

Somalia 2024 Human Rights Report

Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Somalia during the year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious abuses in a conflict; unlawful recruitment or use of children in armed conflict by the government and nonstate groups; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists, unjustified arrests or prosecutions of journalists, and censorship; and significant presence of any of the worst forms of child labor.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who committed human rights abuses, but impunity generally remained the norm.

Conflict involving the government, militias, U.S.-designated terrorist organization al-Shabaab, and international peacekeepers resulted in death, injury, and displacement of civilians. Al-Shabaab committed most of the severe human rights abuses, particularly terrorist attacks on civilians and targeted killings, including summary executions and religiously and politically motivated killings; enforced disappearances; physical abuses and

other inhuman treatment; rape; and attacks on employees of nongovernmental organizations and the United Nations. Al-Shabaab also blocked humanitarian assistance, recruited or used child soldiers, and restricted freedom of expression. The government investigated some human rights abuses committed by al-Shabaab.

Section 1. Life

a. Extrajudicial Killings

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings during the year. While reliable data were difficult to collect, the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia reported state security personnel killed 72 civilians between January and September. In August, UN officials reported authorities in Puntland executed four individuals for terrorism-related crimes they had committed as juveniles younger than 18.

On May 18, Somaliland security forces used excessive force to disperse civilians gathering to protest pro-Somaliland leaders and Somaliland independence-day gatherings, resulting in a number of deaths.

Al-Shabaab and clan militias carried out indiscriminate deadly attacks and, in some cases, targeted killings of civilians. Extrajudicial killings of civilians by African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) peacekeeping forces

also occurred.

b. Coercion in Population Control

There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

c. War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity, and Evidence of Acts that May Constitute Genocide, or Conflict-Related Abuses

The nongovernmental organization (NGO) Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) reported 66 cases of deliberate civilian killings by government-affiliated militias, but the numbers of civilians killed due to inadequate protection of civilians during clashes was estimated to be higher.

The UN Human Rights Protection Group reported al-Shabaab killed 205 civilians and injured 506 between January and November. The group committed religiously and politically motivated killings that targeted civilians affiliated with the government and attacked humanitarian NGO employees, UN staff, and diplomatic missions. The group attacked soft targets such as popular hotels in Mogadishu and other cities, often using suicide bombers, mortars, and vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices to kill noncombatants. Al-Shabaab also killed prominent peace activists, community leaders, clan elders, electoral delegates, and their family

members for their roles in peace building, in addition to beheading persons accused of spying for and collaborating with state security forces and allied militias.

On multiple occasions during the year, al-Shabaab killed or wounded civilians or other noncombatants by launching indirect fire (rocket or mortar) attacks at or around Mogadishu's civilian airport – including a November 3 mortar attack that killed three ATMIS peacekeepers. On August 2-3, al-Shabaab conducted a major, complex terrorist attack at Lido Beach in Mogadishu, resulting in the indiscriminate deaths of more than 40 civilians and federal government security personnel, and the serious injury of hundreds of others. On July 14, al-Shabaab detonated a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device at a tea shop in Mogadishu that killed eight civilians and injured another 21 persons.

While al-Shabaab and clan militias were the primary perpetrators of unlawful killings, ACLED reported five cases in which ATMIS forces deliberately targeted and killed civilians. In one of these cases, ATMIS peacekeepers were implicated in the deaths of two civilians and the injuries of a third, according to local media. The results of an ATMIS investigation were not available at year's end.

Section 2. Liberty

a. Freedom of the Press

The law provided for freedom of expression, including for the press and other media. Federal and regional authorities, however, disregarded or failed to uphold this right. The law included a provision criminalizing the dissemination of “false news,” a term left undefined, that carried potential penalties such as six months’ imprisonment.

In Somaliland, regulations prohibited the publication or circulation of news deemed exaggerated or incitive and having the potential to disrupt public order. Authorities used these regulations to detain and press charges against journalists.

In regions under government control, individuals faced the possibility of retaliation when they criticized government authorities or raised concerns regarding perceived instances of official corruption or alleged incompetence of security officials. Retaliation incidents were reported in different regions, including Mogadishu, Puntland, and Jubaland.

In Somaliland, local media rights organizations reported multiple incidents in which residents were arrested for social media posts criticizing government institutions, services, and corruption.

In April, Somaliland police arrested musician Ugbaad Mohamud Abdi for

spreading what they referred to as “immoral values” on social media. Media reports suggested Abdi was arrested for supporting the opposition Waddani party and singing a rap song criticizing the Somaliland government for signing an agreement with the government of Ethiopia. Authorities subsequently dropped the charges and released Abdi from jail.

The law criminalized blasphemy and defamation of Islam, with punishments including fines, up to two years in prison, or both. There were no reports of prosecutions under this law during the year.

