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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF SOMALIA
FOR THE 52ND SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Federal Republic of Somalia (Somalia) for the 52nd session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Somalia is a country located on the Horn of Africa and has a population of approximately 19.6 million people.¹ The population is predominantly Muslim, with approximately 99.8% of the population identifying as Muslim.² In its 2025 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Somalia as the 2nd worst country for Christians to live in.³ This ranking stems from the fact that al-Shabab, an extremist Islamist group, controls large portions of land in Somalia and enforces strict adherence to Sharia law.⁴

3. Somalia's last review was held on May 6, 2021.⁵ As a result of the review, Somalia received 273 recommendations, 246 of which it accepted.⁶ It was recommended by China, and supported by Somalia, that the government "[c]ontinue to combat terrorism and extremism and protect people's lives and property."⁷ It was also recommended by Norway and supported by Somalia that the government "[f]inalize and adopt a revised federal Constitution fully compliant with Somalia's international human rights obligations."⁸ In our last report on Somalia, we expressed concern over the persecution of Christians by al-Shabab. We also addressed our concern over policies and provisions in its provisional Constitution that violates the rights of Christians to practice their faith.

¹ *Somalia Population*, WORLDOMETER, <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/somalia-population/> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

² *Somalia: Major World Religions (1900-2050)* (World Religion Database, 2020), THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION DATA ARCHIVES, <https://www.thearda.com/world-religion/national-profiles?u=205c> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

³ *Somalia*, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/somalia/> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Universal Periodic Review – Somalia*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/so-index> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

⁶ *Somalia Infographic*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/Infographics-SOMALIA.pdf> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

⁷ OHCHR, UPR of Somalia (3rd Cycle – 38th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/UPR38_Somalia_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx (last accessed Oct. 7, 2025).

⁸ *Id.*

Legal Framework

4. Somalia is currently operating under a provisional Constitution that completely undermines the right to religious freedom, despite claiming to support it. For example, its Article 17 states that “[e]very person is free to practice his or her religion.” Then immediately continues with, “No religion other than Islam can be propagated in the Federal Republic of Somalia.”⁹ Additionally, Article 2 establishes Islam as the religion of the State and states that “[n]o law can be enacted that is not compliant with the general principles and objectives of Shari’ah.”¹⁰ Further, Article 3 states that “[t]he Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia is based on the foundations of the Holy Quran and the Sunna of our Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and protects the higher objectives of Shari’ah and social justice.”¹¹

5. Somalia is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and has a responsibility to uphold the rights enshrined in it.¹² Under Article 18 of the ICCPR:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹³

6. Furthermore, under Article 27 of the ICCPR:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.¹⁴

7. Somalia also has a responsibility to uphold the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Under Article 18 of the UDHR:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.¹⁵

⁹ THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF SOMALIA PROVISIONAL CONSTITUTION art. 17(1), <https://humanrts.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

¹⁰ *Id.* art. 17(2).

¹¹ *Id.* art. 3(1).

¹² *Ratification Status for Somalia*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=161&Lang=EN (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

¹³ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

¹⁴ *Id.* art. 27.

¹⁵ G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 18 (Dec. 10, 1948).

Islamic Extremism

8. Al-Shabaab is an Islamic extremist militant group that has ties to Al Qaeda.¹⁶ Its goal is to destabilize the region and enforce its strict interpretation of Sharia law.¹⁷ To accomplish this, it routinely targets non-Muslim civilians,¹⁸ as well as government and military facilities.¹⁹ Al-Shabaab's attacks range from utilizing IEDs and suicide bombings to ambushing vehicles on critical supply routes to targeted assassinations.²⁰ Further, al-Shabaab utilizes a network of informants who spy on Christians and report suspected Christian activities. Because of this, it is almost impossible for Christians to practice their faith, even in underground churches.²¹ In 2024, attacks by al-Shabaab across Somalia has resulted in more than 6,000 fatalities.²²

9. In this report, we have documented some of the attacks that have been perpetrated against Christians. Unfortunately, these are just a few of the cases that have been reported, and many cases are not documented as documenting acts of violence against Christians is a significant challenge.²³ Reporting on specific examples of Christians being killed in Somalia is difficult to obtain as many human rights organizations have closed down and left the country.²⁴ However, there have been reports of Christians and children being killed by al-Shabaab because they were found in possession of a Bible or refused to divulge the whereabouts of other Christians.²⁵ Below, we have highlighted some examples of the violent attacks that al-Shabaab has committed throughout the country in hopes of gaining more control.²⁶

10. In July 2025, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for attacking a military training school in Mogadishu.²⁷ According to a report, the militant was wearing a suicide vest but detonated before being able to reach the intended target.²⁸

¹⁶ *Persecuted Christians in Somalia: A Growing Crisis*, ICR CANADA (Feb. 3, 2025), <https://www.icrcanada.ca/persecuted-christians-in-somalia/>.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Mohamed Dhaysane, *Over 100 al-Shabaab terrorists killed in Somalia Military Operation*, ANADOLU AGENCY (Aug. 18, 2025), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/over-100-al-shabaab-terrorists-killed-in-somalia-military-operation/3662802>.

