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### **Woman charged with insulting Somali state institutions after rape claim**

***Woman who said she was raped by government forces, and a journalist who interviewed her, to appear in Mogadishu court***

The Guardian (05.02.2013) - A Somali woman who said she was raped by government forces, and a journalist who interviewed her are due in court in Mogadishu on Tuesday, accused of insulting state institutions in a case that has raised concerns about women's rights and press freedom in the fragile state.

The international outcry surrounding the case is an embarrassment for the Somali president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, [whose election last year](#) was described by the international community as the start of a new era for [Somalia](#) after decades of instability and conflict.

The trial started as Mohamud toured Europe to garner international support to rebuild Somalia. He was in Britain on Monday where he met the international development secretary, Justine Greening.

[Human rights groups](#) have described the trial, which was adjourned on Saturday at the attorney general's request, as politically motivated while the US state department's spokeswoman said it was "[a litmus test](#)" for the future of Somalia.

Freelance journalist Abdiiaziz Abdinur Ibrahim and the 27-year-old woman have been charged with insulting a government body and providing false evidence. The woman's husband and two other people have also been charged, and the defendants could face lengthy jail terms if found guilty.

The woman was arrested on 10 January, two days after she was interviewed by Abdinur Ibrahim and told him she had been raped by government forces last year.

She was interrogated over two days without legal counsel and released after police said she retracted her story. Her husband was detained on 12 January and is still in custody, rights groups said.

Abdinur Ibrahim, who was also arrested on 10 January, is still being held.

The Somali police also alleged he was involved in an al-Jazeera report on rape in camps for displaced people in Mogadishu. The news agency dismissed the police claim, and Abdinur Ibrahim did not file his interview to any outlet, rights groups said.

"Bringing charges against a woman who alleges rape [makes a mockery of the new Somali government's priorities](#)," said Daniel Bekele, [Africa](#) director at [Human Rights Watch](#).

"The police 'investigation' in this case was a politically motivated attempt to blame and silence those who report on the pervasive problem of sexual violence by Somali security forces," he said.

The international community, especially Britain and the US, have enthusiastically backed Somalia's new government, which emerged last September after a UN-backed peace process to replace a corrupt and inefficient transitional authority.

"The donor countries funding Somalia's police force and criminal justice system need to make clear to the government that they won't be party to injustices," Bekele said.

David Cameron is due to co-host an international conference on Somalia with Mohamud in Britain in May to provide support for the new government's efforts to rebuild its country.

After the Somali president met Greening in London on Monday, it was announced Britain would support Somali parliamentarians as they establish their new government and federal parliament.

"It's vital that we make the most of the close links between our two countries as Somalia rebuilds its democracy," Greening said after the meeting. "After last September's elections, the most representative process in decades, Somalia now has a real chance to make progress towards stability and peace after 21 years of conflict."

The Somali government does seem to be taking the criticism over the trial on board.

On Sunday, the prime minister, Abdi Farah Shirdon Saaid, said authorities would do more to protect rape victims, and he promised to reform the armed forces and judiciary once the trial had concluded.

"We recognise the concerns of our international partners and we are only too aware of the enormous challenges our nation faces," he said in a statement.

Somalia has been enjoying a period of relative stability since African Union forces pushed the Islamic militants of al-Shabaab out of most of their urban strongholds, including the capital. The rebels still control some rural areas and carry out sporadic bomb attacks in Mogadishu

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