Physical Attacks, Imprisonment, and Pressure

Domestic media advocacy NGOs reported regular harassment of journalists by state security forces, clan and other private groups, and al-Shabaab. Government agents; government-aligned militias; authorities in Somaliland, Puntland, South West State, Galmudug, and Jubaland; al-Shabaab; and unknown assailants killed, abused, and harassed journalists with impunity.

Media NGOs reported arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists across the country and attributed the trend to security measures to counter al-Shabaab propaganda.

The National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) arrested independent journalist Hussein Abdulle Ahmed in April because he published an investigative article on the dismissal of NISA officials and an article regarding an abandoned well allegedly used by security forces as a mass grave. No

formal charges were filed, and Ahmed was released from custody 24 hours after his arrest.

In Somaliland, media advocacy NGOs reported authorities fined and arbitrarily arrested journalists for defamation and other alleged crimes. Penalties included prison terms ranging from a few days to several months, as well as fines. Journalists were intimidated and imprisoned for conducting investigations into corruption or topics deemed sensitive.

Censorship by Governments, Military, Intelligence, or Police Forces, Criminal Groups, or Armed Extremist or Rebel Groups

Journalists engaged in rigorous self-censorship to avoid reprisals. The federal Ministry of Information reportedly censored senior state media journalist Abdulkadir Isse Ali regarding his reporting on a military court case. According to Ali, the ministry blocked his access to the Somali National Television Facebook page and released an edited narrative of the court case to the public. According to the Somali Journalist Syndicate, police commanders, judges, government officials, clan leaders, and individuals affiliated with al-Shabaab restricted the access of media outlets and journalists to information in Mogadishu, Hirshabelle, Galmudug, South West, and Jubaland, resulting in self-censorship.

b. Worker Rights

Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining

The constitution provided for general worker rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike. The law did not address antiunion discrimination. The government did not effectively enforce the law.

Penalties for violations of freedom of association, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for workers were less than those for analogous crimes such as civil rights violations and were never applied against violators.

The Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU), the largest trade federation in the country, played a central role in advocating for stronger protections for workers, including freedom of association and collective bargaining. In August, the federal parliament passed a labor law that improved labor standards after FESTU leaders testified before the Parliamentary Committee on Social Service and Development.

There were no instances of government interference with union activities, reflecting an improved environment for labor rights and increased cooperation between the labor movement and government. Workers, however, faced discrimination for participating in union activities, and the rarely imposed penalties against employers who discriminated against those

who participated in union activities were less than for analogous crimes.

Forced or Compulsory Labor

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Acceptable Work Conditions

Wage and Hour Laws

The law did not provide for a national minimum wage. The law provided for a standard workweek of 48 hours. The law required premium pay for overtime and work performed on holidays and limited overtime to a maximum of 12 hours per week.

Occupational Safety and Health

In January, the federal Council of Ministers approved a national policy on occupational safety and health (OSH) to align local OSH standards with international labor standards. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs established the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to provide research, training, and recommendations to improve health and safety across industries.

The law set OSH standards. The law did not specifically provide for the right of workers to remove themselves from situations that endangered health or

safety without jeopardy to their employment. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remained with OSH experts, and workers could also identify such situations. Violations of working condition regulations were widespread in the public and private sectors. Workers in the electrical, transportation, and petroleum sectors were routinely exposed to hazardous conditions. Additionally, telecommunications and media workers faced targeted attacks by al-Shabaab, and some informal-sector workers were victims of suicide bombers.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was responsible at the federal level for establishing OSH standards and enforcement. The ministry did not effectively enforce labor laws. The ministry established an inspectorate but did not conduct any labor-related inspections. Penalties for abuses of OSH and hour laws were commensurate with those for similar crimes such as fraud or negligence but were never applied against violators. Wages and working conditions were established largely through arrangements based on supply, demand, and the influence of workers' clans.

The country had an informal economy largely based on livestock, remittance/money transfer companies, and telecommunications. Approximately 95 percent of workers worked in the informal sector, where labor regulations were not applied.

c. Disappearance and Abduction

Disappearance

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of federal authorities.

There were no reports of enforced disappearances by or on behalf of Somaliland authorities.

Al-Shabaab abducted persons, including humanitarian workers.

Prolonged Detention without Charges

Although the provisional federal constitution prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention, state security forces, allied militias, and regional authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained persons.

Federal government police detained individuals without judicial authorization, although the provisional federal constitution provided for arrested persons to be brought before judicial authorities within 48 hours.

The federal government reportedly made arrests without warrants and arbitrarily detained individuals. The government sometimes kept high-profile prisoners associated with al-Shabaab in safe houses before officially charging them.

