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Judicial Independence in Somalia

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ABSTRACT: This study is to present a comprehensive understanding of the state of judicial independence in Somalia. It specifically focuses on examining the constitutional provisions and legal framework that govern the independence and immunity of judges in Somalia. Additionally, it aims to evaluate international standards of judicial independence, analyze the composition and functions of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) in terms of the appointment, promotion, and removal procedures of judicial officers in Somalia. Furthermore, the study aims to identify the challenges encountered by the judiciary and propose policy and legal reforms based on the research findings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the independence of the judiciary in Somalia. In this study, using qualitative research, the researchers analysed constitutional provisions, legal frameworks, and a range of published and unpublished materials such as books, journal articles, research papers, reports, internet sources, newspapers, legal systems, and the constitutions of Somalia. The study concludes that while Somalia has made efforts to ensure the independence of its judiciary, there are still significant challenges that need to be addressed, particularly in relation to the appointment, promotion, and removal of judicial officers. To strengthen the judiciary and safeguard its independence and integrity, it is recommended to establish a Judicial Service Commission. This commission would oversee the appointment, promotion, and removal procedures, ensuring they are based on merit and transparency. Additionally, the study suggests that legislative solutions should be considered to review and provide clarity in the legal framework. This would help define the roles, responsibilities, and powers of the judiciary more precisely, contributing to a more robust and independent judiciary in Somalia.

KEYWORDS: judicial, immunity of judges, independence, Somalia

INTRODUCTION

Somalia Context

In the colonial era, which spanned from around 1891 to 1960, the Somali population was split into five distinct regions: British Somaliland located in the north-central part, French Somaliland in the

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northwest, Italian Somaliland in the south, Ethiopian Somaliland encompassing the Ogaden region, and the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya.¹

North Regions got its independence on June 26, 1960, and also south Regions got on July 1, 1960, Both were joined together in 1960 to make the Somali Republic, a single, independent country.² On July 1, 1960, the legislative bodies of the two recently independent states convened in a joint session in Mogadishu and officially declared the formation of the Somali Republic.³

Historical Context of Judiciary in Somalia

The former Trust Territory of Somalia and the former British Somaliland Protectorate gained legislative autonomy in the late 1950s, subsequently forming a unitary republic in 1960 upon achieving independence, a significant portion of the country's current laws can be traced back to the Colonial Era.⁴ There are three notable provisions among the legislation governing received law. Firstly, when Italian Somalia came under Trusteeship Administration, Decree No. 1357 of December 9, 1952, issued by the President of the Republic of Italy, included Article 4, paragraph (3), which explicitly stated that Italian laws would be applicable in the Trust Territory. Secondly, upon the independence of the British Somaliland Protectorate, Article 42, paragraph (1), of the Constitution approved by the Somaliland Order-in-Council, 1960, stipulated the continuation of certain Indian enactments and the laws of England that were in force. Thirdly, soon after the establishment of the Republic, Article 8, paragraph (1), of the Act of Union was enacted, which specifically addressed a particular provision.⁵

Italy and Britain established distinct judicial systems during the colonial period, and these systems remained in effect until 1962 when the Somali Republic established its independent judicial system. ⁶.

Upon gaining independence, Somalia inherited four distinct legal traditions: the English common law system, the Italian legal system, Islamic sharia or religious law, and Somali customary law, which encompassed traditional rulers and sanctions.⁷

A law passed in 1962 put together a four-level system of courts in northern and southern Somalia. These levels are the Supreme Court, courts of review, regional courts, and district courts. Sharia

¹ Helen Chapin Metz, may, 1992, page 3

² Helen Chapin Metz, may, 1992 page 3

³ Haji N.A. Noor Muhammad 1972, p 12

⁴ Ibid p 45

⁵ Haji N.A. Noor Muhammad 1972, p 45,46

⁶ Ibid page 47

⁷ Helen Chapin Metz, may, 1992, p 160

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courts were shut down, but judges were still supposed to think about sharia when making decisions.⁸

Article 108 of the Constitution of Somalia 2012, the judiciary in Somalia is composed of the constitutional Court, Federal Government level court, the Federal Member State courts, and other courts as may be established by law; the Federal High Court is the highest court at the federal government level, and the Federal Member State High Court is the highest court at the federal member state level.⁹

Article 105(2) of the constitution of Somalia "A law passed by the Federal Parliament will set the rules for the legal system."¹⁰

