

# SOMALIA

## A NATION WITHOUT A STATE

Report from four public seminars on the conflict in Somalia, held during October and November 2007 in Stockholm, Sweden with *Nuruddin Farah*, Somali Novelist, *Roland Marchal*, Senior Research Fellow at the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales, Paris, *Asha Haji*, member of the Somalia Transitional Federal Parliament and civil society activist, *Jens Odlander*, Swedish Ambassador for the Somali Peace Process, *Shane Quinn*, Programme officer at the Life and Peace Institute, Sweden, and *Sahra Bargadle* and *Hayan Ismail* from the swedish-somali Diaspora. *Marika Fahlén*, Special Advisor for the Horn of Africa at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs acted as moderator for the panel discussion.

The seminars were jointly organized by the Life and Peace Institute,  
The Nordic Africa Institute and ABF Stockholm.

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## Foreword

The Somalia crisis has affected and continues to affect thousands and thousands of people. In spite of sharing a common culture, the Somali people remain deeply divided, as does their country. In February 2008, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution authorising a six-month extension for African Union peacekeepers but said that more needed to be done to restore peace and stability in the war-torn country. While the decision was welcomed by the Transitional Federal Government, Somali civil society groups said the extension was “of little value”. Initially, the peacekeeping force was to have comprised 8,000 troops, but only 1,600 Ugandan and 200 Burundian soldiers have so far been deployed.

A culture of impunity is one of the causes of Somalia’s humanitarian and political crisis, according to many civil society activists. Unless the world urgently addresses this matter, war crimes and crimes against humanity will continue unabated. This is also the view of Human Rights Watch in an address to the UN Human Rights Council as it began its first session in March 2008. The UN Secretary-General’s independent expert on Somalia will present his report to the council, and the council will also consider the renewal of his mandate. To provide background to the complex situation in Somalia, we decided last year to organise a seminar series. The series resulted in this report, which we hope will serve as a reminder of one of the longest crises in Africa and help to keep the spotlight on it.

Carin Norberg  
Director  
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## Introduction

Siyad Barre, the authoritarian ruler who had governed Somalia since 1969, was driven out of Mogadishu by several armed opposition movements in January 1991. The armed factions, which had nothing in common except their will to oust the long-standing dictator, were, however, not able to set up a working governance structure. In January 2008 – 17 years later – even with a new transitional government, political developments in Somalia still do not seem to show promise of lasting stability, or even peace.

The Transitional Federal Institutions created during peace talks in Kenya in 2004 – which include the government, the parliament and the president – have yet to prove able to provide stability or tackle the country's serious humanitarian crisis. Almost every day, the media tell of violent clashes and assassinations in the confrontation between combined Ethiopian and Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces and the so-called complex insurgency, which also includes remnants of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), in the southern parts of Somalia.

The northern parts of the country, where there are two different semi-independent structures in place (the self-declared “Republic of Somaliland” and the “Regional State of Puntland”), have enjoyed higher levels of security. However, fighting between the respective armed forces of both entities recurs over parts of the Sanaag and Sool provinces.

This report summarises four seminars in a series entitled “Somalia – a nation without a state”. These took place in October and November 2007 and were arranged by the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) and the Life & Peace Institute (LPI). ABF Stockholm very kindly provided the venue for all four seminars.

The title of the seminar series refers to the fact that although Somalis share a common culture, language and religion – qualities that are widely referred to as defining a nation – they remain deeply divided. The clan system, though it is a primary divisive force, is not the only factor behind this heterogeneity. Economic differences, land rights and the struggle for resources also play an important role.<sup>1</sup>

The conflict in Somalia has been going on for so long and has had widespread implications for the society. It is very complex and multi-layered. Consequently, the organisers of the seminar series decided to invite people from different backgrounds, people who have observed and analysed Somalia from different angles. Each seminar was thus very distinctive in its approach and content.

**Nuruiddin Farah** lectured on the history of Somalia and the causes of conflict from the perspective of a Somali-born novelist who has lived outside his country for more than 30 years. He put the question “to whom does the land belong” at the centre of his considerations.

**Roland Marchal**, as a researcher at the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales (CERI) comes from an academic background. He elaborated on the role of religion in Somalia and more specifically on the phenomenon of political Islam. He also presented his view on the way in which the inter-

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1. de Waal (2007).

national community dealt with the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in Somalia in 2006.

