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<http://www.rsf.org/somalia-harsh-sentences-for-four-somali-06-03-2015,47659.html>

Africa - Somalia

Arbitrary justice

Radio Shabelle editor freed on bail

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Reporters Without Borders is relieved to learn that *Radio Shabelle* editor Mohamed Bashir Hashi was released on bail yesterday and calls for the withdrawal of all the charges against him.

Although the prosecution did not produce any witness, he is still charged with the attempted murder of a former parliamentarian, who testified in his defence at yesterday's hearing.

Reporters Without Borders is appalled by the verdicts and sentences that a court passed on four journalists on 1 March, imposing heavy fines and jail terms that seem to justify long periods spent in arbitrary pre-trial detention. All four are now free but a fifth journalist has yet to be tried and is still detained.

Those convicted and sentenced by the Banadir regional court in Mogadishu included *Sky FM* director **Mohamud Mohamed Dahir** and *Radio Shabelle* editor in chief **Ahmed Abdi Hassan**, who were arrested in August. Hassan was released conditionally on 21 October because his health had deteriorated dramatically in detention but Dahir was still being held at the time of sentencing.

Finding them guilty of "publication or circulation of false, exaggerated, or tendentious news capable of disturbing public order," the court sentenced them to [prison terms equivalent to the time spent in detention](#). It also imposed fines of 2,000 dollars on Dahir and 500 dollars on Hassan.

Abdimaalik Yusuf Mohamud, the owner of Shabelle Media Network (which owns both *Sky FM* and *Radio Shabelle*) was acquitted on charges of "instigation to delinquency" and "instigation to disobey the laws." But Shabelle Media Network was nonetheless ordered to pay a fine of 10,000 dollars.

Mohamud had been arrested at the same time as Dahir and Hassan and, like Hassan, released conditionally on 21 October.

The fourth journalist tried at the same hearing was [Mohamed Abdi Ali of Radio Risaala, who had been held since 3 January](#). He was convicted of publishing false information and was fined 500 dollars.

Still awaiting trial is *Radio Shabelle* editor **Mohamed Bashir Hashi**, who has been held since 6 September on charges of "attempts against the integrity, independence or unity of the Somali state," "high treason," "armed insurrection against the powers of the state," and the attempted murder of a former parliamentarian whose car exploded. He is facing a possible death sentence.

"We are outraged by the severity and inconsistencies of these verdicts and sentences," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"These proceedings are farcical. The jail terms were imposed simply to justify the long spells spent in pre-trial detention, while the size of the fines and the ridiculous charges against Hashi show that the aim is to persecute and suppress independent media in Somalia, especially Shabelle Media Network's radio stations."

Kahn-Sriber added: "We call on the Somali judicial system to overturn these iniquitous verdicts and ensure that Hashi, whose trial is still pending, is guaranteed due process."

[Hashi had already been sentenced to six months in prison or a fine in December 2013](#) just for interviewing a woman journalist who said she was raped and who was given a six-month suspended jail sentence on a defamation charge, while her alleged attackers were never arrested or questioned.

Mohamud had been given a 12-month jail sentence in the same case for allegedly insulting Somali institutions and defaming officials.

Radio Shabelle continues to be a target of the Somali government. [Mohamud, Hassan and Dahir and 16 other employees were arrested when Somalia's National Security Agency raided Sky FM and Radio Shabelle on 15 August 2014](#) at the new location they found [after the interior ministry forcibly evicted them from their old headquarters in October 2013](#).

The 16 other employees were released two days after the raid, in which all of the two stations' equipment was confiscated. But the authorities continued to hold Mohamud, Hassan and Dahir, who said they were tortured so that they would confess to intending to harm the Somali government.

Sky FM and *Radio Shabelle* are still closed.

Somalia is ranked 172nd out of 180 countries in the 2015 [Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(Photo: The four radio journalists Mohamud Mohamed Dahir, Mohamed Bashir Hashi, Ahmed Abdi Hassan, and Abdimalik Yusuf Mohamed. (Radio Kulmiye))
