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## DJIBOUTI

The Republic of Djibouti, located in the Horn of Africa, gained its independence from France on June 27, 1977. Given that its terrain is mostly barren, Djibouti's location is its main economic asset. Several landlocked African countries use its transport facilities, earning Djibouti much-needed transit taxes and harbor fees. Its control of access to the Red Sea is of major strategic importance, and has ensured a steady flow of foreign assistance. France stations thousands of troops and operates naval and airbase facilities there, contributing directly and indirectly to the country's income. The United States also stations troops in Djibouti—its only African base—in an effort to combat terrorism in the region. However, these close links have not translated into greater support for democratic freedoms in Djibouti.

Upon Djibouti's independence, Hassan Gouled Aptidon became the first president. He established an authoritarian, one-party rule and served through 1999. In the early 1990s, tensions between ethnic Afars and Issas over Issa control of political power, as orchestrated by President Aptidon, erupted into civil war. French political pressure resulted in a new constitution and a limited multi-party system in 1992, and Djibouti held its first multi-party presidential elections in 1999. A peace agreement signed in 2001 ended the civil war and Djibouti has remained at peace since then, despite turmoil in neighboring countries.

Djibouti is a semi-presidential republic, with executive power in the central government and legislative power in both the government and parliament. The People's Progress Assembly, led by President Ismail Omar Guelleh, dominates the government. As Djibouti's second president, Guelleh was elected to office in the 1999 elections and continues to serve after being reelected in 2005. Though opposition parties are allowed, they have little chance of gaining power in the near future, and Djibouti is effectively a one-party state.

Aptidon's regime disallowed the establishment of independent media and placed restrictions on freedom of speech, although the harshest provisions of an early-1990s law were not enforced. Allowing multi-party elections has not led to the establishment of a free and independent media. Government-controlled (and biased) media dominate, and opposition media battle back with information that supports their political agendas. Newly passed laws that would allow and define expanded rights for the media have yet to be implemented by the government. Only time will tell if these changes will lead to the establishment of media willing to provide the citizens of Djibouti with objective information.

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*Note: MSI panelists in Djibouti agreed to participate only if they were not named publicly. The political nature of the media contributes to a climate of self-censorship. Criticism of the media—both state- and opposition-run—could easily cost the critic his or her job.*

# DJIBOUTI AT A GLANCE

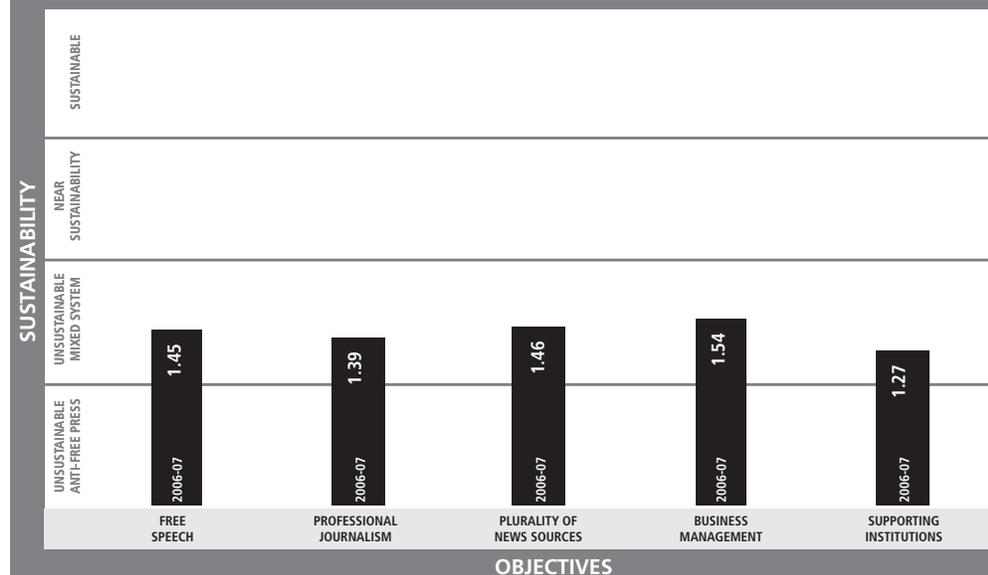
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 496,374 (July 2007 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Djibouti
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Somali 60%, Afar 35%, other 5% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 94%, Christian 6% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** French (official), Arabic (official), Somali, Afar (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2006-Atlas):** \$857 million (*World Bank Development Indicators, 2007*)
- > **GNI per capita (2006-PPP):** \$2,540 (*World Bank Development Indicators, 2007*)
- > **Literacy rate:** 67.9% (male 78%, female 58.4%) (2003 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** Ismail Omar Guelleh (since May 8, 1999)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** *Le Nation, Al-Qarn* and Radio Television de Djibouti (RTD)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** top two by circulation: *Le Nation: 2000, Al-Qarn: 500*
- > **Broadcast ratings:** N/A
- > **Names of news agencies:** Djibouti News Agency (state owned)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** N/A
- > **Number of Internet users:** 11,000 (2006 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: DJIBOUTI



### Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

### Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

### Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

### Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREE SPEECH

### Djibouti Objective Score: 1.45

Information in Djibouti is controlled by political forces, and freedom of the press is only nominally allowed in that the opposition media are tolerated by the government. The Objective 1 score of 1.45 shows that the current legal structure has little room in for media independence. Most indicators fell close to this average, although Indicator 5, related to preferential legal treatment for and editorial independence of state media, was markedly lower than the rest. Indicator 4 on crimes against journalists scored much better, though still low enough to infer that this would likely not be the case if journalists began operating independently.

The constitution of Djibouti guarantees human rights, including freedom of speech, but these rights are not respected in the country. Opposition journalists, outspoken members of civil society, and opposition leaders are harassed and arrested for expressing their views. "The country has archaic media laws created during the civil war, and the law is not effective or properly enforced," said one journalist on the panel.

The current laws on the books, passed in 1990s, do not adhere to international standards of freedom of expression. In 2007, a new law was passed by the Parliament after being presented by the Minister of Communication and Culture. The new law focuses on working conditions and welfare of journalists and other media workers, although it also elaborates journalists' rights and freedoms. However, this law, which was signed by the president, remains unimplemented. Since the old draconian laws are not fully enforced and the new law is taking some time to be implemented, the MSI panel agreed that there is much confusion inside the media sector, and that journalists exercise self-censorship at every level in order to be well inside the boundaries of the law.

Information is under tight control in Djibouti, so often the ownership of media supersede legal matters. The only radio and television station operating in Djibouti is state owned. Two of the four print media houses belong to the Djibouti government, while the other two belong to the opposition. The opposition media are obliged to present only the viewpoint of opposition political factions and therefore cannot be considered objective or independent.

Further, the government of Djibouti fully manipulates the broadcast licensing process. "The government selects the officials who work in the licensing department from its own political group or cronies," said one panelist. The selection process is not transparent, and there are specific, hidden

criteria. If and when private licenses are considered, it seems unlikely that an independent outlet would receive a license.

The government allows foreign and private companies to operate freely in Djibouti. However, the same degree of freedom is not accorded to the media sector. No private, independent media houses may set up shop in Djibouti. There is also inconsistency between legal regulations and application of laws. Often, government practice on the ground is not in sync with what is written as law. Media houses are not burdened by taxes, since most of them belong to the state; even those owned by the opposition are tax exempt, thanks to political connections.

The government often accuses opposition journalists of working as campaigners for the opposition. Several opposition journalists and media managers have been arrested multiple times because of what they published, and some were even forced to leave the country. Some of the journalists arrested were never even officially charged. However, outright violence against journalists is not currently a problem. Given the enforced and entrenched duopoly of state-run and opposition media, this is hardly surprising. However, should independent media emerge in Djibouti in the near future, the current safety for media workers could be tested.

