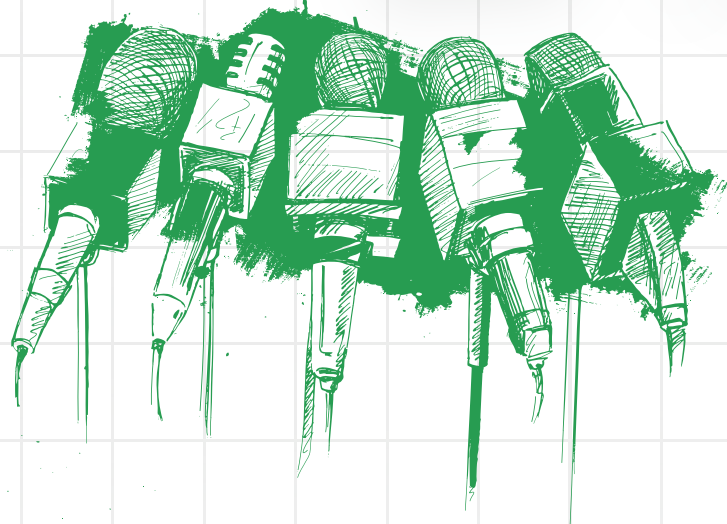




P R E S S S T A T E M E N T

World **PRESS**
FREEDOM
DAY **3RD MAY**



Somalia Must Shape a Future at Peace — Starting With Freedom of Expression

3 May 2026

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On this World Press Freedom Day, observed globally under the theme “Shaping a Future at Peace: Promoting Press Freedom for Human Rights, Development, and Security,” Independence House reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the principles of free expression, press freedom, and the rule of law in Somalia. The theme could not be more apt for a country navigating one of the most consequential political transitions in its recent history.

We mark this day with deep concern and with urgent calls to the Federal Government of Somalia. The arrest on 12 April 2026 of Sadia Moalim Ali — a 27-year-old tuk-tuk driver and social activist widely known as “Sadia Bajaj” — is a stark illustration of the narrowing civic space in this country. Detained by officers of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) and subsequently transferred to Mogadishu Central Prison, she has been held without access to legal counsel or formal charges, on the basis of a court order permitting up to 90 days of detention pending investigation. Her only offence: speaking truth to power through social media, raising the concerns of ordinary Somalis about corruption, nepotism, fuel prices, and the cost of living. Independence House unreservedly demands her immediate and unconditional release. Her detention is part of a documented pattern of harassment, arbitrary arrest, and intimidation targeting journalists, activists, and government critics that has intensified since 2022.

The legal architecture enabling such detentions must be dismantled. Somalia’s Penal Code retains provisions that criminalise defamation, rendering the legitimate expression of critical opinion a prosecutable offence. These provisions are incompatible with Somalia’s obligations under international human rights law. Independence House calls on the Federal Parliament to urgently repeal all Penal Code provisions that criminalise defamation and to align national legislation with international standards, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and the Windhoek Declaration — the foundational African document from which World Press Freedom Day itself originates.

Legislative reform must go further. Independence House calls on the Federal Parliament to enact a Freedom of Information Act that guarantees citizens, journalists, and civil society the right to access public information and hold government institutions to account. Equally urgent is the enactment of a Whistleblowers Protection

Act that shields individuals who expose corruption, abuse of office, and misappropriation of public resources from retaliation or prosecution. In a country where graft remains a persistent obstacle to development and governance, protecting those who speak out is not merely a matter of human rights — it is a prerequisite for accountability. These two pieces of legislation, long overdue, would signal a genuine commitment by the state to transparency and the rule of law.

These concerns are particularly urgent given Somalia's current political moment. The term of the incumbent president lapses on 15 May 2026, amid unresolved public controversy over whether the newly revised Constitution or the four-year term under the Provisional Constitution governs the presidential mandate. This transition makes a free information environment not a luxury but a necessity. Citizens must be able to access, debate, and disseminate information about constitutional processes without fear of arrest. Journalism and civic activism are not threats to stability — they are its foundation.

Independence House stands with all journalists, activists, and citizens who continue to speak out under difficult conditions. We call on the Federal Government of Somalia to honour its constitutional and international obligations: release those detained for peaceful expression, repeal laws that criminalise speech, enact a Freedom of Information Act and a Whistleblowers Protection Act, and create the open, secure environment in which Somali democracy can take root. A future at peace is not possible without a press that is free.

NOTE TO EDITORS

About Independence House

Independence House is a Somali nonprofit, nongovernmental and impartial organisation dedicated to the promotion of democracy, the protection of human rights, and the advancement of a just, safe and inclusive society. It works across six thematic areas — advocacy, research and publications, public outreach, legal aid, accountability and transparency, and gender equity — engaging directly with journalists, human rights defenders, lawyers, researchers, and community service providers across Somalia.

Media & Interview Enquiries

Email: info@independencehouse.so

Phone: +252 615 822 304

Website: www.independencehouse.so

X / Twitter: [@independencehso](https://twitter.com/independencehso)

Address: KM4, Hodon, Mogadishu, Federal Republic of Somalia

No democracy without human rights, and no human rights without democracy.