**Report about the Human Rights Challenges Faced by Somalia in Response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

**Partners for Transparency**

**Introduction**

In light of the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic since the first quarter of last year 2020 in many countries around the world, various governments have sought to contain the crisis and take measures that would reduce its severity or curb its outbreak. Somalia was one of the countries to be exposed to this pandemic; therefore, the Somali government was triggered to take measures to respond to the health crisis.

Despite the government's attempt to take measures to alleviate the crisis, its decisions were reflected in the real situation, which made human rights in Somalia a matter of concern during the year 2020 due to the measures and behaviors of the government of the state party to respond to the Corona crisis.

This report reviews how the successive decisions of the Somali government regarding the Corona pandemic crisis have affected the human rights situation and what are the most prominent groups and sectors affected by these decisions and behaviors.

**First: employment and the standard of living**

Many displaced Somalis have suffered from a decrease in their income, as measures to prevent the Coronavirus have led to a loss of jobs or a reduction in working hours, especially for daily wage workers and people working in the markets. It has been noted that refugees are among the first groups to lose their jobs, while at the same time, food prices are skyrocketing, and remittances, which are a lifeline for millions of Somalis, are falling dramatically.[[1]](#footnote-1)

More than 220,000 Somalis have been internally displaced, including 137,000 people, as a result of conflict. Health and climate-related disasters, including drought, and the resulting lack of livelihoods and floods, are additional complex and interrelated factors of displacement.[[2]](#footnote-2)

By July 19, 2020, there were about 500,000 displaced people spread across nearly 700 settlements, struggling with forced evictions, lack of job opportunities, and inadequate health services in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In March and April, armed operations resumed against Al-Shabaab in Lower Shabelle region despite the health situation, forcing more than 50,000 people to flee their homes. Residents were directly exposed to exchanges of fire and mortar attacks in their villages and on roadside. All this is topped by child recruitment, gender-based violence including rape and arbitrary detention.

Throughout 2020, many people, especially the newly displaced, lived in makeshift shelters made of plastic bags, cardboard and sticks, where physical and social distancing is almost impossible, lacking enough clean water to drink and wash hands, and creating a favorable conditions for the wide outbreak of the virus.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Second: The right to water and food**

Ongoing fighting, recurring drought, floods, and the worst locust infestation in more than 25 years are all conditions that force more people to flee their homes in Somalia, leading to severe overcrowding. In addition to the continued lack of clean water, this increases the risk of COVID-19 infection among the internally displaced.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In June and July 2020, the region suffered from a lack of monsoon rains, which prompted hundreds of thousands of people from the south and the center to flee to camps in the Somali capital, and after the Shabelle River dried up, people fled to camps near Mogadishu.

The Somali government and local humanitarian agencies demanded in 2019 to provide $ 1.08 billion to save the lives of 4.2 million Somalis facing difficult humanitarian situations due to the lack of rains. In 2019, the United Nations warned against an upcoming famine that will jeopardize the lives of over 4 million Somalis due to the drought.

The lack of rainfall has drained 85 percent of the cultivated land, and the food grown is likely to decrease by 50 percent.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The agricultural cities and pastoral families in southern and central Somalia suffered from the consequences of the locusts, which struck the country in two waves, the first in February and the second in October, and destroyed the agricultural crops, plants and weeds of the land on which livestock feed. Livestock and agriculture are the backbone of the Somali economy.[[7]](#footnote-7)

To confront the locusts, the Somali government issued a distress call in February to help combat the dangerous pest. The government declared a national emergency due to the growing number of locusts, which poses a serious threat to the fragile food security situation in the country.

In the first international response, on June 29, the World Bank provided Somalia with $ 40 million as part of the emergency response program, which seeks to combat the threat of locust infestation and strengthen preparedness systems in affected countries in Africa and the Middle East. Livelihoods of nearly 2.6 million people living in 43 regions of Somalia were badly affected by the locusts, according to an International Bank report.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Floods have become the biggest concern that haunts Somalis in 2020, especially in the states of southwestern Somalia and Hershbeli. Floods have severely struck Somalia this year twice; the first in May in the city of Baldwin in Hershbili, and the second in the city of Afgooye in the state of southwestern Somalia.

According to a recent United Nations report, more than 650,000 people have been displaced by floods and torrential rivers in the southern regions, which have increased the level of rivers in Somalia since the beginning of 2020.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that many of the newly displaced live in overcrowded shelters constructed from old clothes, plastic bags, cardboard and sticks. Such shelters provide weak protection from harsh weather conditions and expose families to an increased risk of crimes such as theft and rape. In addition, many refugees suffer from food shortages and malnutrition, putting them at risk of starvation.

**Third: Education and Child Rights**

The education sector has also suffered in the crisis. Thousands of Somali students were unable to pursue their education, due to the inability to afford the exorbitant Internet expenses in Somalia, or due to the digital illiteracy.[[10]](#footnote-10)

In addition, a number of educational institutions were forced to lay off thousands of teachers due to their inability to pay their salaries due to the stifling economic crisis that accompanied the health crisis of "Covid-19".

