, including the establishment and maintenance of prisons administered with respect for human dignity, central to Somalia's ability to tackle crime in a human rights-compliant manner;
- transparent and effective public financial management systems and commitment to coordinate assistance using the structure set out by the Government; and
- a free and secure press.

We are now working with the Somali government to implement these plans.

At the Somalia Conference the Federal Government of Somalia signed a joint-communiqué with the UN, committing both to work together on preventing sexual violence in Somalia and welcoming a UN team of experts who will visit Somalia in late summer. The UK will work with the Somali government and the international community to facilitate this visit and implement the recommendations that result from their discussions. In the meantime DFID continues to help health workers to identify and refer women suffering harmful consequences of female genital mutilation to medical expertise.

However, Al Shabaab continue to demonstrate their ability to threaten peace and stability in Somalia with the large-scale attacks on the main court house in Mogadishu on 14 April, and most recently the UN compound on 19 June. Al Shabaab also attacked a Turkish Red Crescent convoy on 14 April and continues to target civilians, journalists, lawyers, international actors and religious minorities. These attacks hamper the ability of the international community to carry out their work in Somalia.

The situation for journalists in Somalia remains concerning. On 21 April, Mohamed Ibrahim Raage, who worked for Radio Mogadishu and Somali National Television, was shot outside his home in Mogadishu. In June, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists released a report detailing cases of eight Somali journalists whom they have assisted to flee Somalia in the last 12 months due to persecution. This followed the release of their impunity index for 2012 which ranked Somalia second in the world with 23 unsolved murders of journalist over the past decade. The Federal Government of Somalia has committed to investigate the murders of journalists, but there has been little progress on this.

Political tensions in Somalia are also affecting human rights. Continued uncertainty over the governance of regions in Somalia, particularly Jubaland in south central Somalia according to human rights watch reports, has led to civilians being caught between militia battles for control of the area.

Legislation to establish an independent National Human Rights Commission in Somalia is now with the Somali parliament. This body is expected to be the primary advocate of human rights within the Federal Government and will lead on the investigation of human rights violations including sexual violence against women and the killing of journalists.

The National Human Rights Commission was endorsed by the Human Rights Council in Geneva, which passed a resolution on Somalia during the June Session. This resolution called for the Federal Government to compile a human rights road-map by the end of 2013. The UK will continue to support Somalia in undertaking this work.

Update: 31 March 2013

The human rights situation in Somalia remains poor. The case of a woman who alleged she was raped and the journalist who investigated her case has been particularly prominent over the last three months. Initially five people were arrested in relation to the case, before the woman and the journalist were each sentenced to a year in prison. The woman was finally acquitted on appeal and the journalist shortly afterwards. Both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary raised concerns over this case with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud during his visit to the UK in February. The Minister for Africa, Mark Simmonds welcomed the conclusion of the case on 17 March and reiterated the UK's commitment to support the Federal Government of Somalia in improving Somalia's security and strengthening their police and justice systems. The case has highlighted problems with the Somali judicial system, including the length of pre-charge detention, access to lawyers, inconsistencies between charges, convictions and appeal verdicts, and freedom of expression.

The situation of journalists in Somalia continues to be of considerable concern as two more journalists have been killed this year, including the first female journalist to be killed, Rahmo Abdikadir. On 5 February, Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon (Saaid) announced a task force with a three month mandate which will investigate a broad range of human rights abuses, including the organised killing of journalists and sexual violence against women. The UK will be closely following the task force's progress.

In March Human Rights Watch released a report on the plight of women in internally displaced people's camps. It outlined abuses, including physical attacks, restrictions on movement and access to food and shelter and clan-based discrimination throughout 2012. Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud welcomed the report and has publicly reiterated his personal commitment to the restoration of civil security in Somalia and to holding to account any who are found abusing human rights. The UK remains committed to working with the Somali Government to develop professional, effective and accountable security forces, including improving human rights standards.

The Federal Government of Somalia has been taking steps to improve respect for human rights within the country. The Minister for Justice, Abdullahi Abyan Nur, put a draft bill to the Somali Parliament which aimed to establish a Human Rights Commission, although the bill was rejected on the basis that it did not comply with constitutional requirements and parliamentary rules of procedure. The Somali Parliament has established committees for justice, human rights, women's affairs and information and communication. These bodies will be important in pushing for the rights of vulnerable groups in Somalia.

The Governments of the UK and Somalia will co-host an international conference on Somalia on 7 May in the UK. The conference aims to provide international support for the Government of Somalia as they rebuild their country after two decades of conflict. The conference will focus on the priorities of the Federal Government of Somalia: security, justice, public financial management, political progress and preventing sexual violence.