Federal and regional authorities arbitrarily arrested and detained numerous persons, including persons accused of terrorism and either supporting or opposing al-Shabaab. Authorities frequently used allegations of al-Shabaab affiliation to justify arbitrary arrests. According to media reports, Mubarik Nur Ali, Nuradin Ileeeye, Abdirahman Abdilahi, Khalif Salaf, Mohamed Abdirahman, and Almis Saleeban had been detained without charge since February 15, allegedly by NISA. All six individuals were from Somaliland.

Lengthy pretrial detention was a common problem. Although the law established strict time limits for pretrial custody, it was generally not observed. Large numbers of detainees, a shortage of judges and court administrators, and judicial inefficiency resulted in trial delays.

d. Violations in Religious Freedom

See the Department of State's annual *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

e. Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Section 3. Security of the Person

a. Torture and Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or

Punishment

The constitution prohibited all forms of torture and inhuman treatment, but there were credible reports government officials employed them. NISA agents routinely conducted mass security sweeps against al-Shabaab and terrorist cells, as well as against criminal groups. Observers alleged authorities mistreated suspects during interrogations. Government security forces, including NISA and the Puntland Intelligence Agency, reportedly threatened and beat detainees, and forced them to confess to crimes.

There were reports of rape and sexual abuse by government agents. According to local media, on August 25, NISA captain Mohamed Kafi Abukar, also known as Mohamed Sheikh Abukar, was suspended due to allegations of committing sexual violence against colleagues over a period of two years. An investigation continued at year's end.

Reports of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment at the hands of clan militias, some of which were affiliated with the government, were frequent.

Al-Shabaab imposed harsh treatment and punishment on persons in areas under its control. Al-Shabaab committed sexual violence, including through forced marriages, and meted out punishment according to the group's interpretation of Islamic law. Those detained by al-Shabaab were incarcerated under inhuman conditions for relatively minor offenses such as

smoking, having illicit content on cell phones, listening to music, watching or playing soccer, wearing a brassiere, or not wearing a hijab.

A strong and widespread culture of impunity was present in state security forces and militias, due mainly to clan protection of perpetrators and weak government capacity and will to hold the guilty to account. While some military and police personnel accused of abuses were arrested and prosecuted, not all faced charges or were punished.

Although the provisional federal constitution described the “circumcision” of women as cruel and degrading, equated it with torture, and prohibited the circumcision of girls, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) was almost universally practiced throughout the country.

b. Protection of Children

Child Labor

See the Department of Labor’s *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

Child Soldiers

The Secretary of State determined Somalia had governmental armed forces, police, or other security forces that recruited or used child soldiers during the period of April 2023 to March 2024. See the Department of State’s

annual *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Al-Shabaab recruited and forced children to participate directly in hostilities, including suicide attacks. According to UN officials, al-Shabaab committed most of the abuses related to the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Al-Shabaab raided schools, madrassas, and mosques and harassed or coerced clan elders and family members to recruit and use children in direct combat and support roles. Children in al-Shabaab training camps were subjected to grueling physical training, weapons training, an inadequate diet, physical punishment, and forced religious training in line with al-Shabaab's ideology. The training reportedly also included forcing children to punish and sometimes execute other children. The group used children in direct hostilities, including placing them in front of other fighters to serve as human shields and suicide bombers, and to plant roadside bombs and other explosive devices. In addition, al-Shabaab used children in support roles, such as carrying ammunition, water, and food; removing injured and dead militants; gathering intelligence; and serving as guards. Media frequently reported accounts of al-Shabaab indoctrinating children according to the group's extremist ideology at schools and forcibly recruiting them into its ranks.

Child Marriage

The law required both marriage partners to have reached the “age of maturity” and defined a child as a person younger than 18 but did not specifically outlaw child marriage. It noted marriage required the free consent of both the man and woman to be legal. Early marriages frequently occurred. According to the 2020 *Somali Health and Demographic Survey*, more than 62 percent of married women and 74 percent of unmarried girls and women ages 15 to 49 indicated they viewed forced marriage as a form of domestic violence. In areas under its influence, al-Shabaab arranged compulsory marriages between its soldiers and young girls and used the lure of marriage as a recruitment tool for its soldiers. There were no reported efforts by the government or regional authorities to prevent child marriage.

c. Protection to Refugees

Federal government and Somaliland authorities cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern.

Women and children living in internally displaced persons (IDP) settlements were particularly vulnerable to rape by armed men, including government soldiers and militia members. Gatekeepers in control of some IDP camps reportedly forced girls and women to provide sex in exchange for food and

services within the settlements.

Provision of First Asylum

The law recognized the right to asylum. In February, the federal parliament passed a law to provide protection to refugees. Authorities granted prima facie status to Yemenis, while most other nationalities underwent individual refugee status determination procedures. Bureaucratic delays caused backlogs in the process.

d. Acts of Antisemitism and Antisemitic Incitement

There was no known Jewish community, and there were no reports of antisemitic incidents.