The position of women in the Somali society has undergone tremendous change as a result of almost two decades of violence. **Asha Hagi**, founder of Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) and member of the current Transitional Federal Parliament, described the role of Somali women in building peace based on her personal experiences as a women's activist.

The concluding seminar, a **panel discussion**, involved discussants from various backgrounds. The panel focused on the question of what steps are needed in order to achieve the vision of a peaceful Somalia. The panel consisted of Swedish foreign policy makers (Marika Fahlén and Jens Odlander); members of the Somali diaspora in Sweden (Sahra Bargadle and Hayan Ismail) and a representative of an NGO with longstanding experience of working in Somalia (Shane Quinn, programme officer at LPI).

### Acknowledgements

The editor would first of all like to thank the directors Peter Brune at the Life & Peace Institute and Carin Norberg at the Nordic Africa Institute for making these seminars possible. In addition, several people at both LPI and NAI supported the organising of the seminars and the compilation of the report: at LPI, Catrin Rosquist, Shane Quinn, Tore Samuelsson and Carolina Olsson and at NAI Mathias Krüger. I would also like to thank Göran Eriksson and Marianne Nordin-Larsson at ABF Stockholm for their support and, of course, Nurrudin Farah, Roland Marchal and Asha Hagi for their lectures and written contributions.

Uppsala, January 2008

Charlotte Booth, editor  
Life and Peace Institute



# “To Whom Does Somalia Belong?”

## A Novelist’s Account of the Somali Conflict

NURUDDIN FARAH is one of Africa’s most distinguished novelists.<sup>2</sup> Born in Baidoa in 1945, Farah began his writing career in 1970 with *From a Crooked Rib* – the story of a nomad girl who flees from an arranged marriage to a much older man. While travelling in Europe following the publication of *A Naked Needle* (1976), Farah was warned that the Somali government planned to arrest him. Farah began a self-imposed exile to escape imprisonment.

His trilogy “Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship” (1980–83) criticises authoritarian postcolonial African regimes, comparing them to European colonialists. *Maps* (1986) – the first part of his second trilogy “Blood in the Sun” – has cemented his reputation. Set in the Ogaden war, the novel explores questions of cultural identity in a postcolonial world. The novels *Gifts* (1993) and *Secrets* (1998) followed. Among other distinctions, Farah received the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1998.

In 2000, Farah published *Yesterday, Tomorrow (Voices from the Somali Diaspora)*, his one and only non-fiction book. Then he embarked on a new trilogy about the Somali civil war, publishing the first part, *Links*, in 2003 and the second, *Knots*, in 2007. He is currently at work on the third book in the trilogy.

### 1. Introduction

Talking about the history of Somalia is, according to Nuruddin Farah, a difficult task, because, sadly, no reliable text on the subject exists. The social anthropologist Ioan M. Lewis wrote *History of Somalia*, the only book making this claim. In Farah’s view, Lewis has very little understanding of the Somali people, their history and culture. Even though he studied them for 51 years, he has remained what he has always been – a colonial anthropologist.

Nuruddin Farah opened the lecture by asking the question “To whom does the land belong?” and then focused on the one subject that has been trou-

bling Somalis for a long time now. Does the land belong to the people who claim “ancestral ownership” of it, or does it belong to all Somalis? If it belongs to all Somalis, does it also, equally belong to the state running the nation’s affairs?

### 2. Early Somali history

Nuruddin Farah started his historical account by going back to a time, when Somalis were non-Muslims and were trading with the pharaohs of Egypt and with India. The question of land ownership was not one that came up often before Islam arrived on the shores of the country: the land belonged to the clan families dwelling on it. However, from the time Somalis became Muslims the land was said to belong to Allah and not to the people living on it. This opened the entire territory to every Muslim regardless of his or her origin.

In the 10th century, Mogadishu was a metropolis where the *lingua franca* was Arabic. The city, approximately four square miles in extent, boasted inhabitants of mixed origin – Somalis, Persians and Arabs were all residents – and the city state had fruitful trading relations with India, Persia and Arabia. This trade attracted the attention of the Portuguese, not least Vasco da Gama, who was intent on creating trading posts along the East African coast. Perceiving Mogadishu as a major competitor, it is said that Vasco da Gama bombarded the city to destroy it.

