

Armed men raid Somalia's Universal TV, fire guns in station

Authorities in Somalia should urgently investigate an attack on the privately-owned station Universal TV and hold those responsible to account, the Committee to Protect Journalists said.



Traffic flows in Mogadishu's Hodan district in 2018. On March 30, 2019 armed men raided the offices of Somalia's Universal TV station. Credit: CPJ/Reuters/Feisal Omar.

Ten armed individuals, including nine in police uniform, who claimed to be attached to Somalia's revenue authority, stormed the offices of Universal TV in the capital, Mogadishu, on March 30, and started shooting inside the building, according to Abdullahi Hersi Kulmiye, Universal TV's East Africa director, and a statement by the government-recognised National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ).

Abdullahi and Mohamed Ibrahim Moalimuu, secretary general of the government-recognised NUSOJ, both told CPJ that the motive for the attack was unclear, but that they did not think it was to do with unpaid taxes. Abdullahi said that the men did not demand money. Mohamed Moalimuu told CPJ in an email, "We believe it is kind of intimidation or pressure from the commander behind the raid." The man who led the raid was in civilian clothing, they said.

Abdinur Mohamed Ahmed, the director of communication at the office of the President in Somalia, told CPJ via email yesterday that the case was under investigation and "appropriate measures would be taken once investigations are complete". In [a March 30 post](#) condemning the attack on his official Facebook page, Abdinur said it was unacceptable that it was carried out by a section of the same security forces meant to enforce the rule of law. Abdinur did not respond to CPJ's follow-up email asking if the attackers had been identified.

Abdullahi told CPJ that government officials with whom he spoke, including Commissioner of Police Bashir Abdi Mohamed and Internal Security Minister Mohamed Islow Duale, denied deploying police to the station, and said they would investigate. Neither official responded to CPJ's phone calls and text messages today and yesterday.

"This attack on Universal TV is outrageous and an unfortunate reminder that Somali journalists cannot expect safety, even in their own offices," said CPJ's Sub-Saharan Africa representative, Muthoki Mumo. "Authorities need to guard against impunity by credibly investigating this attack and ensuring those responsible are prosecuted."

Abdullahi told CPJ that he asked the armed men to leave and said he would speak to the man who identified himself as their commander but they refused and an argument ensued. The men refused to speak in Abdullahi's office or to speak with Abdullahi Hassan Bariise, a police official whom Abdullahi called and whose department covers the Ministry of Finance and revenue collection department. Abdullahi said that the police official denied deploying the men to the station and said that he would send a response team. CPJ tried to reach the police official by phone today and yesterday, but was unsuccessful.

Abdullahi said that when he warned the armed men that their actions might be recorded, the leader confiscated his phone and started to shoot inside the building. Abdullahi told CPJ that most of the staff had been moved to another part of the building by the time the shooting started and that no one were injured. He said that a camera was damaged and programming was disrupted during the morning and did not resume until later in the afternoon.

Military guards from the nearby presidential palace arrived at Universal TV and disarmed and detained the 10 men, according to Abdullahi and Mohamed Moalimuu, who said he arrived at the station shortly after the attack.

Mohamed Moalimuu and Abdullahi told CPJ that sources in the police identified the individual who commanded the armed men and that Universal TV has filed a complaint against him at the military court in Mogadishu. The court's mandate includes prosecuting police, according to [a 2014 report](#) by Human Rights Watch.

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