The Somali Constitution adopted in 1960 included Article 93, which aimed to establish an independent judiciary. This provision recognized the importance of separating the judiciary from the influence of other branches of government and ensuring its impartiality and autonomy.¹¹

Article 106(2), of the Somali Constitution 1960, grantee the safeguard the judiciary's ability to administer justice fairly and independently. It aimed to prevent any undue interference or influence from the executive or legislative branches and give courts the power to make fair choices based on the law.¹²

Article 27 of the 1962 Organization of the Judiciary Law of Somalia indeed established a Higher Judicial Council with the responsibility of ensuring judicial independence. This provision recognized the significance of an independent judiciary in upholding the rule of law and impartial administration of justice.¹³

Under the 1979 Constitution, the judiciary was directly controlled by the executive branch of the government, and the president held significant authority over the judiciary through the Higher Judicial Council. Article 105 established the Higher Judicial Council, while Article 106 stipulated that the president served as the chairman of this council. The inclusion of these provisions meant that the president had substantial influence and control over the judiciary, which compromised its independence and impartiality. This arrangement allowed the executive branch to exert significant influence over judicial appointments, promotions, and other key decisions, limiting the judiciary's ability to function independently.¹⁴

⁸ Helen Chapin Metz, may, 1992, p 161, 162

⁹ Article 108 of the Constitution of Somalia 2012

¹⁰ Article 105(2) of the constitution of Somalia 2012

¹¹ Article 93, Somali constitution 1960

¹² Article 106(2) SC 1960

¹³ Article 27 of the 1962 Organization of the Judiciary Law of Somalia

¹⁴ Article 105,106 Somali constitution 1979

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The Constitution of Somalia was adopted in 2012. The constitution provides an independent judiciary. Article 106(1) of the Somali Constitution prohibits any interference from outside parties. The article says that judges possess freedom and are bound solely by the constitution and legal statutes. In addition, the article recognizes the importance of judicial accountability and transparency, stating that judges must be accountable for their decisions and must ensure that their decisions are based solely on the law and the facts presented.15

Article 109A (1) of the Somali Constitution establishes the JSC as a constitutional body responsible for overseeing the appointment, promotion, and discipline of judges, as well as the administration of the judiciary. It helps establish a transparent and accountable process for the selection and advancement of judges, thus enhancing public trust and confidence in the judiciary.¹⁶ Despite these efforts, there are ongoing challenges for judicial independence in Somalia. The security situation in the country remains fragile, and there continue to be concerns about the judiciary's ability to operate independently in certain areas. Additionally, the legal system in Somalia remains complex and can be difficult for ordinary citizens to navigate.

Immunity of the Judges in Somalia.

Somali constitution 2012, Article 106(2,3) provides guarantees for members of the judiciary. It states that judges are protected from civil or criminal proceedings related to the performance of their judicial functions. Additionally, it requires authorization from the JSC for any search of a judge's home or person.¹⁷

The Judiciary organization Act 1962, article 24, guarantees that members of the judiciary cannot be deprived of their judicial functions unless disciplinary measures are advised by the Higher Judicial Council. They cannot be transferred or assigned to other functions without their consent, except for disciplinary measures or urgent service necessities. Civil action against members of the judiciary is not allowed unless it results from a crime. They are not required to perform public functions or duties, except military service.¹⁸

To summarize, the purpose of these provisions is to ensure that judges can perform their duties without facing unwarranted interference or consequences. By safeguarding their rights and establishing disciplinary measures, the Constitution, and the Judiciary Organization Law work together to establish a just and unbiased judicial system in the country.

¹⁵ Article 106(1), Somali constitution 2012

¹⁶ Article 109A (1) of the Somali Constitution 2012

¹⁷ Article 106(2,3) Somali const 2012

¹⁸ Article 24, Judiciary organization Act 1962

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International Standard of Judicial Independence

United Nation are a set of rules that determine the level of independence of the judiciary around the world. Some of these concepts are keeping the judiciary separate from the government, making sure judges have safe terms, and promoting justice in the decision-making process. They also highlight how important it is to have concrete standards for selecting judges, appointing judges, and promoting judges. The concepts also support equal opportunity under the law, accessible and public hearings, and the honesty of the courts.¹⁹