"A false and malicious publication printed for the purpose of defamation is a criminal case in Djibouti," participants of the MSI survey noted. Some opposition journalists were arrested in the past and taken to court for defaming and insulting the

## LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

country's leaders. However, courts do not sentence journalists to significant—or any—jail time because journalists have been trained to be cautious, and such cases are simply harassment.

State media do not receive specific preferential legal treatment, apart from the fact that there is only state broadcasting, and journalists at state media are immune from official harassment. However, Djibouti has no guarantee in law or practice of editorial independence, and state media are decidedly biased in favor of the government. Further, state media customarily receive preferential treatment in that the government will give them information that they would not give to the opposition media. Some government agencies provide information for opposition media, while other agencies state that they cannot provide the information requested. Since no law specifically covers access to information, media—particularly those controlled by the opposition—receive public information at the whim of the government.

Access to international news and news sources through the Internet is not restricted in any way. Journalists and editors are able to use the Internet to freely access news resources. State media managers are able to secure Internet services for their employees to do their jobs properly, as the government owns the Internet service provider. “Media—both state and opposition—are allowed to reprint or rebroadcast both foreign news programming and news agency information,” according to an MSI survey participant.

The government does not grant special privileges or impose restrictions, whether through licensing, accreditation, or other means, for any specific group of reporters or editors. The government has not limited the entry of journalists into the profession based on their education or other qualifications. However, the Ministry of Communication and Culture accredits foreign press coming to cover events in Djibouti, and the ministry recently simplified the requirements.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Djibouti Objective Score: 1.39

Journalism practices differ greatly from accepted standards of journalism such as accuracy, balance, and fact-based reporting. With all mainstream sources of news and information in political hands, the quality of journalism naturally suffers. The overall score for this objective shows that Djibouti media have a long way to go to meet international standards for reliable and objective news. For now, citizens must be content with two points of view that are equally distorted, with the truth either somewhere in

the middle or not reported at all. While most indicators were close to the overall objective score, one stood out as particularly low: Indicator 2, covering journalism ethics. Indicator 8, regarding niche reporting, was regarded by the panelists as somewhat better than the rest.

Though reporters sometimes verify and check their information for accuracy, many of them report in a manner that pleases their employers, especially those in government media houses. Journalists with the state media try to avoid subjectivity, and get many sides of the story when covering social affairs, health, culture, and related topics. However, while researching political background information and interviewing government officials, reporters are not likely to ask direct questions that “hit the nail on the head.” Overall, state broadcasting (Radio Television of Djibouti, or RTD) and the newspaper *La Nation* are considered reliable sources of information, except regarding political matters.

“There are no ethical rules followed by the media in Djibouti, but there is an unwritten code that journalists follow: consult with their managers on stories,” said one panelist.

Journalists in Djibouti are well paid in comparison to those in the surrounding countries, but with the cost of living also higher, journalists have a meager lifestyle. As a result, many journalists and other media professionals resort to taking bribes or gifts, especially from the state, to write favorable stories.

Fear of government reprisal—from being fired to fines or exile—forces most journalists to self-censor their articles. This fear exists in several generations of journalists in the country and among editors, who discourage journalists from writing articles that are not favorable to the government.

## JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

Journalists are encouraged to cover any issue in the country and report on them as long as they write favorably about the government. Coverage of protests, opposition meetings where the government is criticized, or other unfavorable issues is likely to give rise to problems for the editors and journalists. Coverage of such issues generally requires the permission of the government, and this further inhibits journalists from asking for permission. The situation at the opposition media is similar, with journalists slanting their stories.

Most journalists cover all key events and issues in the country, except, as indicated above, in the case of politics, when the story must put the journalist's political bosses in a favorable light. There are types of events that, if covered, will most probably have undesired consequences for editors and reporters. Such events include corruption or crimes committed by government officials. The opposition media do not cover the events of the government. There are cases in which editors may prevent reporters from covering certain events, such as opposition political events, in which opposition strongly or directly criticizes the state. Additionally, there is limited freedom in Djibouti to cover events related to security issues of local and international scope. A journalist must get a green light from the state before covering such issues.

