



SOMALILAND FORUM

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SOMALILAND FORUM CONDEMNS GOVERNMENT'S TAKE-OVER OF INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS NETWORK (SHURO-Net)

The Somaliland Forum strongly condemns the Government of Somaliland's interference in the internal governance of the independent human rights network, SHURO-Net. The appointment of a parallel Board of Directors headed by a civil servant at a contrived meeting on Thursday October 24th 2007, attended by a minister and a deputy minister (Mr. Yussuf Issa Dualeh (Tallabo), and the use of the police to force the take-over of the management of the organization is an act reminiscent of a bygone era that Somaliland people hoped was a thing of the past. Neither the Board of SHURO-Net, nor the legitimate representatives of its numerous constituent organizations attended this meeting.

On Tuesday October 30th, 2007 the Deputy Minister (of Justice) sent an edict ordering the Ministry of the Interior and the Head of the Police to transfer the management of SHURO-Net to the "new board".

Somaliland Forum is dismayed by this unlawful action and the interference in the independence of SHURO-Net, a network of human rights organisations in Somaliland. These actions are aimed at hampering the independent scrutiny of the domestic human rights situation and run contrary to Somaliland's Constitution and law. Even if there was a genuine dispute between two factions of a civil society organization, ministers have no right under the constitution to interfere, let alone order that the police should support one side. Any such genuine disputes would be settled under the civil law.

The legitimate and elected committee and the management of SHURO-Net have strongly denounced the meeting which was called, at the instigation of the government, months before the scheduled Annual General Meeting of the organization and consider that the "new board", chosen by the government and headed by a civil servant, illegitimate.

SHURO-Net has recently campaigned vigorously for the release of the hundreds of citizens held in the Somaliland jails on the orders of the government's security committees without any involvement of the courts and has also spoken about the imprisonment of journalists and prominent politicians. Rather than addressing these human rights abuses, the government declared that these actions by SHURO-Net indicate support for the opposition parties and used this as a pretext to install a new management board.

The Somaliland Forum believes that human rights defenders deserve the support of the whole community and reminds the Government of its obligation to protect human rights and to follow international standards relating to the status, independence and functioning of national institutions and civil organisations, such as SHURO-Net, which work for the protection and promotion of human rights. These instances of harassment and intimidation of independent human rights defenders and activists damage Somaliland's democracy and standing.

The Somaliland Forum:

- Urges the Government to refrain from using the police to intimidate human rights organisations
- asks the Government to respect and protect the rights of human rights defenders, as reflected in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;
- urges the Government to refrain from taking any action that may undermine the independence and effectiveness of SHURO-Net;
- implores the Government to respect the integrity and the independence of non governmental organisations and civil society groups .
- warns that subverting the constitution and Somaliland's civil laws would not serve the nation's interest and will only lead to chaos.
- Calls on the House of Representatives to hold an enquiry into this matter, and in particular into the actions of the Deputy Minister.

Finally, the Somaliland Forum expresses its full support for SHURO-Net and calls on Somalilanders to support the legitimate board and management of SHURO-Net until such time that the organisation's scheduled General meeting on December, 23rd 2007 is held in an open and transparent manner and the members choose freely to elect, in line with their own rules, a new board and management.

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The Somaliland Forum is a non-partisan independent think-tank that brings together Somaliland citizens in the Diaspora, who supports the sovereign, democratic and independent Somaliland. The Forum helps Somaliland Communities and friends around the globe to work together and contribute to the socio-economic and political development of the Republic of Somaliland.

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