

Renewed objections to proposed media law

On Sunday, 21 July 2013, more than 100 journalists and media managers from broadcast, print and online media came together in Mogadishu to discuss the proposed new media law which was adopted by the Council of Ministers of Somalia, and they renewed their objections to the draft media law.



The participants of the meeting categorically stated that the proposed new media would impose potentially wide-ranging restrictions on freedom of the media and freedom of expression.

The current draft regulates and licenses all media, whether broadcast, print or web-based, whether public or privately owned. It forces journalists to reveal their confidential sources, while it requires media houses to reveal names of reporters whose names were concealed for genuine reason. It also grants broad powers to a new media authority - National Media Council - to enforce ill-defined standards.

The meeting unanimously decided to welcome improvements in the current draft with regard to elimination of heavy fines and imprisonment of journalists in comparison to December 2007 Media law but to oppose all restrictive articles and clauses in this draft law and provide the government an alternative text.

The vagueness and lack of clarity of several terms in the draft law is very concerning to the media community. There are also concerns about the independence of the National Media Council which will operate under auspices of the Ministry of Information. Ethics in journalism is restrictively specified in the draft, and journalists are strongly opposing this article.

Can be misused to curb alternative and differing voices

The media community considers that the draft media law can be misused to curb alternative and differing voices in Somalia for political reasons and editorial independence will not be guaranteed.

The media community strongly rejected assertions made by the Ministry of Information that the media was consulted with and provided inputs to the current draft law, and warned the dangerous move by officials within the government to use individuals who have no mandate to represent neither journalists nor media managers as camouflage.

"The Somali government must work with the media genuinely to bring this draft law in line with Constitution of Somalia and AU's Charter of Human Rights, a binding guarantee of freedom of expression. The current draft constitutes a potential threat to media freedom," said the concluding statement of the meeting.

The participants of the media further called on the Prime Minister of Somalia Abdi Shirdoon and the Minister of Information Abdulahi Ilmoge to make broad consultations with the media instead of talking to individuals whose aim to set the media against the government in their bid to undermine the interest of journalists, editors and media managers.

Journalists, editors, media managers and owners resolved to carry out cohesive campaign against restrictive articles of current draft.

"The Federal Government needs to provide assurances that this draft law will be refined, genuinely consulted with the media and take steps to ensure that it is implemented with full respect for the freedom of expression and freedom of the press," said Omar Faruk Osman, secretary general of the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ).

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