There seems to be a balance in terms of airtime for news and entertainment programming, and no trend to change the status quo in the system is evident. Overall, people receive information when they need it, even if the information itself is less than reliable. State media spend a significant amount of time reporting on government business, compared to the opposition. They highlight state efforts in development and promote educational and cultural programming, all of which support the government's agenda.

State-owned media have modern facilities and systems in place. This is not true for the opposition-controlled media: they lack the necessary infrastructure to gather and distribute information. The MSI participants urged international organizations and donor countries to support the modernization of non-state media in Djibouti.

Journalists in Djibouti do not undertake investigative reporting. "The major obstacle is that there is no free and open media in this tiny country, and the media workers, particularly journalists, are not professionally prepared in terms of journalistic skills and experiences," said one panelist.

The media in Djibouti do cover specialized issues, such as sports, health, and business; some journalists have developed skills in these areas. In those stories, relevant technical experts are consulted and in-depth research is undertaken.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES

#### Djibouti Objective Score: 1.46

With political factions—the government and the opposition—in control of the media, plurality of news sources is necessarily limited. Multiple viewpoints are severely lacking. While most indicators ended up more or less in line with one another, two were appreciably higher: Indicator 2, covering access to international media; and Indicator 6, regarding the transparency of media ownership.

"There are many news sources, but self-censorship limits the accuracy of the news and ability of people to check one source against another," one panelist said.

There are no private broadcast media outlets, but the two opposition print media houses provide local and national coverage. MSI participants estimated that around 25 percent of the population can afford to buy these newspapers. They also noted that there is a strong "oral culture" in Djibouti, and therefore radio is an important source of news and information. Local radio and television are presented by RTD.

People living in the capital city have greater access to media sources in comparison to those living in villages and rural areas. This stems from the fact that all the media houses are based out of the capital city. There are no community media to provide local news and information to the rural community. The capital also has better infrastructure, such as electricity and communication facilities capable of supporting Internet cafés. Urban residents often use the Internet to obtain news

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

and information, though panelists lamented that the younger generation wastes time in chat rooms and following European football. There are no restrictions on the usage of Internet in Djibouti and it is a useful source of independent information. Income affects access to Internet, satellite, and other pay broadcast services: those with high-income levels have better access, while the poor have no access. In rural areas, due to lack of electricity and high rates of illiteracy, the radio becomes a major source of information and entertainment.

The government does not impose any restrictions on access to foreign news sources, such as radio, newsprint, or the Internet. Economic affluence, however, greatly impacts the type of information obtained in Djibouti. Foreign print editions are available and generally affordable. Access to the Internet and satellite channels is less affordable, but RTD does rebroadcast BBC, VOA, and RFI programming. These foreign sources of news provide key information that otherwise might be missed by local media, and many viewers are drawn to the better production values of foreign television channels.

Most editors and journalists see their role as serving their employers' interest in a partisan way instead of serving for the public interest impartially. This is particularly true with state media, which do not operate under public media models. "State media are rarely open to alternative views and comments, and this is reflected in their news," said one panelist. One exception, however, is that RTD recently established a morning program that allows people, including opposition supporters, to call in and voice their concerns without any restrictions.

There are no independent news agencies in Djibouti. The state-run news agency carries out selective distribution of news, ensuring distribution of information that is favorable to the government. The opposition media sometimes rely on the government news agency for their information as well, though because they do not pay they do not cite the news agency as a source.

Broadcast media seldom purchase programming, and instead produce their own programs. The programs on RTD are comparable to those produced by international broadcasters in terms of technical skills and equipment used. RTD sometimes provides its original programming to international news organizations.

Media ownership in Djibouti is clear: it is either controlled by the government or the opposition. Given the current media environment and the attitude of the government to private media, MSI participants do not foresee the entry of private media in Djibouti in the near future.

Finally, while there is not a broad spectrum of social interests reflected in the media, RTD does air programming in many languages, such as Somali, Afar, Arabic, and French.