The primary residents of Mogadishu – being cosmopolitan – and the Somali-speaking nomads living in the area outside the city limits had different ideas when it came to land ownership, and Nuruddin Farah presumed that the two groups would have answered his central question differently. Whereas the Somali pastoralists claimed ancestral ownership of the land, the cosmopolitan urban dwellers, who were Persian, Arab or Indian and who were invariably Muslim, would have challenged the pastoralists’ claims, given that in their view the land belonged to

2. For more information on Nuruddin Farah’s life and work, refer to Wright (2004) and Alden and Tremaine (1999).

Allah, so that they as Muslims and residing in the city had every right to it. These differences led to an invasion of Mogadishu by Somali speaking nomads in the 15th century, when the city was razed to the ground, save for a couple of mosques, which survived until 1991 and were finally destroyed only in the current civil war.

### 3. Colonialism

During the era of colonialism, the land of the Somalis was divided among three European powers – Italy, France and Great Britain – and one African, Emperor Menelik's Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia).<sup>3</sup> An astute politician, Menelik characterised Abyssinia as a Christian island in an Islamic ocean, thereby pandering to the European powers that he hoped would come to the aid of a Christian monarch as the Ottoman empire unravelled. His small country, the size of a napkin, was to secure special protection and benefit from Europe's largesse in the form of arms shipments, and was abetted by other means, including diplomatic recognition.

In the 1880s, the question of land ownership again came to the fore. The colonial powers dismissed the idea of the land belonging to Allah and negotiated access to the territories with the "corrupt elders" of clan families. The land that had belonged to Allah for several centuries was given away "for a bit of sugar for their sweet teeth", you might say. From then on, the colonialists had the authority to claim ownership of the land, and required all Somalis to carry identification cards as British, Italian or French subjects, as well as making them apply for visas if they wanted to travel between the different Somali-inhabited colonial territories. On the ID cards, the colonialists identified the person by his name and after it the name of his clan.

Since the colonial occupation overtly challenged the rules of Islam, it is no surprise that anti-colonial resistance had a clear religious impetus. The strongest resistance to the colonial presence was led by the Somali warrior and poet Sayyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, whom the British called the "Mad Mullah". To illustrate his argument, Nuruddin Farah quoted a letter that Sayyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassan wrote to the British in 1903:

I want to rule my own country, I want to protect my own religion, all you can get from me is war – nothing else. The land – as a Somali and as a Muslim – belongs to me and to Allah. You – the British – have come and negotiated with traitors who sold the land to you. I want you out of this country. My religion is this one, I am Somali, you are British, Christian, colonialist and I want you out of it. We ask for Allah's blessings, Allah is with me. If you want war, I am ready for it, if you want peace, I will be content. But if you want peace, go away from my country, back to your own.<sup>4</sup>

The resistance lasted for 20 years (1901–20) and was brought to an end by what, according to Nuruddin Farah, was the world's first aerial bombing, when the British attacked Taleh where the "Mad Mullah" was based.

From that date on, the land belonged neither to the clan families dwelling on it nor to the faith of Islam and all who profess it, but to the foreign powers occupying it.

### 4. From Independence to Collapse (1960–1991)

When Somalia gained independence in 1960, the new state inherited most of the practices and behaviours of the colonial powers. According to Nuruddin Farah, the state behaved in "exactly the same way with no change".<sup>5</sup> In 1969, the military dictator Mohammed Siyad Barre seized power and one of his first measures was to grant total supremacy to the state, declaring, in effect, that the state owned the land, not the clans. This was in line with Siyad Barre's justification for seizing power through a military coup, namely to clean the country of the clan mentality that had been pervasive during the years of parliamentary democracy, an era known for its widespread corruption and clannishness.

During the rule of Mohammed Siyad Barre, one major problem was the centralisation of political,

3. Italy established itself in the southern part of today's Somalia in 1882; Great Britain nominally controlled north-western Somalia; Ethiopia's main area of influence was the Ogaden region; and France was the colonial power over today's Djibouti.

4. Quotations without references are taken from the seminar recordings.

5. Somalia reached independence in July 1960 with the merger of the former Italian colony in the south and the British protectorate. Somali-inhabited territories that were not included in the independent state are the Northern Frontier District in Kenya and eastern parts of Ethiopia (Ogaden region) as well as Djibouti (which did not achieve full independence until 1977). The years until the "collapse" of the state in 1991 saw two different political systems. From 1960–69, Somalia was – at least nominally – a parliamentary democracy. However, party competition and parliamentary rule declined more and more into a system of patronage, mainly built on the clan structure of Somali society. The second period from 1969–91 was marked by the authoritarian rule of Mohammed Siad Barre and his military regime.



economic and social life. According to Nuruddin Farah, Somalia became a "one-city state": "There was only one city where you could go to if you needed a medical doctor, if you needed a dentist, if you needed the best school. If you needed a passport, you had to go to Mogadishu".

The Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia (1977–78) can be seen as a turning point in Somalia's downward trend. The defeat of the national army in 1978 through the combined efforts of Cuba, Russia and Ethiopia prompted an attempt by certain military officers to assume power on 9 April 1978, among them today's transitional President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed. The underlying reason for this coup was that Siyad Barre, contrary to his claims, relied on his immediate family and a couple of other clans to keep himself in power. The coup was the first overt act of opposition to his regime. It was followed by the formation of armed opposition movements, beginning with the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), which based itself in Ethiopia, with Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed as one of its leaders. In 1981, the Somali National Movement (SNM) came into existence, establishing itself, again, in Ethiopia and being the movement of the peoples of the former British protectorate. The founding of further movements, most importantly the United Somali Congress (USC), which would eventually invade Mogadishu and chase Siyad Barre from his power base in 1991 would lead to the eventual break-up of the country into clan-based fiefdoms run murderously by warlords. Of course, the warlords claimed to be fighting in the name and interests of their clan families – which they were not: they were interested in seizing power, nothing else.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Somalia after 1991

### *Trapped in clan warfare?*

After the flight of Siyad Barre, the entire Somali population, including the breakaway Republic of Somaliland, Puntland and Mogadishu, demanded that the land should revert to the people who had owned it "ancestrally".

Since 1991, Somalia has been experiencing widespread civil war and political, social and economic

chaos. Nuruddin Farah summarised his analysis as follows: "My theory is no clan ever fought against another. There were people representing groups and clan families who wanted to take over power and one way of doing it was to claim to be fighting on behalf of a clan family".

Nuruddin Farah identified *representation* as the core issue. Who represents whom? How do you determine that someone claiming to represent this or that clan does and can represent them? Have the largest number of people from a given clan family asked that So-and-So represent them in their fight for power?

We know that no clan families have chosen representatives on a broad and inclusive level. Therefore, those who are saying that they are fighting on behalf of "their" people or clans might just as well just be fighting on their own behalf and for their personal gains and interests.

After the collapse of the Siyad Barre regime in 1991, most people were convinced that what happened in Mogadishu soon after Siyad Barre fled the city arose from a confrontation between two of Somalia's major clan families. However, according to Farah, that is not the case, because soon after Mogadishu had been emptied of its inhabitants and there was widespread looting of properties the men interested in taking power deployed their armed supporters to fight each other. Nor is there a need to mention that the two men in question belonged, broadly speaking, to the same large clan family unit. An analysis of the evolution of the conflict since 1991 reveals that the armed confrontation was and is more about power than anything else. In addition, it has more recently descended into internal fighting.

### *History returns: The rise of the Islamic Courts (2006) and the question of land ownership*

In 2006, after armed conflict had persisted in Somalia for more than 15 years, a group of men rallied to take power in the name of Allah. Their ultimate goal, they said, was to establish an Islamic state in Somalia. Here, Nuruddin Farah drew a link to the start of his lecture by returning to the question, "to whom does the land belong?" The new Islamists said that it belonged to all Muslims. Reflecting that conviction, the spokesperson of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) stated the following just a few days before the Ethiopian invasion: "We invite all Muslims wherever they are to come to Mogadishu because there is a jihad going on". In this sense, the

6. Open civil war started in 1988 when the Somali National Movement launched an attack on Burco. Siyad Barre reacted with harsh "punishment" of northern Somalia by bombing both Burco and Hargeisa. For a detailed description of human rights violations by the regime, especially those targeted against the Isaq population in the north, see Africa Watch (1990).

question of “to whom the land belonged” was answered in the same way as it was answered over a thousand years ago – “the land belongs to all Muslims”. However, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which declares itself to be at the head of a secular state, does not share this view.

Nuruiddin Farah described the rise and fall of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) as tragic – because the UIC achieved great things but, unfortunately, “collapsed” because of a secondary failing. Among their achievements were the expulsion of the warlords and the establishment of some kind of order in the south of Somalia. However, they made a mistake by thinking they could defeat Ethiopia by provoking her into war.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Nuruiddin Farah's view on the question of land ownership*

The question of land ownership is not only pivotal at the level of the national struggle for power, but is also a constant feature of daily life. For instance, Nuruiddin Farah commented how he was once offended by a politician in Hargeisa – capital of the “breakaway” Republic of Somaliland – who demanded him to leave “his” land. According to Nuruiddin Farah:

This is a question that comes back, time and time again, a question that we, in Somalia and in other parts of Africa too, have not answered adequately. I am of the generic view that the territory belongs to whoever it is who lives on it, who develops it, turns it into a functioning, working place no matter where this person came from originally.