There have been persistent reports of the Somali National Army and allied militias’ use and recruitment of children as soldiers. UN officials have documented the recruitment and use of children by the Somali National Army, primarily Al-Shabaab militia.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The Child Protection Unit of the Ministry of Defense conducted six checks on hundreds of Somali National Army soldiers at Somali bases in order to increase awareness of child recruitment and verify the numbers of children in Somali security sector units. As of December, the Central Processing Unit found four child soldiers in one of the bases it examined and returned them to their families. The unit acknowledged the difficulties it faced in accessing some other bases and noted the danger of child recruitment in the regions of Benadir, the southwestern state, Hershapil and Galmudug due to the presence of powerful militias.

**Fourth: The right to housing**

The vast majority of IDPs were staying in overcrowded, underserved camps where clean water and sanitation were inadequate, and access to health care was very limited.

Ensure that the rights to water, sanitation, health and adequate housing for the internally displaced are met, in line with international human rights standards and guidelines when confronting the COVID-19 pandemic. [[12]](#footnote-12)

In March and April, armed operations against Al-Shabaab resumed in Lower Shabelle, which forced more than 50,000 people to flee their homes and subjected residents to shootings, mortar attacks in their villages, and roadside explosions.

Fighting between parties to the conflict in the area in early March forced an estimated 40,000 people to flee their homes in Belet Iksaw.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**Fifth: the right to health**

Immediately after the virus was discovered in the country, the Somali government announced a set of common measures to deal with the virus, including stopping international and domestic flights, allocating $ 5 million for combating the virus, rehabilitating one medical center in the capital Mogadishu to deal with new cases, in addition to imposing curfew measures in major cities and suspending study in universities and schools.

However, these measures did not last for long and the resources allocated to combat the virus were not sufficient. The country adopted a policy of "herd" immunity, which became the most prominent weapon, and in some cases, it resorted to hiding the number of real cases, according to what was revealed by a BBC report.

The government has also exploited the virus’s-imposed measures as a political war machine against some opposition states such as Jopaland. The health sector was not the only one affected in light of the Coronavirus crisis. About 360 companies in the airline sector and travel and tourism agencies in Somalia suffered losses amounting to about 250 million dollars during the current year, according to estimates by the Chairman of the Committee of the Federation of Airlines in Somalia.

In early May 2020, some newspapers reported that there were growing concerns about the possibility that the true death toll from the Corona virus in Somalia is many times greater than the official figures announced by the government.

While official statistics stipulated that 28 deaths and 601 cases of coronavirus were recorded in Somalia until that date, doctors and employees involved in organizing funeral ceremonies and grave diggers confirmed that the country has witnessed in recent days a sharp increase in the number of deaths due to the epidemic.

Newspapers quoted the ambulance driver, Muhammad Osman and Rassami, saying that in the last two weeks he was transporting about 15-18 bodies per day to cemeteries in the capital Mogadishu, compared with 2-4 bodies in the normal period.

The driver indicated that he had transported 12 bodies to cemeteries on April 25, but the next day the government announced only two deaths due to the pandemic.

The health official who leads the response team to the "Covid-19" crisis at Martini Hospital in Mogadishu, Muhammad Ali, acknowledged that the health authorities have only limited capacity to count deaths from the virus, explaining that many families do not report deaths of the virus to the authorities.

**Sixth: The right to life**

Reports received from the city of Kismayo, the temporary capital of Jubaland state, pointed out that at the end of November in southern Somalia, armed men assassinated Dr. Yusuf Ahmed, one of the doctors working in combating the Coronavirus in the city.

The unidentified gunmen managed to escape from the crime scene after the doctor was assassinated in "Vieux Afmedo" region in Kismayo, before the arrival of the security forces of the Jopaland administration.

**Seventh: the rights of detainees**

The number of known injuries has increased dramatically in Somali prisons, as places of detention may be overlooked during the public health crisis, thus becoming particularly vulnerable, as physical distancing and basic hygiene measures are luxuries that many detainees cannot afford. Overcrowding, shared sanitation facilities and poor hygiene limited ventilation and access to common areas are examples of structural and organizational factors that have facilitated the spread of disease. These factors provide ideal conditions for the spread of an already highly contagious disease in the event that a detainee or prison staff becomes infected.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**Conclusion**

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that the decisions and behaviors of the Somali government regarding the Coronavirus pandemic did not take into account the preservation of human rights. Besides, the lack of transparency in the announced figures along with the failure to protect medical staff and the failure to provide adequate health equipment to ensure the operation of hospitals have exacerbated the situation of the pandemic. .

**Recommendations**

In light of the aforementioned facts, Partners for Transparency recommends the Somalian government of the following:

* Establishing a platform to provide information on Coronavirus, the number of cases and the number of deaths in a transparent, clear and verifiable manner.
* Not to displace citizens and transport them to inappropriate gathering places that are subject to transmission and spread of the virus.
* Checking the sanitary suitability of the refugee and displacement camps.
* Expanding the insurance of medical institutions and facilities, especially those that treat cases infected with the Coronavirus.
* Follow the international laws that regulate the rights of the child, especially with regard to the non-use of children in battles and conflicts.

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