INDIVIDUAL BRIEFING
Mahmoud Jama Ahmed
Somalia
Updated 16 March 2020

Name: Mahmoud Jama Ahmed
Country of origin: Somalia
Current location: Undisclosed
Date of birth: 9 November 1986

Status: Mahmoud is currently in hiding. He was a professor of humanities and social sciences at the University of Hargeisa who was given a presidential pardon for previous charges of blasphemy, but who remains at high risk of attack from fundamentalist religious groups and vigilantes.

Humanists International and other civil society groups consider Mahmoud Jama Ahmed a victim of persecution on grounds of expression as a human rights defender.

On Friday 28 February 2020, and again on Friday 6th March, Mahmoud was the subject of a series of violent threats by a very prominent Imam, Adam Sunnah.

As a result of this, we consider his case of extremely high risk of a violent attack. We are therefore calling for the Somali authorities to intervene to assure Mahmoud’s safety.

1 https://youtu.be/vQNRJS37fq8
As of 12 March, we have intervened twice on Mahmoud’s case:

- Protect Mahmoud, the Somali professor accused of blasphemy for a Facebook post
- Don’t let Mahmoud die, Humanists International tells UN

## History

**16 February 2019**: Mahmoud published a book titled, “Are You Free” (see appendix 1).

**17 February 2019-17 March 2019**: Mahmoud was writing posts on his Facebook page. Shortly after this, Mahmoud began to receive direct and indirect threats, and great pressure was exerted on his family to stop him from writing. Around this time, Mahmoud’s family began to receive very hostile treatment from local people when walking around outside the house.

The following links are a number of his articles that have been published by the press taking quotes from his Facebook page:


**18 March 2019**: he published a post on Facebook, where he asked “1. If prayers are answered by God, why does every year drought happen to us? 2. Why do western countries get rain without praying, do they make “artificial rains”?”.

This produced a strong response from many people, because there were words in the post that were interpreted as "insulting the divine self" and ridiculing religious rituals such as prayer. The post was widely interpreted as an act of blasphemy.

**18 March 2019- 21 March 2019**: the number of threats of violence and/or death against Mahmoud reached an unprecedented level.

**Thursday 21 March 2019**: Mahmoud was arrested by the police and detained at the Central Investigation Department (CID).

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3 [https://humanists.international/2020/03/dont-let-mahmoud-die-humanists-international-tells-un/](https://humanists.international/2020/03/dont-let-mahmoud-die-humanists-international-tells-un/)


Mahmoud contends that he was arrested without the court’s permission, and subjected to ill-treatment during his detention for about 40 days. During the detention, Mahmoud asserts that a security guard armed with a machine gun directed his weapon towards him asking for immediate repentance, or else he would be shot.

The Investigation Department confiscated his personal computer and smartphone, and searched all the data contained within them without a court order.

20 April 2019: Mahmoud was presented to the court for the first time, and asked the court to be released under bail. The court rejected his request, which resulted in Mahmoud refusing to cooperate with the authorities and submit any defense.

23 April 2019: The court ordered Mahmoud to be presented at a mental hospital for assessment, because it was shocked by his silence and his refusal to engage with attempts to humiliate him.

30 April 2019: The court sentenced Mahmoud to two and half years in prison for blasphemy. After several days of imprisonment, Mahmoud experienced physical harassment and discrimination by prison authorities.

07 July 2019: The prosecution appealed the ruling of the first court, and demanded in the appeal petition to increase the sentence and seek the death penalty against Mahmoud.

16 July 2019: The appeal case was heard in court.

25 July 2019: The Court of Appeal upheld the original verdict and rejected the prosecution’s request to sentence Mahmoud to death.

27 January 2020: Mahmoud received a presidential pardon, and was released from prison after spending about 307 days in jail, on the conditions that he may not practice any clerical activity. Mahmoud was also suspended from working at the university for five years.

Since his release from prison, Mahmoud has not left his house, out of fear of vigilante attacks.

Friday 28 February 2020: Mahmoud was the subject of a series of violent threats by a local preacher, Adam Sunnah. In the recording, Sunnah says that no repentence should be accepted from Mahmoud because he is an apostate and an apostate must be killed even if he repents. He also said killing Mahmoud is good for him because he will benefit from that in the afterlife.
Background

Political and civic initiatives

Mahmoud has, on several occasions, been vocal about societal issues, involved himself in politics, and received some media attention - illustrating that his civic engagements have made him a familiar figure in the Somali society.

In 2012, he was the National Party’s candidate for Mayor of Hargeisa. Mahmoud also published a book about the development of Hargeisa, called “My Vision for the Development of Hargeisa in Five Years 2012-2015”, which later became the foundation for his campaign program (see appendix 2). He was also diligently vocal about tribalism and discrimination in Somaliland. Through means of lobbying he was able to collect five thousand signatures expressing support for his three bills regarding tribalism and discrimination. Mahmoud’s initiative was unprecedented, and to this day he is the only individual that has been able to present his bills to the Secretary-General of the Parliament (see appendix 3).