#### *What place for the Somali Diaspora?*

Both in Nuruiddin Farah’s presentation and in the ensuing discussion, the role and potential of the Somali diaspora was brought up. His advice to all the Somalis living abroad is that they be good citizens wherever they are. In the light of that view, he was rather critical of the attitudes and behaviour of some diaspora representatives:

Instead of sending guns and money to various families in Somalia, and instead of standing around and

talking all-day long, saying terrible things and creating enmity, and saying nothing pleasant about the people who live in very, very difficult situations, I advise the Somali in the diaspora to do good where they are. You should take into account that your children are here and safe, nor are your lives at risk daily. I suggest you shut up, say nothing bad about those living in difficult questions, those living in the country you have already relinquished, your territory is here, you belong here, if you can benefit, if you can create peace, that is what you must do. ... Do well where you are, so that we – the Somalis in Somalia and everywhere – can be proud of you.

In his view, the Somalis around the world have the opportunity to use their favourable life conditions to support the stabilisation process of Somalia, but they can do that only if they become good citizens where they live. A Somali Swede can help by pleading to the Swedish government for help, and ask for support for Somalia. Again, this is possible only if the Somalis are responsible citizens of Sweden. Not so if the Somalis in Sweden are living on social welfare, for no one will respect you in your country of residence if you do not behave responsibly, pay your tax, etc, and no one will pay attention to requests of the diaspora. “You are comfortable here, be comfortable, and in your comfort give us some comfort ... You don’t lose your Somaliness by becoming a good Swede”.

#### *External influence in Somalia: The African Union, Ethiopia and Eritrea*

Nuruiddin Farah had no objections to the **African Union (AU) mission** to Somalia. In his view, an adequate AU force combined with diplomatic mediation between the different parties to the conflict could contribute to a cessation of hostilities and an improvement in the conditions for people. However, the problem is that the AU mission lacks sufficient funding, which had been promised by the international community. The troops sent to Somalia are doing a tremendous job with the limited resources at their disposal. The areas of Mogadishu secured by these forces are in peace. If the international community were to allocate the promised funds, it would be possible for the remaining AU forces to be deployed to Somalia.

He went on to assess **Ethiopia’s role**. In his view, the Ethiopian “invasion” of Somalia in late December, 2006 (which he later also referred to as “intervasion” to capture the hybrid character of intervention – because it was requested by the TFG

7. Nuruiddin Farah was asked to “carry the fire”, i.e. mediate between the TFG and the Islamic courts in July 2006. When he was talking to high-ranking Islamist leaders, he told them: “Ethiopia is waiting for you to provoke them. When you are talking to the press, don’t use the word jihad, because when you use that word, you are going to be target”. (For a more detailed description of his role, see: Farah (2007).

– and invasion – because Ethiopia's own national interest was a key factor in its entering Somalia) has created a very complicated situation. In current circumstances, the insurgents attack all the areas in Mogadishu where Ethiopian forces are concentrated. Sadly, though, because there is no negotiated political settlement between the Somali groupings, there is no guarantee the fighting will stop once the Ethiopian invaders withdraw. Further point-scoring as well as vengeance will probably continue. Reacting to a comment by an Ethiopian in the audience, who defended Ethiopia based on the argument that the TFG had formally invited the Ethiopian forces, Nuruddin Farah referred back to his initial question:

(...) the question you have to ask yourself is to whom does the territory, the land, the authority of the land belong? Does it belong to the people of Somalia or does it belong to a Transitional Federal Government, who invited Ethiopia? I did not say it was right, I did not say it was wrong, I simply say always ask the question to whom does the land belong, who can be invited and who cannot be invited.

In his assessment of **Eritrea's involvement** in the Somali conflict, Nuruddin Farah stated that Eritrea was making unnecessary enemies at a time when it is already on bad terms with most countries in the region, and with the US too.

## 6. Nuruddin Farah's vision for Somalia

At the conclusion of his lecture, Nuruddin Farah reflected upon Somalia's future and prospects for peace. He expressed the belief that the Somalis would be united one day. In order to achieve such peaceful coexistence, we must eradicate the dominant culture of the gun and replace it with self-respect and tolerance, and peace must become fashionable, he said.

