

# TERRORISM AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

## Somali Government Bans Media Reporting on Al-Shabaab

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OE Watch Commentary

As the accompanying excerpted article from the Somalia-focused East African news site *Somali Guardian* relays, Somalia's Deputy Minister of Information, Abdirahman Yusuf Al Adala, recently decreed that Somali media were henceforth banned from "the dissemination of extremism ideology messages both from official media houses and on social media." In practice, the announcement meant a *de facto* ban on reporting on the activities of Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda's East Africa branch and one of the deadliest terror groups in the world.<sup>18</sup> The announcement came as Somalia's new president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who took office in May 2022, has promised to take a hardline stance against Al-Shabaab, which conducted a suicide bombing in late September in Mogadishu that killed seven people.<sup>19</sup> For its part, the United States and the broader international community have been fighting Al-Shabaab for nearly a decade. In May 2022, the U.S. deployed 450 troops to Kenya to help battle the group.

**I want to inform the Somali media and all Somali people in general that we'll regard all al Shabaab-related propaganda coverage including their terrorist acts and their ideology as punishable crimes.**

The move to restrict reporting on Al-Shabaab has largely been condemned. Most broadly, reactions seem to suggest that the decree's bans remain ambiguous in practice: just where the line between simply reporting on the group's activities and disseminating pro-al-Shabaab propaganda begins is unclear. While it was stated that reporting on Al-Shabaab was not allowed, separately, the same Deputy Minister relayed that the new law would not prohibit normal news coverage of Al-Shabaab's activities. In its tone, however, the ban on reporting has sparked dissent by Somali and global media rights groups. As the second article, also from the *Somali Guardian* details, a local Somali journalist organization, Somali Journalists Syndicate, saw its Secretary General arrested approximately a week after the announcement of the decree following his criticism of the new law. The Ministry of Information denied that his arrest was connected to the criticism. Amnesty International has also condemned the new law. Given the prevalence of Al-Shabaab in the security and political fabric of Somalia, just how the new decree will play out remains to be seen.



A copy of the Somali Government's Press release on 8 October 2022, banning the dissemination of extremist ideology in formal or informal outlets.

Source: <https://twitter.com/SOMNALIVE/status/1578774905986093056/photo/1> Attribution: Public Domain

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## Continued: Somali Government Bans Media Reporting on Al-Shabaab

**Source:** “Somalia bans media from reporting Al-Shabaab attacks,” *Somali Guardian* (East Africa-based news platform), 8 October 2022. <https://somaliguardian.com/news/somalia-news/somalia-bans-media-from-reporting-al-shabaab-attacks/>

*Somalia’s government on Saturday banned journalists from covering stories of Al-Shabaab attacks, weeks after the government launched an offensive against the militant group.*

*In a press conference, Somali deputy information minister Abdirahman Yusuf Al Adala said the government had banned local media from reporting Al-Shabaab attacks in accordance with national media regulations and those who breach the order will face justice.*

*He added that dozens of social media accounts linked with the group had been removed and a number of others would be next....*

*Somali media associations have not yet commented on the decision. The government had previously restricted reportage of conflict stories by local journalists, with dozens killed, others arrested and many more wounded in crackdown to stifle media.*

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**Source:** “Arrest of media activist in Somalia sparks outcry,” *Somali Guardian* (East Africa-based news platform), 13 October 2022. <https://somaliguardian.com/news/somalia-news/arrest-of-media-activist-in-somalia-sparks-outcry/>

*The arrest of media activist Abdalla Mumin in Somalia’s capital on Tuesday by security forces sparked an outcry from journalists and rights groups, days after authorities introduced a media gag order.*

*The activist was arrested in a raid by security forces on his office, just a day after he had criticized an order by the Ministry of Information that banned journalists from covering reports on the Al-Qaeda-linked militant group Al-Shabaab. He accused authorities of having an intention to muzzle media.*

*Amnesty International said it was concerned by the “arbitrary arrest and detention” of Abdalla. “Authorities in Somalia must immediately & unconditionally release him & must also respect, protect and promote freedom of expression,” It added.*

*Somali Ministry of Information, in a statement, distanced itself from Abdalla’s detention and alleged that he was arrested on challenges unrelated to his work by police. But journalists and media activists accused the ministry of playing a role in the detention.*

*Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), where Abdalla has been serving as secretary-general, said he was transferred on Tuesday to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), days after being held incommunicado.*

*The media clampdown came months after the incumbent Somali president, who accused his predecessor of using unlawful force to silence journalists, promised to promote press freedom during his election campaign.*

### Notes:

[18] For a comprehensive list of the best resources available to study Al-Shabaab, see: Christopher Anzalone and Jason Warner, “Al-Shabaab,” Oxford Bibliographies, 23 June 2021. <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0303.xml>

[19] For more on Al-Shabaab’s use of suicide bombing as a tactic in its arsenal of violence, see: Jason Warner and Ellen Chapin, *Targeted Terror: The Suicide Bombers of Al-Shabaab*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, February 2018. <https://ctc.usma.edu/targeted-terror-suicide-bombers-al-shabaab/>