

NUSOJ condemns 'communications law'

The National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) condemns latest moves contemplated to stifle and control freedom of expression, freedom of information and independent broadcasting following the announcement of completion of Somali telecommunications and broadcast media bill by the Ministry of Information, Telecommunications and Posts of Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

NUSOJ reveals that the process was not inclusive or sufficiently consultative and expresses its fears that the resultant legislation will be used to undermine independent broadcasting, disrespecting editorial independence, pluralism of broadcasting organisations, intercepting communication and hindering free flow of communication and information to the people of Somalia.

The union views the secretive appointment of a consultant by a UK based company, Albany Associates with the use of UN funds, at the request of the minister of information, telecommunications and posts as lacking transparency and validates the efforts to manipulate and produce repressive regulations that will have long-lasting, serious and negative impact on freedom of expression in Somalia.

Key stakeholders excluded

Moreover, a number of key stakeholders from the telecommunications and media sectors were not invited to make input in this critical process but only handpicked individuals to "rubber stamp" the process.

"We are of the view that the consultative process has not been inclusive and transparent and that there may have been a scheme to deliberately make the regulation a means of government control over communications and independent broadcasting," said Omar Faruk Osman, NUSOJ secretary general. "We believe that this is an approach of exerting government control over the private broadcast sector".

"Censor the content of broadcast media"

While the Ministry of Information fails to take forward the reformed draft media bill, and continues to arrange repressive attacks on journalists and their organisations, the ministry hurriedly goes for a process, which is meant, to specifically impose excessively harsh and severe regimes for the regulation of thriving private media broadcasting sector of Somalia.

The ministry foresees to establish a commission, which is feared to be tightly controlled and highly politicised institution. Broadcast media and journalists see that the ministry wants to have a stranglehold on the medium that serves as the primary source of news and information to the majority of Somalis.

One senior official at the Ministry of Information, Telecommunications and Posts informed NUSOJ on the condition of anonymity that the regulation is meant to "censor the content of broadcast media".

"This is a clear fight to weaken existence of a wide range of independent broadcasters and programming that represents and reflects Somali society as a whole," added Osman.

Law finalised

The Ministry of Information, Posts and Telecommunications of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) announced that the communications "law" for the Somali telecommunications and broadcasting industry had been "finalized" after a two day consultative meeting.

"Developing a stringent law in a mysterious manner demonstrates efforts to subject private broadcast media to a considerable political interference and censorship," added Osman.

"NUSOJ maintains that there has been no such 'broad consultation of the relevant stakeholders' as claimed by the Ministry, its funder and warns that the process is meant to undermine independent broadcasting and make it susceptible to government interferences" declared Osman.

NUSOJ expresses complete disapproval of efforts to put resources into development of regulation meant to curb media freedom, freedom of expression and free flow of information. The union will pursue organised and active campaign against the proposed repressive regulation.

Source: African Press Organisation

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