Looking at developments in Somalia in the last two years, he identified some progress in that the number of parties to the conflict has diminished considerably. Before the Islamic Courts' rise to power in 2006, he said, there were some 15 factions fighting for influence in South Somalia. In 2006, there were only two – the TFG and the Islamists. In 2007, there were also just two parties. He is convinced that peace would become fashionable and then that people would forget their differences. Citing Voltaire, who said that joblessness was the source of all evil, Nuruddin Farah expressed the belief that peace could be achieved by making everybody very busy not with "talk, talk and more talk", but with "work, work and more work".

The question of land ownership will eventually be solved in a peaceful Somalia:

When and if there is peace in Somalia, you can be sure that there will be no borders between the Somalis. ... All of us will have our properties in Mogadishu back, we will all come and we will live there and you will see there will be no problem. Am I naïve? Yes, I am. What if I am naïve?!



Nuruddin Farah. Picture taken 9 October 2007 at ABF Stockholm.  
Credit: Catrin Rosquist.

## SEMINAR 2

Roland Marchal  
16 October 2007

# The Role of Religion in the Somali Conflict and External Ways to Deal with It

ROLAND MARCHAL is senior research fellow at the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales (CERI) in Paris. CERI is one of France's foremost centres for research on international relations. He holds degrees in mathematics and the social sciences. Roland Marchal is a member of the scientific committee of the journal *Politique Africaine*. He has observed and researched developments in Somalia and the Horn of Africa region for many years and has visited the region on various occasions. His first stay in Somalia was in 1991 to monitor the agreement reached in the second reconciliation conference hosted by Djibouti (15–21 July).

### 1. Introduction

The subject of this lecture was the role of religion in the Somali conflict, a role that had been especially highlighted since the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2006. Somalia is a Muslim nation and therefore talking about religion means talking about Islam, which is a reality that no one can escape. This basic tenet of the society is not contested by whoever is in power or opposition.

Roland Marchal started by highlighting three aspects where caution was needed in the analysis of the role of religion.

**First**, one should not confuse Islam and political Islam. The distinction between them is vital for any proper analysis. From a sociological perspective, **Islam** is a way in which people frame their lives. It is therefore much broader than the concept of political Islam. **Political Islam** encompasses ideologies that are framed within an Islamic discourse, based on Islamic values and propagating a specific interpretation of what Islam is and is not supposed to be in its interaction with the state and the organisation of the society.

A **second** point to consider is the tendency by external actors and analysts to focus on the political groups in the forefront, especially in violent contexts such as in Somalia. However, political Islam in Somalia could be represented by many organisations, some

of whom were part of the Islamic Courts, some not. Others might not be willing to move into the political realm as it is framed today at all. Therefore, analysis has to be very cautious and has to question whether what is discussed actually reflects the reality or only part of it.

**Thirdly**, the Islamic discourse emanating from those groups is not religious in itself, but might be a tool to structure nationalistic values instead. This becomes especially relevant in the current Somali situation, which is characterised by foreign troops within the country and an insurgency against the combined Ethiopian/TFG forces.

Roland Marchal split his lecture into two parts. In **part one**, he spoke about political Islam in Somalia based on the assumption that its characteristics and shape result from a specific path to globalisation. **Part two** was devoted to a discussion of how the international community – including journalists, media and diplomats – has perceived and reacted to political dynamics in Somalia in 2006 and 2007. His general conclusion was that most of these actors failed to take the local situation into account. The articulation between these two subjects is **globalisation** – a term widely discussed and analysed by sociologists. However, the term still has no exactly defined meaning. In Marchal's view, the only possible way to discuss globalisation is in reference to local situations. In the discipline of international relations, this is called "glocal", i.e., global and local, denoting the intimacy of the relationship between what appears to be global dynamics and what is local reality.

### 2. Political Islam in Somalia

*The "secular illusion": Political Islam in Somalia before the civil war*<sup>8</sup>

A description of political Islam in Somalia in the period from 1969–1991 – the years of authoritarian

8. For a more detailed account, see Marchal (2004).

rule by Mohammed Siyad Barre – is a challenge, since there was little space to conduct research on this subject and no free media in Somalia during that time. As a result, social transformations taking place within the Somali society were hardly noticed by external actors. Regarding the development of Islam, most outsiders were caught in what Roland Marchal called a “secular illusion”, arising from the fact that Siyad Barre promoted the ideology of scientific socialism. Measures such as the introduction of a Latin alphabet in 1972 and a secular Family Law code in 1975, which was strongly opposed by religious leaders, supported the external perception of Somalia as a secular state.

