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ITUC-Africa raises concern over Somalia new media law

The African Regional Organization of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) expresses deep concern over the draft media law passed in Somalia on 11 July 2013 by the Council of Ministers.

According to the National Union of Somalia Journalists (NUSOJ), the new media law which is expected to replace the December 2007 media law contains several provisions which are vague and lack clarity. Additionally, the new law regulates all media outlets, electronic and print, and runs against international standards on media freedom. Furthermore, the new legislation fails to promote press freedom and to mediate disputes objectively.

ITUC-Africa is gravely concerned that this law which restricts journalists' and citizens' rights to freedom of information can be used to silence critical media and public debate in the country.

We emphasize that freedom of expression and freedom to information are fundamental principles for developing sustainable knowledge societies, and serve as cornerstones for democracy and good governance. It is also important to note that journalists serve as a medium of communication between the press and the masses and are vital agents in society for advancing democracy and social justice.

ITUC-Africa therefore calls on the government of Somalia to review the new media law and ensure that its final version restores media freedom. We assert that the challenge for the Somali authorities is to secure safety of journalists, tackle impunity and allow journalists to enjoy their right to work without interference, to receive decent pay and secure working conditions and to have their professional status properly respected.

We trust that the Somali Parliament which has the mandate to adopt the new media law would take into consideration the fundamental right to freedom of expression, guaranteed in the provisional Constitution of Somalia and in regional and international conventions, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of the African Union, which Somalia has ratified.

ITUC-Africa hopes that the new media law would be amended appropriately to provide and promote a favorable environment for achieving media freedom and a democratic state.

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