

Somaliland bans operations of privately owned newspaper

Authorities in the breakaway state of Somaliland should immediately lift a ban on the operations of Waaberi newspaper, a privately owned daily, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



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A Hargeisa regional court issued an order [suspending the newspaper](#) on June 19 on allegations of improper registration, according to a statement sent to CPJ by Yahye Mohamed, the executive director of the Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA), and the newspaper's owner, Hassan Omar Hassan, who spoke to CPJ.

The attorney general's office in Somaliland on June 13 filed an application asking for the newspaper to be suspended, claiming that Hassan Omar Hassan was not the rightfully registered owner of the newspaper, Yahye and Hassan told CPJ. Hassan said he was not informed of the application, nor did he attend a hearing on the case. The [June 19 court order](#), issued following the attorney general's application, also directed printers in Somaliland not to publish the newspaper, Hassan told CPJ. The newspaper does not have a website, he said.

Hassan said he acquired *Waaberi* newspaper from its previous owner, Abdirahman Hajj Nour, in 2013. Copies of documents shared with CPJ by Yahye and confirmed as accurate by Hassan indicate that the ministry of information and the office of the attorney general approved the change of ownership in 2013. CPJ did not independently authenticate the documents.



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4 Jun 2018



Hassan told CPJ that he believes the decision to shut down his newspaper is in retaliation for its critical stance regarding the current government in Somaliland. He said the newspaper had recently published interviews with analysts critical of a [conflict](#) between [Somaliland and Puntland](#), a semi-autonomous region of Somalia, and that on the day that the court order was issued banning *Waaberi's* operations, it had published a story on a [dispute](#) between the federal government of Somalia and Somaliland over [airspace management](#).

"This drastic action to suspend a newspaper without giving its owner a chance to be heard underscores our concern that it is simply an excuse to silence a critical voice," said Angela Quintal, CPJ's Africa program coordinator. "We call on the government of President Muse Bihi Abdi to immediately allow *Waaber* newspaper to resume operations and to refrain from censoring or harassing the press."

In an emailed statement, the office of the attorney general told CPJ that Somaliland's media law does not allow dual registration or the change of ownership of newspapers and that only one "single ownership" can be authorized. The attorney general's office did not immediately respond to CPJ's request for clarification on which segments of Somaliland's laws bar transfer of ownership. CPJ reviewed [Article 6 of Somaliland's Press Law](#), which covers registration of the press, and did not find any ban on transfer of ownership, and Guleid Ahmed Jama, who heads the advocacy group Human Rights Center, Somaliland, also told CPJ there is no such law.

This is not the first time that publications in Somaliland have been shut down due to the intervention of the attorney general's office or on allegations of improper registration. At least three newspapers have been out of circulation since 2016 when the attorney general's office ordered them to stop publishing on allegations that they had not been properly registered, according to [CPJ research](#) and Guleid.

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