Social transformations regarding Islam and political Islam arose from a number of factors. First and foremost, Somalia overcame its isolated position in the region, e.g., by joining the Arab League in 1974. In connection with that, a considerable number of Somali students received their training in foreign religious institutions (promoted through grants and scholarships) in Sudan and Saudi Arabia, coming back with new religious ideas. A further influence was the Iranian revolution in 1979, which promoted the development of political Islam in the whole region.

The spread of Islamic ideas was facilitated – at least in comparison with other social ideas – by the availability of Arabic books, which were more easily brought into Somalia than Western books. This meant that religious literature had a more or less undisputed status, while more liberal ideologies had little soil to grow in. Secular and liberal groups, furthermore, were more persistently suppressed and controlled by the regime.

According to Roland Marchal, the Islamic groups that developed in Somalia had no very specific character but shared many characteristics with other Muslim countries. First, there was not one Islamic movement, but several, and they disagreed on more than ideology. They were further divided for other reasons, such as the social or regional backgrounds of their founders. A general tendency, which can also be witnessed today, is that the religious culture was not very impressive in Somali Islamic groupings (again a feature observed in other countries). Somali Islamic movements were, moreover, split from the beginning over their interpretation of Somali politics. This had already played a role before the upheaval against the Siyad Barre regime. It was also reflected after 1991 and in the involvement by these groups in the civil war. While some groups were

willing to take up arms and take part in the fighting, others refused to participate either militarily or even politically in Somali politics.

#### *Dynamics after 1991*

Roland Marchal distinguished three periods in the development of political Islam in Somalia after 1991.

##### *a) Changes in religious practice, al Itihaad al Islaami and local Islamic courts (1991–96)*

The period from January 1991 until December 1992 was characterised by large-scale civil war. This entailed very high levels of human insecurity, which – as a new social reality – also influenced the significance and form of religious practice. For instance, people read the Qur’an more often in quest of spiritual support. Identification with Islam also became a means to achieve physical security, e.g., against the mooryaan, groups of youth militias that avoided attacks on religious people for fear of God’s punishment.<sup>9</sup>

There was a great proliferation of factions during this period. Islamic groups that had been set up at the outset of the upheaval against the regime were neither very active nor visible in the period when the fighting was hardest.<sup>10</sup> Some political groups operated with an Islamic agenda. By far the most influential – and the only one arming itself – was al Itihaad al Islaami (AIAI). Its strategy of trying to assume power violently distinguished it from other Islamic groups. AIAI tried to occupy the cities of Merka, Kismaayo and Boosaaso, but was defeated by other factions, such as the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, which expelled AIAI from most of the northeastern regions (Puntland). AIAI settled itself in the Gedo region and established some kind of order in Luuq, a town near the Somali-Ethiopian border, with limited success until 1996.

Another group worth mentioning is al-Islaah, which was initially an Islamic NGO operating at the interface between Somalis and international Islamic NGOs. At the very beginning, its activities were modest and the projects it implemented demonstrated a real social commitment. Al-Islaah then developed a strong basis inside Bakaraha market in South Mogadishu. Through the external support it received, Al-Islaah was able to build a network across

9. See also Marchal (2004:123). The phenomenon of mooryaan is discussed in Marchal (1997).

10. See Marchal (2004:125).

different groups of the population. For instance, it was very influential in the education sector.<sup>11</sup>

Another important element during this period was the creation of Islamic courts in a few areas in Mogadishu and Middle Shabelle. These courts attempted to enforce Sharia law in order to exert control over large parts of these two centres. In North Mogadishu – then under Ali Mahdi’s influence – Islamic courts achieved almost “normal” levels of security. During that period, Sharia courts strove to be seen as independent of all the politico-military factions that emerged from the civil war. The fact that they employed armed militias to enforce law proved that they were becoming leading actors in the political sphere. Their political ambitions largely explain why they were challenged and destroyed.

*b) Islamic groups merging with communities (1996–2000)*

This period was driven mostly by social assertion, in the sense that the Islamic and even the more militant groupings sought to work within communities, within clans and did not want to be as independent as in the preceding period. The logic was thus very different from previous attempts to influence political dynamics. In fact, the groupings became very powerful actors with a geographical focus on South Mogadishu and the Lower Shabelle region. Their major achievement was to establish a considerable level of security.

