



## ***Protecting Persons Held in Police Stations and Prisons from COVID-19***

**18 March 2020: Hargeisa, Somaliland**

Yesterday, President Muse Bihi Abdi took action to shield Somaliland from the COVID-19 pandemic. With confirmed cases in Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya, the President ordered the closure of schools, banned public gatherings and imposed initial travel restrictions for the next month to help keep the public safe. These decisive acts are commendable. We urge President Muse to also take immediate action to protect persons detained in Somaliland's police stations and prisons.

Incarcerated people are particularly vulnerable to pandemics. In Somaliland, detainees at both prisons and police stations are held in cells with dozens of other people and have very limited access to basic sanitation items like soap and clean water. When one person becomes sick, others in the facility, including police and prison officers, as well as visitors, are at high risk of contracting the illness. This will be the case in the event someone infected with the coronavirus enters Somaliland's police stations or prisons. It will spread rapidly amongst the population. And, with people moving in and out of prisons and police stations on a daily basis, any outbreak inside could cause the virus to spread to the general population.

Countries with outbreaks of COVID-19 are taking measures to respond to this threat by reducing the numbers of people detained. Iran has released 85,000 prisoners on bail, mostly non-violent offenders serving short prison sentences. In the United States, police officers in some states have been instructed only to make an arrest and bring people into custody if absolutely necessary.

*Horizon* is protecting its staff and clients who are detained by mandating a work from home policy for now. Our team is providing legal assistance to detainees and their families over the phone. We call on President Muse to impose extra measures immediately by ordering the conditional release on bail of detained persons who have not committed serious and violent offences, especially pregnant prisoners and prisoners who are already ill, and by informing the police to only arrest persons in critical situations. Additional soap should be provided to all police stations and prisons. Taking action now will help protect those who are detained and the general population as a whole.

***Horizon Institute is a Somaliland NGO working to advance the rule of law and human rights. For inquires and comments, we can be contacted at the below. To learn more, visit our website and follow us on Twitter and Facebook.***

6th Floor Omar Hashi Building, Hargeisa, Somaliland | +252 523 603 +252 (0) 633 751 063

P.O. Box 691-00621 Nairobi, Kenya | +254 (0) 20 4180 222 +254 (0) 713 773 420

[www.thehorizoninstitute.org](http://www.thehorizoninstitute.org) | [info@thehorizoninstitute.org](mailto:info@thehorizoninstitute.org)