

# **Somalia: Prof. Mahmoud Ahmed-Hamdi, a humanist, is safe outside the country**

– HRWF (25.06.2020) – On 2 March 2020, Professor Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi informed HRWF about alarming death threats targeting him in Somalia. HRWF and Humanists International helped him for his relocation in a safer country. As he was also a human rights defender, HRWF could get him a relief grant.

Professor Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi was a university lecturer in Somalia until he was arrested on 21 March 2019 for a Facebook post that authorities deemed to be “blasphemy.” He was then sentenced on 30 April 2019 to 2 1/2 years in prison.

In the Facebook post that led to his conviction in April 2019, Professor Ahmed-Hamdi commented on the need to take a more proactive approach to recurring droughts in Somalia that have been devastating for individuals and the state as a whole. The current strategy to preventing and combatting these droughts is to pray. This was his Facebook post in response to that:

‘The advanced countries make rain but we are still praying to get rain, although despite our prayers we are still suffering every year from drought.

The advanced countries, those we are considering that they are unbelievers and God hates them, live in prosperity even if God hates them. It means that they overcame God by knowledge and using reason.

So, we should learn and base our life on reason and knowledge, not on Myths.'

After spending ten months and seven days in prison, Professor Ahmed-Hamdi received conditional presidential amnesty and was released on 27 January 2020. However, the conditions of his release entailed severe limitations on his freedom.

### ***Threats of violence and death***

Professor Ahmed-Hamdi had previously received death threats targeting both him and his wife due to his advocacy for human rights, but now that he has been convicted of blasphemy, he is at risk from both the state and non-state actors.

He had been banned from working as a professor and could not share his thoughts, beliefs or knowledge with anyone in any form; otherwise he risked more jailtime or even the death sentence.

After Professor Ahmed-Hamdi was arrested, an individual sent his wife an email saying: 'once your husband leaves prison I will kill him.'

Furthermore, Professor Ahmed-Hamdi emailed HRWF on 2 March 2020 about another death threat, one that was of particular concern as it had the potential to incite an entire congregation to violence:

'In the Friday [28 February 2020] prayer sermon, a preacher called Adam Sunnah spoke about me and demanded to kill me, as he denounced the prison sentence that I spent because he said that the legal ruling that I deserve is murder.

This preacher was imprisoned several times for terrorism, and he was released from prison only four months ago, as we were together in the same prison, but in two different blocks.

In this sermon he speaks in the first half of it about another Somali writer who is now residing in the West, and in the second section starting from minute 28 he starts talking about me in a very provocative way.'

You can find the recording of this sermon here:  
<https://youtu.be/vQNRJS37fq8>.

In 2019 and as of June 2020, HRWF's Database of FoRB Prisoners in the world only contained one humanist in prison in Somalia: Professor Mahmoud Jama AHMED-HAMDI.

### **HRWF Comment: Prison sentences for humanists and atheists**

Atheists suffer a wide range of penalties and discrimination in many countries today.

Egypt, which was ranked 185<sup>th</sup> out of 196 countries by the Freedom of Thought Report 2019 of *Humanists International*, has been the most dangerous place for humanists, atheists and the non-religious in the world as it is the main country where they have been sentenced to prison terms on blasphemy and contempt of religion charges in the last decade.

However, in 2019 and as of June 2020, no atheist or humanist was in prison in Egypt while there are still a Sunni and a Coptic Orthodox in detention.

In June 2014, an appeal court upheld a **five-year sentence** handed down in absentia to **Karam Saber** for his short story collection entitled "Where is God?". The accusations against Saber included: Insulting the divine, writing short stories which call for atheism, defaming divinity, and inciting strife. In his defense, Saber claimed that: "[In the stories], I expose the fake religious discourse and detect the scale of contradictions in a patriarchal society that claims religiousness while it practices the opposite, especially in terms of oppressing women. I pose simple questions that seek God amid all this absurdity we are living in".

He was said to have violated Article 98 of the Egyptian Penal Code which provides a sentence of six months to five years and a fine of 500 to 1,000 Egyptian pounds [approximately €25 to €50 Euro] for anyone who uses religion to propagate 'extremist ideas' to incite strife, insult a monotheistic religion, or damage national unity.

In 2016, **Mustafa Abdel-Nabi** was charged with blasphemy for

postings about atheism on his Facebook page and was ultimately sentenced in absentia to **three years in prison**.

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## **SOMALIA: Conditional presidential amnesty for a professor jailed for blasphemy**

*– On 29 January, two days after his release, Prof. Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi called HRWF for help after spending ten months and seven days in prison*

On 30 April 2019, **Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi**, a university lecturer in the Northern Somali city of **Hargesia**, capital of the breakaway-region of Somaliland in Somalia, was sentenced to 2 1/2 years in prison for a Facebook post that authorities in Somaliland called “blasphemy.” He had been arrested on 21 March 2019.

In that Facebook post, **Ahmed-Hamdi** criticized the apathetic approach taken to drought in Somalia, where people pray to God instead of taking proactive steps to resolve recurring droughts. Ahmed-Hamdi said Somalis should learn from “advanced societies” such as in the United States and Europe and address drought by “making rain.”