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Djibouti Objective Score: 1.54

The overall objective score of 1.54 indicates that media are not professionally managed in Djibouti. As media are used as a political tool, this is not particularly surprising. Panelists scored all indicators close to the average, with Indicator 4, regarding advertising revenue, the highest; and Indicator 3, covering advertising agencies, the lowest.

Panelists agreed that media outlets—both state-run and opposition—do not operate efficiently or make use of best practices in management. The purpose of media in Djibouti is not to turn a financial profit, and therefore streamlining operations and instituting practices such as business plans and proper accounting has no priority. There is no transparency in personnel practices, as media managers do not disclose employee benefits or salary scales, or clearly delineate job descriptions. "Most media managers do not have journalism skills or the skills required to run a news media outlet," said one MSI panel participant.

Media managers do not actively seek advertisements or other support from the private sector, as the media are primarily funded by either the government or opposition, which limits other sources of revenue. "Advertisements are not seen by media professionals in Djibouti as a good source of revenue since the media is relying on financial sponsorship from the government and opposition parties," said one panelist.

### INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

Media outlets do not seek the services of advertising agencies. State media receive the backing of the government through subsidies. In the case of print media, this also includes subscriptions from government departments. The government directly finances the operations of RTD. Naturally, these sources of revenue dictate editorial policies, management practices, and news content.

No survey has been taken of the media sector to try to identify audiences or the most popular programs and services. With a secure source of funding, there is little incentive to tailor products to market demand. Similarly, no organizations produce ratings for broadcasts or monitor newspaper circulation. Newspaper circulation is low—estimated at between 500 and 2000 copies for the several print publications that exist.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Djibouti Objective Score: 1.27

The supporting institutions that would allow a media system to operate at its best essentially do not exist in Djibouti, or are completely dominated by the government. Further, the small size of the market and bipolar nature of the media throw up serious challenges to developing this sector in the future. Therefore, this objective received the lowest of the five scores, with Indicator 4, related to journalism degree programs, and Indicator 7, covering the politicization of media distribution, receiving particularly low scores from the panel.

For a number of reasons, no trade associations or unions exist to support media professionals. The government prevents the formation of unions generally, so this problem is not limited to the media sector. Another obstacle is that the media is

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

##### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

divided into the main political groups of government and opposition. Tribal and ethnic issues also present a challenge to forming associations. The opposition has often criticized the government for making formation of associations harder for journalists, but this situation is unlikely to change. MSI participants also noted that no civil society organizations are working with media to promote freedom of speech or media independence. There are no watchdog groups to flag rights abuses or lobby the government for positive changes.

Djibouti also suffers from a lack of educational institutions that provide interested students with practical training instead of theoretical knowledge. Specifically in the field of media studies, no journalism schools or trained faculty exist in Djibouti, and opportunities to study abroad are limited. Further, most practicing local journalists were originally recruited as translators by the Ministry of Labor and then became journalists, so an experienced and properly trained cadre of professionals is needed to reverse the situation. Media outlets have hired some journalism graduates from neighboring Somalia, and a few journalists have graduated from programs in other countries.

However, short-term training opportunities do exist. And as one panelist observed, "These opportunities for practicing media professionals are more accessible to state-owned media houses than the opposition ones." The training programs are organized in collaboration with international organizations. Basic journalistic skills classes are among the more popular courses, but investigative journalism and editing classes are also needed. "There are no programs that address the professional needs of all departments of a media house like journalism, editing, advertising, broadcasting and publishing," a journalist on the panel observed.

Supporting industries and facilities are not apolitical and most are not privately held. "The major printing houses are financially backed by the government, but [are] free to print anything that is not contradicting government politics," said one panelist. Distribution and printing firms are barely adequate to support the media in its current state. To date, distribution and printing firms have not been manipulated into interfering with media operations. All broadcast transmitters are owned and operated by the state for exclusive use by RTD.

### Panel Participants

As noted above, MSI panelists in Djibouti agreed to participate only if they were not named publicly.

The Djibouti study was coordinated by, and conducted in partnership with, the National Union of Somali Journalists, Mogadishu, Somalia.