



Woman 8-Months Pregnant Released from Wajale Police Station

21 March 2020: Hargeisa, Somaliland

On 18 March 2020, *Horizon Institute* issued an appeal to President Muse Bihi Abdi to take immediate action to protect people in Somaliland's police stations and prisons from COVID-19. Specifically, *Horizon* asked President Bihi to order the conditional release of detained persons who have not committed serious and violent offences, especially pregnant prisoners. This is especially critical now with the threat of COVID-19 looming at Somaliland's borders.

That same day, 18 March, a woman who is 8-months pregnant was released on bail from Wajale Police Station where she was serving a sentence of three years and a fine for trade of alcohol. Convicted on 31 December 2019, she was already visibly pregnant when police arrested her on 25 December. She confessed and punishment was swift. She was sent to serve her sentence in a police station, a facility with no healthcare services, especially for a pregnant woman.

Other countries, like Brazil, have laws that protect pregnant and breastfeeding women and their children by permitting them to serve criminal sentences under house arrest. This is not the case in Somaliland. The only additional protection pregnant and breastfeeding women enjoy under the law is the postponement of the death penalty until the child is born and either a year old or under the care of family. Because of the lack of legal protections, the judge felt his only option, given her confession, was to convict.

When *Horizon's* paralegal team met this woman on 4 March, the situation was dire. Her pregnancy was more advanced and she was experiencing health issues from the conditions of confinement. The police station commander asked that her case be prioritised for legal assistance, knowing his station was not equipped to assist a woman giving birth. Our team alerted her family and started working with them to secure her release. We assisted the family to take the woman to a doctor, collect the necessary paperwork to request bail and prepared them to speak to the judge. She was released and is currently at home.

Her ordeal, however, is not over. Inexplicably, the prosecutor has appealed the judge's decision and continues to seek conviction, even though no detention facility in Somaliland has the ability to safely care for a pregnant woman, or her and her infant after she gives birth. This puts both the woman and her future child at risk, especially now in the age of coronavirus. *Horizon* calls on the prosecution to drop this needless appeal.

Horizon Institute is a Somaliland NGO working to advance the rule of law and human rights. For inquires, we can be contacted at info@thehorizoninstitute.org. To learn more, visit us at www.thehorizoninstitute.org and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

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