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[Home](#)

> [Research Program](#)

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Responses to Information Requests

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12 June 2015

DJI105209.FE

Djibouti: Treatment of members of the Union for National Salvation (Union pour le salut national, USN) coalition; framework agreement signed in December 2014 between the government and the USN (March 2014-May 2015)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

For information on the USN, including its structure, its members and its activities, see Response to Information Request DJI104771.

1. Treatment of Members of the USN

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Djiboutian League of Human Rights (Ligue djiboutienne des droits humains, LDDH), a Djiboutian NGO affiliated with the International Federation for Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) (FIDH n.d.), stated that [translation] "the treatment of members and supporters of the USN has not changed since [its creation in 2013]" (LDDH 5 June 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Djiboutian Observatory for the Promotion of Democracy and Human Rights (Observatoire djiboutien pour la promotion de la démocratie et des droits de l'homme, ODDH), another local NGO (US 27 Feb. 2014, 2) created in 2012 that works, among others, to [translation] "promote and strengthen democracy, good governance and human rights" (ODDH 8 June 2015), reported that "human rights violations and abuses" committed against members of the USN are "recurrent" (ibid. 5 June 2015).

1.1 March 2014

In a press release issued on 6 March 2014, the president of the USN states that between 3 and 5 March 2014, around fifteen members of the USN were taken in for questioning by the police on grounds of [translation] "illegal demonstrations," which he considers unfounded (USN 6 Mar. 2014). One of these USN members was allegedly [translation] "taken in using strong physical violence" on 3 March 2014 in AliSabieville, in the southeast of the country, and then placed "in police custody in the Research and Documentation Division (Section de recherches et de documentation, SRD) [of the police station] in the capital" (ibid.). In this same press release, the president of the USN states that nine USN members, including three parliamentarians, were arrested on 4 March 2014 in Arta-ville, [translation] "not far from the capital," and then detained at the Gabode prison on 5 March 2014, except for one person who was released (ibid.). The three parliamentarians referred to in the press release are member Ismaël Ahmed Assoweh, who also serves as permanent secretary of the USN, member Idriss Aden Osman, and deputy member Houssein Robleh Waiss (ibid.). In this same press release, the president of the USN states that six other USN members were taken in for questioning on 4 March 2014 in Balbala, another city in the suburbs of Djibouti, and then taken to the Cheik Moussa police station in this same city (ibid.). Further information on these arrests and interrogations

could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources dated 16 March 2014 report that 35 political detainees, including USN members, began a hunger strike (RFI 16 Mar. 2014; *La Nouvelle Tribune* 16 Mar. 2014). The objective of this hunger strike was to secure the release of 8 of these 35 political detainees who were found not guilty by judicial decision (ibid.; RFI 16 Mar. 2014). According to sources, this hunger strike was also intended to obtain better detention conditions (*La Nouvelle Tribune* 16 Mar. 2014; USN and VLD 12 Mar. 2014). According to a joint statement by the USN and La Voix de Djibouti (LVD), an independent Djiboutian radio station (RSF 23 May 2015), Ismaël Ahmed Assoweh (parliamentarian and USN permanent secretary), Idriss Aden Osman (parliamentarian), Maydaneh Abdallah Okieh (journalist and senior member of the USN) and Houssein Robleh Waiss (deputy parliamentarian) took part in this hunger strike (USN and LVD 12 Mar. 2014). Further information on the USN members who reportedly participated in the March 2014 hunger strike at the Gabode prison could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Reporters Without Borders (Reporters sans frontières, RSF), Maydaneh Abdallah Okieh, a technician at La Voix de Djibouti, was [RSF English version] "arrested arbitrarily" on 9 March 2014 and then detained at Gabode prison on 10 March 2014 for having covered a USN meeting held on 4 March 2013 in Balbala, where police "use[d] violence" (RSF 13 Mar. 2014).