Judicial independence refers to the ability of judges to make decisions free from external influence or interference. It is an essential component of the rule of law and is necessary to ensure that justice is administered fairly and impartially.²⁰

Principle 10 of the United Nation Basic Principles requires that the selection of judges be based on objective criteria, such as professional qualifications, ability, and integrity, and that the selection process be free from any improper influence.²¹

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted 1966, promotes the appointment of judges based on their qualifications, experience, and integrity, and requires that judges be independent and impartial in the performance of their duties.²²

Principle 11 emphasizes the importance of security of tenure for judges, which helps to protect them from any improper influence or interference in the performance of their duties.²³

Article 6 says that judges are chosen for nine-year terms and can be re-elected. The terms of judges are spread out so that every three years, one-third of the judges are chosen.²⁴

The United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary outline guidelines for the removal of judges. Principle 17 protects judges from pressure, threats, or harassment that could interfere with their independence. Principle 19 ensures due process in disciplinary proceedings, and judges can defend themselves. Judges can only be removed due to incapacity or unfit behaviour, and removal must occur through lawful procedures. The decision to remove a judge must be made by an impartial authority.²⁵

¹⁹ he United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary, adopted in 1985. 20 Council of Europe, Nov 2010

²⁰ Council of Europe, Nov 2010

²¹ Principle 10 of United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary

²² The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted 1966.

²³ Principle 11 UN Basic Principle

²⁴ Article 6, the status of the International Court of Justice (ICJ

²⁵ Principle 17,19 The United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary

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The dismissal of a member of the Court is only possible if all other members unanimously agree that the individual no longer meets the necessary qualifications. In other words, the consensus of all Court members is required to determine the removal of a member who fails to fulfil the required conditions.²⁶

In summary, United Nation principles emphasizes the importance of an independent judiciary for justice, equality, and the rule of law. They advocate for objective selection of judges, security of tenure, equal representation, and fair disciplinary procedures.

Composition and Appointments of Judicial Service Commission

Article 109A (2) of the Constitution of Somalia, and Article 6 of the Judicial Service Commission act adopted by parliament 2014 states the composition of (JSC), which was composed of Nine Members, included, the Chief Judge of the Constitutional Court, the Chief Judge of the High Court, the Attorney General, two members of the Somali Bar appointed by the Somali Law Society, the Chair of the Human Rights Commission, and three people of high reputation within Somali society appointed by the President.

The appointment of members to the (JSC) in Somalia is outlined in Article 109A (2) of the Somali Federal Constitution, Article 6(E, F) and Article 9(2), of establishment of The Judicial Service commission 2014. The process for appointing members JSC is as follows:

The Chief Judge of the Constitutional Court, the Chief Judge of the High Court, Attorney General and Chairman of the Human Rights Commission are automatically members of the JSC by virtue of their positions.²⁷ The Somali Law Society has nominated two members of the Somali Bar Association, and three individuals of high reputation within Somali society to serve as member of the JSC. the president made the appointment after parliament approved ²⁸

Role and Responsibilities of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC)

Article 109A (6), of the constitution of Somalia 2012, the JSC is responsible for the appointment, promotion, and discipline of judges and other judicial officers throughout the country. Its job also includes making sure the court is impartial and honest, as well as coming up with rules and guidelines for how to handle justice effectively and efficiently.²⁹

Article 5 of the establishment of The Judicial Service Commission outlines the duties and powers of the Council. These responsibilities include:

²⁶ Article 18 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

²⁷ Article 9(2) of establishment of The Judicial Service commission 2014

²⁸ Article 6(2) of establishment of The Judicial Service commission 2014

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a. The Council is responsible for appointing, training, representing, and approving the appointment of judges at the federal level and for the Constitutional Court, as specified in Article 111 of the Constitution and the act of judicial service commission.

b. The Council has the authority to make decisions concerning the rights of employees working for the Federal Government and the Constitutional Court.

c. The Council is tasked with establishing procedures and enhancing the standards of the judiciary within the Federal Government and the Constitutional Court.

d. The Council provides advice to the Federal Government on matters related to the actions that affect the judiciary. This advice can be requested either by the Federal Government or by the same Assembly.

e. The Council is responsible for fulfilling the obligations of the party as mandated by the Constitution.