Somaliland and large parts of Somalia have suffered from repeated droughts in recent years, a phenomenon many have connected to climate change. The droughts have killed millions

of livestock in an economy dependent on livestock-exports, and have caused millions of people to be displaced and hungry. The **United Nations** has called for [\\$1.6 billion dollars in international aid](https://bit.ly/2vkl6Cs) (<https://bit.ly/2vkl6Cs>) to prevent hundreds of thousands of deaths. As of 2017, there were 1.2 million malnourished children in Somalia. (Source: Samaynta News: <https://bit.ly/3bmRPYs>)

### ***Posting on Facebook***

“The advanced countries make rain but we are still praying to get rain, although despite our prayers we are still suffering every year from drought.

The advanced countries, those we are considering that they are unbelievers and God hates them, live in prosperity even if God hates them. It means that they overcame God by knowledge and using reason.

So, we should learn and base our life on reason and knowledge, not on Myths”.

### ***Prof. Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi, a secular Muslim***

Prof. Ahmed-Hamdi told HRWF:

“I am a secular Muslim. It means I am fighting to keep religion in the private sphere and the state away from the beliefs of its citizens.

I believe in the Quran, but that doesn't make sense, because no Somali can be a non-Muslim inside Somalia, so the religion of someone became important just when he can choose it.

I fully support freedom of religion and belief, including for the atheists.”

His story was first published by [Horn Cable TV](https://bit.ly/3boRrIX) (<https://bit.ly/3boRrIX>):

*A court in the region of Maroodi Jeex sentenced today (April 30 2019) to two years and six months in prison instructor Mahmoud Jama Ahmed, nicknamed "Hamdi." He was found guilty of the crime of blaspheming the Islamic religion, as was confirmed to Horn Cable Tv by the judge of the Maroodi Jeex court who reached the verdict. The citizen who was found guilty spread these blasphemous writings on social media, particularly Facebook. Mahmoud Jama Ahmed Hamdi taught at one of the universities in Hargiesa. In 2012, he ran as a candidate from the opposition Wadani party in municipal city council elections, although he did not win. Hamdi appealed his prison sentence, as was stated by the judge who gave the verdict. Hasan Galaydh, Horn Cable reporter, Hargiesa.*

**Prof. Mahmoud Jama Ahmed-Hamdi is under house surveillance.**

**In the name of religion or belief, he needs the assistance of secularists and believers of all faiths.**

**His email address is: [abuabdala15@gmail.com](mailto:abuabdala15@gmail.com)**

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## **Indonesian Buddhist woman's blasphemy conviction upheld**

*– Supreme Court backs Meiliana's 18-month jail sentence but her lawyer says she is a 'victim of a hoax'.*

*– by [Aisyah Llewellyn](#)*

*– Al Jazeera (08.04.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2IjvqiJ>– [Indonesia](#)'s Supreme Court has upheld an 18-month jail sentence for a 44-year-old Buddhist woman convicted last year on*

blasphemy charges.

Meiliana's conviction last August stemmed from a complaint filed after she was accused of making remarks against mosque loudspeakers in the city of Tanjung Balai in North Sumatra nearly three years ago.

Her lawyer Ranto Sibarani said that his client was a "victim of a hoax," denying she made those remarks.

"There is no evidence that she committed blasphemy. This hoax spread in the course of a week and ruined a woman's life in the process," Sibarani told Al Jazeera.

"Today's decision is very dangerous because in the future it means that people can spread false information which will lead to wrongful convictions under the blasphemy law."

The case is based on an incident on July 22, 2016 when Meiliana, an ethnic Chinese-Buddhist resident of Medan, purportedly made a complaint to her neighbour, Kasini, who like many Indonesians only goes by one name.

Kasini claimed that Meiliana asked for the azan, the Islamic call to prayer, to be turned down at the local al-Mashum mosque. Her version has been disputed and the ensuing blasphemy conviction widely criticised by [human rights](#) groups, including [Amnesty International](#) Indonesia.

In the days and weeks that followed the initial incident, comments were widely shared on [social media](#) stating that Meiliana, a mother of four, had tried to stop the mosque from broadcasting the call to prayer.

A mob in Tanjung Balai set fire to Meiliana's front lawn while two of her four children were inside her home. They escaped with the help of a Muslim pedicab driver who happened to be passing at the time.

Members of the mob were then called as witnesses at the trial

which took place in Medan District Court between June and August last year.

Sibarani said there was insufficient evidence against Meiliana to warrant a custodial sentence.

“The hoax was legitimised by the court. The judge allowed a statement letter to be submitted as evidence by three witnesses outside Meiliana’s house,” he said.

“They claimed she told them the prayer call hurt her ears while a gang confronted her and pelted her home with rocks and bottles. Yet there is no evidence that this conversation ever happened and the statement letter was written six months after the incident.”

Indonesia has the world’s largest Muslim population but it also is home to sizeable numbers of Buddhist and Christian minorities.

The alleged remarks also kicked off some of the worst race riots since the fall of Suharto in 1998. At least 11 Buddhist temples were torched in Tanjung Balai, where Buddhists number around 11,000 out of 185,000 residents.

There has been widespread criticism of Indonesia’s blasphemy law, which in recent years has been wielded against minority groups including the former governor of Jakarta, Basuki “Ahok” Tjahaja Purnama.

Ahok was sentenced to two years in prison for insulting Islam following comments he made about a verse from the Quran in 2016.

According to Sibarani, Meiliana’s legal team are now considering their final legal options.

“We believe that video evidence of the discussion outside Meiliana’s home exists and we plan to use it to file a judicial review,” he said. “If this case is not followed up

then it means that anyone can now file a statement letter to a judge accusing someone of blasphemy without having to prove it.”

“This case shows that there is no legal certainty in Indonesia any more.”