1.2 May 2014

A report published by the LDDH in June 2014 states that during International Labour Day on 1 May 2014,

[translation]

USN activists did not escape the spiral of police repression that continued until 03 May 2014, during which security force officers disguised in plain clothes ... severely assaulted and injured many opposition activists who came to attend a meeting organized by the USN at the headquarters of the Union for Democracy and Justice (Union pour la démocratie et la justice, UDJ) [1] ... [which] was vandalized by these officers. (LDDH 27 June 2014)

According to the ODDH and the USN High Council, senior members of the USN were arrested on 1 May 2014, detained in Nagad, and then released on 3 May (ODDH 6 May 2014; USN 12 May 2014). According to sources, the USN activists included Kadar Abdi Ibrahim, Farah Ofleh, Yacin Moussa Ahmed and Abdi Doubad Darar (ibid.; ODDH 6 May 2014). Sources describe the location where the activists were detained as the [translation] "Nagad administrative detention centre" (USN 12 May 2014) and an "illegal detention centre" (LDDH 27 June 2014). According to the ODDH, the purpose of this centre was to be a [translation] "transit centre for illegal aliens" (ODDH 6 May 2014). The ODDH and the USN both note that the men apprehended on 1 May 2014 were kept in detention until 3 May 2014, while the women were released the same day (ibid.; USN 12 May 2014).

According to the ODDH, Saada Ahmed Houssein, a senior member of the USN whose name appears on a list of USN parliamentary candidates, was among the many people arrested on 2 May 2014 and then detained in Nagad (ODDH 6 May 2014). The ODDH and the USN both report that Saada Ahmed Houssein was released on 3 May 2014 (ibid.; USN 12 May 2014).

According to the USN, on 4 May 2014, two senior USN members, Hamoud Aden Olow and Abdi Bouh Miguil [Abdi Bour], were taken in for questioning, placed in police custody and mistreated at the police station in the 4th arrondissement (ibid.). They were then reportedly imprisoned at the Gabode prison on 8 May 2014 (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the USN, on 8 May 2014, the president and vice-president of the federation of the Republican Alliance for Development [Alliance républicaine pour le développement, ARD] party in Tadjourah, Wahib Mohamed Salem and Houmed Mohamed Halloyta, USN members, were arrested and then detained for a few hours by the [translation] "local police brigade" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources mention the arrest of Daher Ahmed Farah, spokesperson for the USN (EIU 17 July 2014; LDDH 17 June 2014). In an undated article, the Association of Culture and Progress (Association cultures et progrès, ACP), which aims to use foreign policy and development cooperation to [translation] "help improve living conditions for men and women" (ACP n.d.b), states that this arrest occurred on 22 May 2014, at his home, in retaliation for a joint "diplomatic tour" that the president of the LDDH and the USN representative made to Brussels to meet with Belgian authorities and the European Union (ACP n.d.a). At the time of his arrest, Daher Ahmed Farah was allegedly [translation] "forced to hand over [to criminal police officers] his

computer and all the documents that were in his office" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Sources report that Daher Ahmad Farah was released (RFI 23 June 2014; EIU 17 July 2014) on 23 June (ibid.). However, according to the ODDH, he was kept in detention [translation] "arbitrarily until 21 June 2014" even though a judicial decision of not guilty, rendered on 10 June 2014, should have led to his release (ODDH 24 Nov. 2014). This is corroborated by a press release dated 14 June 2014 in which the president of the USN denounced the non-enforcement of the judicial decision of not guilty on 10 June 2014 (USN 14 June 2014).

1.3 June 2014

A press release from the Union of Djibouti Workers (Union djiboutienne du travail, UDT) posted on the African online news site Al Wihda reports that Adan Mohamed Abdou, secretary general of the UDT, was [translation] "removed from a flight" and had his passport confiscated by the "political police" at the Djibouti airport (UDT 6 June 2014). A press release from the ODDH states that, in addition to being the secretary general of the UDT, Adan Mohamed Abdou is vice-president of a party affiliated with the USN (the ARD) and a member of the USN High Council (ODDH 24 Nov. 2014). According to the UDT, Adan Mohamed Abdou was [translation] "taken to a border police office inside the airport, set up as an interrogation and torture centre" (6 June 2014). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.4 August 2014

In August 2014, the RSF and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), a nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide (CPJ n.d.), both called on Djiboutian authorities to release Mohamed Ibrahim Waiss, a journalist at La Voix de Djibouti (RSF 8 Aug. 2014; CPJ 12 Aug. 2014). According to statements by CPJ East Africa representative Tom Rhodes made to Panapress, the Pan-African news agency, this arrest reflected [translation] "the [zero] tolerance policy for critics of the government of Djibouti" (Panapress 13 Aug. 2014). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the RSF, Mohamed Ibrahim Waiss was arrested [translation] "violently" on 8 August 2014, while working, for covering a demonstration by USN activists that had taken place that same day (RSF 8 Aug. 2014). This is corroborated by the CPJ, which stated that, according to local journalists, Mohamed Ibrahim Waiss reportedly sustained injuries to his eyes and back after being beaten by police and then taken to the Hodan Balbala police station (CPJ 12 Aug. 2014). Sources state that Mohamed Ibrahim Waiss was then detained at the Gabode prison (ibid.; LVD 22 Aug. 2014). According to La Voix de Djibouti, he was released on 21 August 2014 (ibid.).