These duties and powers are designed to ensure the effective functioning of the judiciary and uphold the principles of justice within the legal system of the country.³⁰

At present, Somalia does not possess a functioning judicial service commission. On October 6, 2022, the current president terminated the establishment of a committee when he saw document XG/504/B-12/021 from the Upper House, as it was deemed to be in violation of the proper procedures that were appointed the committee, "on December 30, 2020, the president appointed the Judicial Service Commission with degree No. 357, which had solely obtained approval from the lower house and lacked the endorsement of the Upper House". As a result of these events, the judicial service commission in Somalia is currently non-existent.³¹

Overall, the existence of the JSC and its functions is crucial for upholding rule of law, maintaining the quality and integrity of the judiciary, and ensuring accountability within the judicial system.

Appointment Judicial Officers

Article 109A of the Somali Constitution of 2012, a Judicial Service Commission is established. This commission is responsible for determining the qualifications required for individuals to become judges and for establishing the procedures for their appointment.³²Furthermore, Article 90(J) stipulates that judges in Somalia are appointed by the President of the Federal Republic of Somalia with the recommendation of the Judicial Service Commission.³³

The Organization of the Judiciary Act of Somalia, adopted in 1962 that validated by the federal parliament through Act of establishment of judicial service Commission, outlines the process for admission to the judiciary. The process involves a competitive examination announced by the Minister of Grace and Justice, following the advice of the Higher Judicial Council. The

31 Official Bulletin of Somali 2022

³⁰ Article 5 of establishment of The Judicial Service commission

³² Article 109A of the Somali Constitution of 2012

³³ Article 90(J) of the Somali Constitution of 2012

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examination is open to citizens of legal age with a degree in legal subjects from the recognized university. Candidates may also possess an equivalent degree and meet other qualifications for civil service appointments. The Minister of Grace and Justice, after consultation with the Higher Judicial Council, determines the equivalence of educational qualifications for candidates from other institutions. This provision emphasizes the importance of capable and qualified judges in Somalia.³⁴ Addition that, to ensure the integrity and fairness of the examination process, the HJC may seek assistance, if necessary, from professors at the University of Law. These professors can provide expertise and contribute to the examination process, ensuring that it is thorough and comprehensive.³⁵

Overall, these provisions and processes aim to establish a transparent and credible judiciary in Somalia by setting standards for qualifications and appointments, as well as by involving relevant bodies to ensure fairness and expertise in the selection of judges. Despite that, there are political influence, current judges are appointed by the president without recommendations from the judicial service commission. On 27 may, 2018, the president appoints the chief of higher court with degree No 82 without recommendations for the judicial service commission.³⁶

Grades and Promotions of Judges

Article 18 of the Judicial Organization Act of 1962, the judiciary is organized into different grades. The members of the judiciary are categorized as follows:

- 1. The members of the judiciary shall consist of:
 - A. Assistant District judge
 - B. District judge
 - C. Assistant regional judge
 - D. Regional judge
 - E. Senior judge
 - F. First judge
 - G. President of supreme court
- 2. The assistant District Judge shall be Judge of the District court. The District Judge may be president of the District Court or Judge of the same court. The assistant Regional Judge shall be Judge of Regional Court. Regional judge may be the President of the Regional

Court, deputy Attorney general or Judge of the court of appeal, or Judge of Supreme Court. The first judge may be vice-president of the supreme court or attorney general.

These grades represent the hierarchical structure within the judiciary, with each level having its own responsibilities and authority.³⁷

³⁴ Article 19, Organization of the Judiciary Act of Somalia, 1962.

³⁵ Article 28(2)(a) Organization of the Judiciary Act 1962.

³⁶ Official Bulletin of Somalia 2018

³⁷ Article 18, judicial organization Act 1962

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According to Article 22 of the Judicial Organization Act of 1962, the promotions of judiciary are outlined as follows:

- 1. An assistant District Judge may be promoted as District judge after three years of service as an assistant District Judge.
- 2. A District Judge may be promoted as an assistant regional Judge on the basis of competitive examination on the main branches of the law. Provided he has served for at least three years as District Judge.
- 3. An assistant Regional Judge may be promoted as Regional Judge after two years of service as an assistant Regional Judge.
- 4. A regional Judge may be promoted as senior Judge on the basis of competitive examination on the main branches of the law, provided he has served for at least three years as Regional Judge.
- 5. A senior judge may be promoted as first judge after at least two years of service as senior Judge.
- 6. The president of the supreme Court shall be appointed from among the first Judges or from among Senior Judges who have served for at least four years as Senior Judges.
- 7. All promotions shall be subjected to the availability of vacancies in the higher grade.