²⁰ *Al-Shabaab Still a Threat in Somalia*, VOA (Mar. 10, 2025), <https://editorials.voa.gov/a/al-shabaab-still-a-threat-in-somalia/8005499.html>.

²¹ *Persecuted Christians in Somalia: A Growing Crisis*, *supra* note 16.

²² *Fatalities in Africa More Than Doubling: Over 22,000 Killed by Islamic Extremists*, CHRISTIANITY DAILY (Aug. 7, 2025), <https://www.christianitydaily.com/news/over-22000-killed-by-islamic-extremists-in-africa.html>.

²³ OPEN DOORS INT'L / WORLD WATCH RSCH., SOMALIA: PERSECUTION DYNAMICS 9 (Dec. 2024), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Somalia-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

²⁴ *Somalia*, THE LINDISFARNE CENTRE, <https://christianpersecution.co.uk/country/somalia>.

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ Gavin Blackburn, *Al-Shabaab Militants Claim Responsibility for Explosion at Military School in Somalia*, EURO NEWS (July 9, 2025), <https://www.euronews.com/2025/07/09/al-sabab-militants-claim-responsibility-for-explosion-at-military-school-in-somalia>.

²⁸ *Id.*

11. In April 2025, al-Shabaab extremists attacked a town in central Somalia, which the government considered a strategic area for countering al-Shabaab's attacks.²⁹ Thankfully, Somali forces were able to drive the militants back.³⁰

12. In March 2025, al-Shabaab militants stormed a hotel in Beledweyne.³¹ The siege began after al-Shabaab detonated a car bomb and then proceeded to enter the hotel.³² After a twenty-four-hour standoff, police were able to neutralize the threat.³³ The attack took place as leaders were gathered to plan an offensive against al-Shabaab.³⁴

13. In October 2024, al-Shabaab began targeting civilians and businesses across Mogadishu in response to the government's mandate for businesses to install CCTV surveillance systems in the city.³⁵ The mandate for businesses to install CCTV was done to enhance the ability of authorities to crack down on al-Shabaab's extorting money from businesses.³⁶ In one of the attacks, al-Shabaab shot and killed four businessmen. In a separate attack, militants killed two civilians.³⁷

14. On March 29, 2024, six Christians were killed by al-Shabaab extremists.³⁸ According to witnesses, the extremists were covered in hoods and began shooting the Christians at a shop where they worked.³⁹

15. While Somalia has faced difficulty combatting al-Shabaab, the Somali army, with the support of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, has increased its efforts to fight al-Shabaab.⁴⁰ Even though these efforts only began in July 2025, we've already seen some success. For example, in August 2025, more than 100 al-Shabaab terrorists were killed in a military operation that involved airstrikes in the Lower Shabelle region.⁴¹ In addition to killing the terrorists, the military was also able to liberate several towns and seize weapons caches.⁴²

²⁹ *Al Shabaab Attacks Strategic Somalia Town as it Presses Offensive*, REUTERS (Apr. 16, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/al-shabaab-attacks-strategic-somalia-town-it-presses-offensive-2025-04-16/>.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ Fardowsa Hanshi, *Somali Forces End Deadly 24-Hour Hotel Siege*, BBC (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2gdjd57lro>.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Al-Shabaab Target Civilians in Somalia in Retaliation for Installing CCTV Cameras – November 2024*, ACLED (Nov. 29, 2024), <https://acleddata.com/report/al-shabaab-targets-civilians-somalia-retaliation-installing-cctv-cameras-november-2024>

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Six Christians Killed on Good Friday in Somalia*, INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN (Apr. 8, 2024), <https://www.persecution.org/2024/04/08/six-christians-killed-on-good-friday-in-somalia/>.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Mohamed Dhaysane, *Over 100 al-Shabaab Terrorists Killed in Somalia Military Operation*, ANADOLU AGENCY (Aug. 18, 2025), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/over-100-al-shabaab-terrorists-killed-in-somalia-military-operation/3662802>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

Christian Persecution

16. In addition to the threat that al-Shabaab poses to Christians, those who convert to Christianity are also persecuted within their communities and by their family members. Muslims who convert to Christianity have to live out their faith in complete secrecy because of fear of being ostracized and attacked, even by their family members.⁴³ For example, on October 5, 2024, a Christian convert was attacked by his relatives after they suspected him of leading Christian prayer meetings.⁴⁴ This was the third time that year that he was attacked by relatives for holding prayer meetings and Bible studies.⁴⁵

17. Women who convert to Christianity are particularly vulnerable. They risk being humiliated, beaten, and having their children taken away.⁴⁶ For example, in 2025, a Christian woman was sent back to live with her parents after her Muslim husband learned she had converted to Christianity.⁴⁷ She was forced to leave her three children behind.⁴⁸ Once her parents learned she had converted, she was beaten and ostracized.⁴⁹