More recent information on the treatment of members of the USN could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Framework Agreement Between the USN and the Government of Djibouti

Attached to this Response is a copy of the Framework Agreement on Political Dialogue between the Government and the Union for National Salvation (*Accord Cadre sur le dialogue politique entre le Gouvernement et l'Union pour le Salut National (USN)*) dated 30 December 2014 and taken from the *Journal officiel de la République de Djibouti*.

Sources describe this framework agreement as an [translation] "agreement to end the crisis" between the government and the USN opposition coalition (RTBF 31 Dec. 2014; BBC 31 Dec. 2014; *Jeune Afrique* 31 Dec. 2014). Similarly, according to Radio France internationale (RFI), [translation] "this agreement officially puts an end to the dialogue started in August 2013 between the two parties ... which resulted from the opposition contesting the results of the February 2013 election" (RFI 31 Dec. 2014). Sources report that, as part of the negotiations for this agreement, the USN committed to take up its seats in parliament of the eight members who were elected in 2013 (ibid.; AFP 31 Dec. 2014).

At the time its signing was announced, the framework agreement was well received by the international political community, including by the African Union (AU) (AU 9 Jan. 2015), the European Union (EU 6 Jan. 2015) and France (*La Nation* 6 Jan. 2015). However, according to an article published in January 2015 by *The Indian Ocean Newsletter*, a journal published in English and in French in Paris on [Africa Intelligence English version] "politics and business in the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean" (Africa Intelligence n.d.), on the local political stage, this framework agreement led to "splits" within the USN (*The Indian Ocean Newsletter* 2 Jan. 2015). According to this source, Daher Ahmad Farah, who heads the Movement for Democratic Renewal and Development (Mouvement pour le renouveau démocratique et le développement, MRD) and is also a spokesperson for the USN, was [Africa Intelligence English version] "the only member of its administrative council to vote against the reconciliation agreement with the government" (ibid.). This vote against was

motivated by the absence in this agreement of two [Africa Intelligence English version] "essential" provisions for the opposition regarding an independent national electoral commission and the status of the opposition (ibid.). However, according to this article, he accepted the vote and did not leave the USN, unlike Ali Deberkale Ahmed, a USN representative to the EU and Belgium (ibid.). Dissension was also allegedly evident within the governing party, with some of its members seeing this as an obstacle to their personal political advancement (ibid. 22 Jan. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

An article published in February 2015 by the *Indian Ocean Newsletter* states, [The Indian Ocean Newsletter English version] "The government is struggling to honour its commitments it gave under the reconciliation agreement ... with the Union pour le Salut National (USN).... For its part, the opposition coalition has already honoured its undertakings, seeing to it, notably, that its deputies take part in the proceedings of the National Assembly and calling off demonstrations" (3 Feb. 2015). According to the LDDH representative, [translation] "the framework agreement signed between the USN and the government on 30 December 2014 has effectively stalled, and there has been no political openness or respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the national constitution" (LDDH 5 June 2015). This is corroborated by the ODDH, which states that in May 2015, [translation] "of the seven 'immediate issues' [of the framework agreement], only one, issue 5, regarding the inclusion of the eight (8) opposition members in the National Assembly with payment of their salaries as of 23 February 2013, was resolved" (6 May 2015). However, the Chinese news agency Xinhua indicates that, in accordance with the framework agreement, [translation] "the government of Djibouti approved [in April 2015] an amnesty bill in favour of opposition figures and activists sentenced for events related to the 2013 post-election crisis" (Xinhua News Agency 9 Apr. 2015). Additional information on this amnesty bill could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Note

[1] The UDG is an opposition party in Djibouti, created in 2002, that has joined forces with the USN (*PHW* 2014, 399).

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Attachment

Djibouti. 30 December 2014. *Accord Cadre sur le dialogue politique entre le gouvernement et l'Union pour le Salut national (USN)*. <<http://www.presidence.dj/jo/2014/accordgouvusn2015.php>> [Accessed 1 June 2015]

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[Top of Page](#)

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