

Looking for a place to hide – the plight of a Somali journalist

By Abdalle Ahmed Mumin

In Somalia, journalists risk their lives to report daily events, mostly deadly bombings by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab, severe human rights violations. Journalists are continuously targeted for their reports. 59 journalists were killed in the country since 1992, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), making Somalia the worst place to be a journalist in the world. Last year, four journalists were killed.

I myself survived after gunmen shot my car three times in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia in 2015. That was after serious death threats by people who were angered by my reporting for western media, notably the Wall Street Journal and the Guardian. I fled to the neighboring Kenya, where I thought the situation would be better.

Nearly two weeks later a masked man armed with an AK-47 stormed my home in Mogadishu where my wife and children were staying. Luckily, they didn't harm anyone. Days after, two men returned. They asked my wife about my whereabouts. They claimed "they were friends and they had a message to pass." Infact, my wife understood that they were not friends and that they message they wanted to pass was the message of death.

My family moved to a different neighborhood and went into hiding. A month later, a close friend and former colleague journalist was killed in Mogadishu after a car bomb hit the hotel he was staying in. That was not the end. My family faced serious security challenges after gunmen visited the place where they were hiding forcing them to flee eventually into exile.

In Kenia, I continued to work as a journalist and became an advocate for other journalists in distress. I initiated and co-authored two projects under the 'Save Somali Journalists' banner. This put me into further risks. Early this year, shortly after I attended a human rights meeting in Nairobi, I received a phone call from a person I didn't know. He threatened me with death and accused of being an "anti-Islamic and pro-western spy". He said I should be killed with my head cut off and put on the street.

Next weekend, two men on a motorcycle followed my car until I nearly reached home, an then they disappeared. I did not sleep in my apartment that night. In May, on three different occasions, unknown people knocked at my door while one emailed me to say that "people prepared to assassinate you are looking to get your location". Since that time I went into hiding and stopped accessing internet and changed my Sim Card to avoid my location being tracked.

There is also another challenge. While the police target refugees on a daily basis on the streets in Nairobi, the Kenyan government continuously reiterates it wants all asylum seekers in the country sent back to their countries of origin. Thousands of people have been sent back to Somalia in the past two years. I and my family are really afraid of this happening to us.

I attended the funeral services of almost a dozen of my colleague journalists killed between 2011 and 2014. I remember their work and their young souls. Nevertheless I hoped for a long time that I could stay in Somalia. Now, I am just looking for a place to hide.

(The author is responsible for the content)