

Somaliland bans two privately owned TV stations

Authorities in the breakaway region of Somaliland should immediately lift an indefinite ban on two privately owned television stations, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



Somaliland.

Police entered the offices of broadcasters Horyaal 24 TV and Eryal TV in the capital, Hargeisa, last week and ordered them closed indefinitely, allegedly on orders from the Ministry of Information, according to officials at both stations who spoke with CPJ.

At each station, police officers presented a letter allegedly signed by the minister of information, Mohamed Muse Dirie, demanding they be shut down, but did not allow the stations to keep copies of the letter, according to Horyaal 24 TV chairman Mohamed Osman Mireh (Siyad) and Eryal TV owner Adan Aideed Abdi, who both spoke to CPJ via messaging app.

The letters accused the two stations of airing content that threatened national security, according to Mohamed Osman Mireh, who told CPJ that the letter did not note any specific content that was deemed threatening.

"The arbitrary closure of Horyaal 24 TV and Eryal TV without due process sends the message that Somaliland media operates at the whim of government officials," said CPJ Sub-Saharan Africa representative Muthoki Mumo. "We call on the government to immediately and unconditionally lift these bans and allow the press to work freely."

While the Hargeisa offices of both stations remain closed, they continue to broadcast from other studios based outside of the region, and their programming is still accessible to Somaliland viewers via satellite, Mohamed and Adan told CPJ.

Mohamed told CPJ that he went to meet the minister of information yesterday evening and was told to come back this morning. When he returned, the minister was not available, he said. Adan told CPJ that Eryal TV planned to challenge the shutdown through Somaliland's legal system.

CPJ's calls and text messages to Information Minister Dirie went unanswered. Mukhtar Mohamed Ali, the ministry's director general, told CPJ that he was in a meeting and could speak later, but did not answer follow-up phone calls.

Somaliland Deputy Police Commissioner Abdirahman Libaan Fohle told CPJ that he did not have full information about the closure of the stations, but said he heard they were closed for incitement.

CPJ called Police Commissioner Abdillahi Fadal Iman for comment, but his phone was off.

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