

Independent daily suspended indefinitely in Somaliland

The acting attorney general in the semi-autonomous republic of Somaliland should withdraw his request to suspend the independent daily Hubaal, the Committee to Protect Journalists said on Thursday, 13 June 2013. A court ruled on Tuesday that the paper had been indefinitely suspended at the request of Aden Ahmed Mouse, according to news reports.

"Somaliland authorities often ignore their own legal system to censor the press, whether it is arbitrary detentions of journalists or, in this case, an arbitrary suspension order," said CPJ East Africa consultant Tom Rhodes. "If the authorities are serious about their desire for self-determination, then a functional justice system must be in place. The government must stop misusing its authority to censor critical news coverage. Aden Ahmed Mouse should withdraw his request for the suspension and allow Hubaal to resume publishing."

The regional court in the capital, Hargeisa, on Tuesday banned all Somali printing agencies and distributors from printing and circulating Hubaal, according to news reports. Hubaal's staff members were not notified of the suspension, and learned of the decision from an announcement on the state Radio Hargeisa, Hubaal editor, Hassan Hussein told CPJ. Security agents and police prevented Hubaal journalists from entering the station's office, citing the court order, Hassan said.

The court said that the paper had been suspended at the request of Aden, the acting attorney general, reports said. The reports did not offer further details. The attorney general's office has not released a statement about the suspension. CPJ's calls to the attorney general's office were not immediately returned.

Executives of the Hubaal News Network, which publishes Hubaal and the English-language daily The Independent, sought an explanation from the court and attorney general's office, but were denied, Hassan told CPJ.

The newspaper will appeal the decision to a higher court, Hassan said.

Journalists at Hubaal said they suspected the suspension was a result of their ongoing coverage of a construction dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia. Both countries are vying for political support from Somaliland, a close ally and strategic trading partner to landlocked Ethiopia, local journalists said. The sources said they suspected authorities feared any media coverage that could tarnish their relationship with Ethiopia.

Hubaal has also published some hard-hitting anti-corruption articles in the past, local journalists told CPJ. The coverage includes a number of articles that expose corruption within Somaliland's banking system.

Journalists are often harassed, arbitrarily detained, or attacked in Somaliland, according to CPJ research. In April, two assailants raided the Hubaal offices and shot at the owner and manager, Mohamed Ahmed, injuring his arm and hand, according to news reports. No charges have been brought to date.

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