

BANJUL, Gambia, September 27 (Infosplusgabon) - Somaliland authorities should immediately release journalist Mohamed Adan Dirir, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said Wednesday.

In a statement made available in Banjul, the global press freedom body revealed that police arrested the Somali journalist on 16 September on allegations of incitement and publishing false news.

"Criminalizing reporting and jailing journalists is not the way to address disputes about editorial content," remarked CPJ Africa Program Coordinator Angela Quintal, from New York.

"We urge authorities to immediately release Mohamed Adan Dirir from jail and to drop the investigation into his work."

Mohamed, editor of online news portal Horseed Media and owner of the news website Saylactoday, was arrested while covering a press conference at the Ministry of Education in Hargeisa, the administrative capital of the semi-autonomous region.

According to CPJ, the journalist is accused of false news and instigating the public to disobey the law.

Publishing false news carries a prison sentence of six months or a fine of up to 3 million Somaliland shillings (US\$5,146), and instigating the public to disobey the law carries a sentence of up to five years going by Somaliland's penal code.

Mohamed's arrest is linked to articles in which he allegedly accused Noradin, a group of private schools, of mismanagement and misconduct. Mohamed was said to have alleged in reports published on several news websites, including Gabiley Media, that teachers accepted bribes from students.

Several links to the articles have since been removed, according to Guleid and Mahad Ibrahim Mohamed, managing director of Noradin Schools. The articles did not appear on Horseed Media, the website's owner, Abdikarim Saaed Salah, told CPJ.

Mahad, from Noradin Schools, told CPJ that he filed a complaint against Mohamed over the reports. He said that Mohamed wrote similar articles six months ago and allegedly attempted extortion.

The statement disclosed that Mohamed had appeared in court twice and was being detained at the Criminal Investigation Department in Hargeisa and the court ruled that police could detain him for a longer period without charge while they investigate his case.

Meanwhile, CPJ said Mohamed has been arrested previously for his journalism, recalling that in May authorities detained Mohamed without charge for a month after he asked the health minister a question during a press conference.

Also, CPJ said Mohamed's site, Saylactoday, was one of five sites blocked by authorities in Somaliland in July for "disseminating false news" and "propaganda against officials of the State of the Republic of Somaliland," and the website remains blocked in Somaliland.

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