Moreover, Mahmoud prepared and hosted a talk show, revolved around political and social issues and human rights that aired live on the national TV channel, Star TV. He moderated the weekly talk show for two years. Some of the episodes are available on Youtube. In addition, he has written several books about politics. He is the author of a book named “What is the Obstacles for Somalis in terms of State Formation and Development”, and “Political Islam” (See appendix 4 and 5)

Mahmoud has also created the civic education curriculum for high school students in Somaliland, which was adopted by the national Ministry for Education in 2014 (see appendix 6). Furthermore, he has written a book about the same subject for adults. (see appendix 7).

Mahmoud has also authored the book “Enlightenment” looking into challenges other societies have experienced in the past and discussing whether Somalia can overcome its current social challenges in a similar manner (see appendix 8).

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6 https://youtu.be/2qkNbt7hFls
7 https://youtu.be/trSL5YNPQSs
8 https://youtu.be/01w5eKRx1xA
9 https://youtu.be/or4dsUsQFPs
10 https://youtu.be/trSL5YNPQSs
Education

Mahmoud holds a Master’s degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Hargeisa, and is currently a PhD candidate. He also has a Bachelor of Laws (hon), obtained at the Al Neelain University in 2010 (see appendix 9-10).

Other engagements

He is a licensed attorney, and from 2013 to 2019, Mahmoud was a lecturer at the Faculty of Law at the University of Hargeisa. Finally, he has served as the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science at Gollis University. (See appendix 11-13)
Appendix

Appendix 1: The cover of Mahmoud’s book “Are you Free?”

Appendix 3: Mahmoud presenting the signatures collected supporting his bills against tribalism and discrimination to the Parliament’s Secretary-General.
Appendix 4: The cover of his book: “What is the Obstacles for Somalis in terms of State Formation and Development”

Appendix 5: The cover of Mahmoud’s book, “Political Islam”.
Appendix 6: Ministerial decree to adopt the national curriculum written by Mahmoud.

Mudanayaal & Marwooyin:

Waxaan warqaddaan u geray si aan uga marag-kaco in bugaagta uu isku soo duba-riday Prof. Maxamuud Jaamac Axmed (Xamdi) oo ay ka caawiyeen khubaro kale oo ku xaal-dheer dhinaca waxbarashada, ay yihii kuwo ku habboon in legu dhigo dugsiyada Sare ee Somaliland.

Ujeedada buugaqtani waxay tahay in ay dhigtan dhamaan fasalada dugsiyada Sare ee Somaliland, si kor loogu qaado aqoontaada Madaniiga ah (Wadaniyadda). Waxa kale oo buugaagtani ay wax u tareysaa dhamaan dadka ku hadla Afka-Soomaliiga si ay wax uga korodhadaa aqoonta ay u leeyihii halkooda Somaliland.

Waxaan dhamaan barayaasha farayaa, gaar ahaan kuwo dhiga maadadda taariikhda iyo cilmiga bulshada in ay duruustooda ku daraan aqoonta ku jirta bugaagtaan. Isla markaana ay waa jibaadka ardayga ee uu guriga u qaadanayo (home-work) ay ku daraan.

Wax aan ku raajy weynahay in buugaqtani ay wax weyn ku soo kordhiin doonaan aqoonta bulshada Somaliland.

Zamzam Abdi Adan,
Wasirka Wasaarada Waxbarashada iyo Taclinta Sare JSL
Appendix 7: Cover of Mahmoud’s book “Basic Civic Education”.

Appendix 8: “Enlightenment” authored by Mahmoud.
Appendix 9: Postgraduate Testimonial

Testimonial

This is to certify that Mr. Mahmoud Jama Ahmed has successfully completed a postgraduate diploma in peace and conflict studies at Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), University of Hargeisa in academic year 2012-2013.

He has demonstrated diligence, hardworking, cooperative and good conduct in his study at the IPCS and he has been good at both theoretical and practical studies.

We would recommend him to anybody or institution that he has capability to perform any duty relating to his profession.

N.B. His certificate shall be issued upon his request

Hanse Khayre Yousef
Administrator, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Hargeisa

Email: ipes.2012@gmail.com
Appendix 10: L.L.B. certificate

This is to certify that the University Senate has awarded

MOHAMoud JAmA AHMED mOHAmEd, (Somali Nationality)

the degree of: L.L.B. HONOURS

Grade: THIRD CLASS (Accumulative Average 62.99%)

Faculty: OF LAW

Date of award: 2/SEPTEMBER/2010

Dr. ALLA ELDEN ABDEL FATAH ABDELHAMEID
Registrar

Dr. ISMAEL A. EL TAYEB ADAM
Dean

Academic Secretary

COPY
Appendix 11: Mahmoud’s license to practice law.

Appendix 12: A Letter of recommendation from the University of Hargeisa received for his work as a lecturer at the University.
Appendix 13: Mahmoud receiving a Certificate of Appreciation by the President of Gollis University for his work as the Dean at the Faculty of Social Science.