18. By way of another example, in January 2025, a Christian man was attacked by his wife after she learned that he was having Bible studies with other Christians in secret.⁵⁰

19. In December 2024, a Christian woman was forced to leave her two children behind and flee for safety after she was severely beaten by her husband for converting to Christianity.⁵¹ The attack left her with a broken hand and several scars on her face.⁵²

20. One teenage girl was harassed after her family learned that she was converting to Christianity.⁵³ When her brother and uncle learned that she was converting to Christianity they beat her and sent her back to live with her mother.⁵⁴ When she arrived at her mother's village, several sheikhs were waiting for her and forced her to drink spit from a bowl in order to "purify" her.⁵⁵

21. Unfortunately, these few stories we have highlighted are just some of the ones that have been reported. Because the situation for Christians is so dangerous in Somalia, many instances of persecution go unreported in order to protect the identity of Christians.⁵⁶

⁴³ *Somalia*, MIDDLE EAST CONCERN, <https://www.meconcern.org/countries/somalia/> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

⁴⁴ *Christian Convert in Somalia Suffers Third Attack*, MORNING STAR NEWS (Oct. 21, 2024), <https://morningstarnews.org/2024/10/christian-convert-in-somalia-suffers-third-attack/>.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ OPEN DOORS, SOMALIA MEDIA ADVOCACY DOSSIER 4 (2025), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Somalia-Media_Advocacy_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

⁴⁷ *Mother of Three in Somalia Loses All Relatives for Receiving Christ*, CHRISTIAN DAILY (Mar. 28, 2025), <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/mother-of-three-in-somalia-loses-all-relatives-for-receiving-christ>.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Christian in Somalia Loses Voice in Attack by Wife*, MORNING STAR NEWS (Feb. 3, 2025), <https://morningstarnews.org/2025/02/christian-in-somalia-loses-voice-in-attack-by-wife/>.

⁵¹ *Christian Mother Beaten by Husband in Somalia Flees for Safety*, CHRISTIANITY DAILY (Dec. 13, 2024), <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/christian-mother-beaten-by-husband-in-somalia-flees-for-safety>.

⁵² *Id.*

⁵³ *Somali Christian Flees Family, Serves Other Muslim Converts*, THE VOICE OF THE MARTYRS, <https://www.persecution.com/stories/somali-christian-flees-family-serves-other-muslim-converts/>.

⁵⁴ *Id.*

⁵⁵ *Id.*

⁵⁶ *Somalia: Persecution Dynamics*, OPEN DOORS INT'L / WORLD WATCH RSCH. 9, *supra* note 23.

22. The provisional Constitution of Somalia, which explicitly prohibits propagating religions other than Islam, has emboldened Somali Muslims to go after Christians. For example, in 2022, two women who had converted to Christianity were arrested and detained for sharing their faith on Facebook.⁵⁷ In another example, two Christian brothers were arrested for sharing the gospel with others.⁵⁸ One of the brothers was tragically killed, and the other managed to escape after his wife convinced authorities that he was insane and possessed.⁵⁹

23. This provision is a flagrant violation of numerous international human rights instruments. For example, the ICCPR enshrines the right for individuals “to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”⁶⁰ Similarly, this same right is also enshrined in the UDHR. Preventing people from freely choosing their faith and prohibiting them from practicing their faith is a clear violation of these international human rights instruments.

Recommendations

24. In our last UPR we recommended that the government take action to prevent Christians from being targeted by extremist groups. While Somalia has taken military action against al-Shabaab, al-Shabaab is still relentlessly carrying out attacks across the country in an attempt to gain control and implement their strict interpretation of Sharia law. We urge Somalia to take further steps to fight al-Shabaab and protect its citizens from the ongoing violence. Al-Shabaab’s reign of terror will only grow across the country if these steps are not taken.

25. We also previously urged the government to adopt a permanent Constitution that guarantees the right to religious freedom in with the UDHR and ICCPR. Unfortunately, this has yet to happen. We ask that Somalia must immediately adopt a constitution that fully protects the rights of all its citizens, not just Muslims. This includes guaranteeing protections for religious freedom that allow everyone, regardless of religious affiliation, to peacefully and openly practice their faith. Additionally, the government must protect its citizens from being attacked and harassed because of their faith. It is paramount that Somalia protects the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief.

⁵⁷ *Catholic Charity Calls for Release of Somali Women Detained for Converting to Christianity*, ACI AFRICA (May 10, 2023), <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/8225/catholic-charity-calls-for-release-of-somali-women-detained-for-converting-to-christianity>.

⁵⁸ *From Stealing a bible to Serving Secretly – Rooble From Somalia*, OPEN DOORS (Oct. 2, 2025), <https://www.opendoors.org.hk/en-US/news/latest/somalia-serving-secretly/>.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ ICCPR art. 18, *supra* note 13.