

Banjul, Gambia, February 22 (Infosplusgabon) - Somaliland authorities should immediately release Mohamed Aabi Digaale, the Hargeisa bureau chief for the London-based broadcaster Universal TV, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said on Wednesday.

In a statement, the press freedom watchdog revealed that Somaliland police arrested Digaale on 17 February and have been holding him without charge since.

The authorities on 19 February took him to court, where he was remanded at the Counter Terrorism Unit for seven more days while investigations continued and Digaale was relocated Wednesday to Hargeisa's central police station.

"The arbitrary arrest and detention of Mohamed Aabi Digale, simply because authorities dislike his TV station's journalism, is outrageous and a violation of justice," said CPJ Africa Programme Coordinator Angela Quintal in New York.

"Somaliland should immediately free the journalist without charge and allow him, as well as his Universal TV colleagues, to work without fear of retaliation."

According to CPJ, the journalist's arrest was likely related to a 2 February story another Universal TV journalist reported about conflict in Somaliland's Sanaag region as some of the people interviewed for the report complained about police conduct in quelling regional violence.

The statement pointed out that Somaliland's deputy police commissioner, Abdirahman Liban Fohle, indicated that Digaale was arrested because his station had aired a report that was damaging to the police.

Yahye Mohamed, executive director of the Somaliland Journalists Association (SOLJA), told CPJ that Digaale had previously written a letter to the Information Ministry apologising for the 2 February story.

Meanwhile, CPJ says Digaale's arrest is the latest case in a deteriorating and hostile environment for the press in the semi-autonomous region of Somalia.

CPJ has documented at least five cases of journalists who were detained in connection with their work in Somaliland since September 2017.

The statement said during the elections in November 2017, authorities also shut down social media sites.

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