Press release by the Human Rights Working Group on press freedom in Somaliland

28/05/2014

The Human Rights Working Group, a group of international partners comprising the European Union, its Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the United States, wishes to express its concern over the forced closure of the newspapers Haatuf and Somaliland Times, and of the website of Haatuf media.

This is the third incident of the kind in recent months, after the forced closure of Hubaal media and the ban on Universal TV. In the course of 2013, 47 journalists were imprisoned, detained or otherwise harassed without a fair and transparent trial, and often without due process. In some cases, moreover, the journalists were physically abused.

While the release on bail of the chairman and editor-in-chief of Haatuf media on May 27th is a positive development, the case still threatens to reverse a recent trend towards improvement of relations between the media and the authorities, reflected in the establishment of a mixed commission for amending the Press Law in March.

The HRWG calls upon the Somaliland authorities to allow Haatuf media, as well as Hubaal media and Universal TV, to resume operations. It requests fair and transparent trials following a civil procedure for journalists accused of defamation, in accordance with the Somaliland Press Law and with international standards.

Acts of force ordered by courts upon the request of the Executive reflect negatively on Somaliland’s image. Freedom of expression and independent media are essential to the functioning of a democratic society, and Somaliland is no exception. (END)

Background:
The European Union and its Member States established a Human Rights Working Group on Somalia (HRWG) in December 2011, together with Norway, Switzerland and the United States. Respect for and promotion of human rights is at the foundation of the participating members of the Human Rights Working Group (HRWG), and an inherent part of their development policies.