These promotion criteria and procedures are intended to ensure a structured career progression within the judiciary and to consider the qualifications and experience of judges when advancing to higher positions.³⁸

Removal Procedure of Judicial Officer

According to Article 109A(6)(a) of the 2012 Provisional Constitution of Somalia, the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) is created as an independent body. The JSC is tasked with the duty of selecting, advancing, and disciplining judges and other judicial officials. Additionally, the JSC has the power to remove judges and other judicial officers from their roles in situations of misconduct or incompetence, while ensuring that proper procedures are followed and the right to appeal is respected.³⁹

Organization of the Judiciary Act of Somalia, adopted 1962, article 28(2)(C) the Higher Judicial Council (HJC) had the power to discipline judges and other judicial officers, including the power to remove them from office for misconduct or incompetence. The disciplinary powers of the HJC included suspension, reduction in rank, and removal from office.⁴⁰

Overall, the removal procedure of judicial officers in Somalia has been subject to significant political interference and instability over the years. However, the establishment of an independent

³⁸ Article 22 of the Judicial Organization Act of 1962.

³⁹ Article 109A(6)(a) Somali Constitution 2012.

⁴⁰ Article 28(2)(C) of the Judicial Organization Act of 1962.

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JSC under the Provisional Constitution represents a significant step forward in establishing a more formalized and independent procedure for the removal of judicial officers in Somalia.

Challenges Facing Judicial Independence of Somalia

The independence of Somalia's judiciary is under threat from various factors. Weak institutional framework, political interference, security concerns, limited judicial capacity, corruption, and bribery are significant challenges.

The judiciary's effectiveness is obstructed by a lack of a strong legal framework, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources. The shortage of trained judges and legal professionals contributes to delays in court proceedings and affects the quality of justice. The interference of influential individuals or groups in the judicial process undermines its independence and impartiality. Security concerns arising from armed groups. Public perception of corruption and inefficiency undermines confidence in the judicial system. The presence of traditional and informal justice systems alongside the formal judiciary creates complexities in maintaining consistency and upholding rule of law. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms, government and international support, and measures to strengthen the judiciary's independence and effectiveness. In summary, Somalia's judiciary isn't very independent, and there are significant issues that make it less effective and undermine public trust.

CONCLUSION

The study focuses on the judiciary independence in Somalia, examining the 2012 Provisional Constitution and the legal framework that establishes the independence of the judiciary and the role of the Judicial Service Commission (JSC). The JSC is responsible for appointing, promoting, and disciplining judges and other judicial officers. It plays a vital role in selecting qualified candidates for judicial positions, evaluating their performance, and handling disciplinary matters. However, the study highlights concern regarding the lack of existence of the JSC, which negatively impacts judicial independence. The judiciary in Somalia faces various challenges, including legal contradictions, inadequate legal structures, weak institutional framework, political interference, security risks, corruption, insufficient infrastructure, and limited resources. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive reforms, government and international assistance, and initiatives to enhance the autonomy and effectiveness of the judiciary.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes that the independence of the judiciary in Somalia relies on the existence and proper functioning of the JSC within the legal framework.

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Recommendation

- To enhance the judicial independence of Somalia, several recommendations can be made. These include the establishment of a Judicial Service Commission to oversee the appointment and discipline of judges, ensuring a transparent and merit-based selection process.
- The government should adhere to a strong legal framework that upholds the principles of an independent judiciary. It is crucial to separate the judiciary from the executive and legislative branches to prevent undue influence.
- Reviewing and clarifying the legal framework can define the roles, responsibilities, and powers of the judiciary more clearly.
- Investing in training programs and capacity-building initiatives can cultivate a skilled and competent judiciary while fostering a culture of ethics and integrity.
- International support and collaboration can provide valuable assistance in strengthening the judiciary's independence.
- Enhancing security measures for judges, court personnel, and facilities is vital to safeguard their independence and protect them from external threats.
- Allocating sufficient financial resources to the judiciary is necessary to simplify court processes and reduce delays.
- Promoting transparency and accountability by publishing court decisions and ensuring open access to proceedings can enhance public trust.
- Additionally, raising public awareness and education about the role of the judiciary and its significance in upholding the rule of law can foster understanding and engagement with the judicial system.

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