The year 2000 presented the climax and at the same time the end of their influence. It was the climax in the sense that the Islamic courts had to be considered to be the most influential political actors in south-central Somalia. It was the end because a number of elements within the courts decided to align themselves with the newly formed Transitional National Government (TNG). The existing courts were split on that decision: some of their leaders – such as Hassan Dahir Aweys – refused to cooperate with the TNG and withdrew from the political realm. Most, however, supported the TNG and provided recruits for the police and the army.

*c) After 11 September 2001: The rise and fall of the Union of Islamic Courts*

In Roland Marchal’s view, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) tried to synthesise those experiences. They must be considered the leading political actors in that period. Nevertheless, the victory against the factions was not only their achievement, as Hassan

Dahir Aweys himself pointed out in an interview with Roland Marchal:

Many people got involved in the war against the factions. Of course, the Islamic Courts were there, they are the ones that are capitalising on the victory against the factions. They are filling the political vacuum. But we know that we are not the only ones and there should certainly be an attempt to take on board politically a number of trends, groupings that were not part of the Islamic Courts but played a major role in marginalising and getting rid of the factions in Mogadishu.

As indicated by that quote, the victory of the Islamic courts resulted from the merging of several factors. First, there was a popular uprising against the factions, though the population was not unanimous. Second, the Islamic courts were in fact the only ones able to fill the gap after the factions fled Mogadishu, because neither clans nor businessmen that had been supporting the war effort were organised.<sup>12</sup> According to Roland Marchal, this political dimension was completely misunderstood and misused by the international community. No – or very few – diplomats were willing to engage with the UIC (even though UIC had the leverage to move matters), to discuss and argue about a number of decisions that were taken by the courts.

The political spectrum of the Islamic groups forming UIC was very broad: from certain Takfiri<sup>13</sup> and jihadi groups to people who “were running the show” three to four years earlier, people of al-Islaah, and as such close to the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. Though the Union of Islamic Courts can be criticised for a number of serious failings and measures taken, there was one thing very striking about their rise, their legitimacy.

Over the last 17 years, I rarely found an organisation that was legitimate for most of the Somalis. The Courts were, which doesn’t mean that everything the Courts did was seen as positive. Far from that, there were a lot of arguments against specific decisions or non-decisions. But nevertheless for the first time you had a legitimacy of a de facto Somali authority that was deprived yet of a political programme. That was something that could have raised a lot of hope. A question

11. See Marchal (2004:126).

12. This is a summary of the line of argument used in Marchal (2007).

13. Takfirirs (from takfir – the practice of declaring as an unbeliever an individual or a group previously considered Muslim) are not bound by the usual religious constraints in carrying out operations related to jihad. They believe strictly in Muhammed’s understanding of Islam and reject any kind of change or reform.

I am still asking myself is why in summer 2006, the international community never ever engaged in a serious matter with the Islamic Courts.

### 3. External ways of dealing with political Islam in Somalia

As an academic – not even asking as a citizen – I was amazed by the way events in Somalia were represented over the last year.

In the ensuing part of his lecture, Roland Marchal explored the way in which the international community reacted to the trends in political Islam in Somalia. He focused especially on the recent period of the rise and fall of the UIC. His general view was that whatever happened in Somalia during 2006 and 2007 was perceived through the lens of terror and terrorism, even though the whole approach on terrorism was already mistaken. He warned against this prevailing perspective by citing Charles Tilly:

In particular, social scientists that attempt to explain sudden attacks on civilian targets should doubt the existence of a distinct, coherent class of actors (terrorists) who specialize in a unitary form of political action (terror) and thus should establish a separate variety of politics (terrorism).<sup>14</sup>

However, with few exceptions those who attempted to describe the political dynamics in Somalia failed to take this kind of warning into account. He went on to identify a merging of very different categories:

Political Islam became Islamic extremism. If you are an extremist, you must be a jihadist, and if you are a jihadist, you must be close to Takfirism. A whole spectrum, which referred to a long history of debate within political Islam, was just summed up in one position.

According to Marchal, this approach is even more striking when one considers that we are not completely without knowledge of the phenomenon of terrorism, because this is not the first time in history that such violent actions against civilians have been taken. Studies of suicide bombers and terrorist groups make clear that religion is, in the great majority of cases, a secondary factor behind political grievances and nationalism. In short, the religious discourse used by these actors is more instrumental than causative.<sup>15</sup> This idea is confirmed when one looks at a number of suicide bombings that have occurred in Somalia and hears about the people that

perpetrated them. Of course, religious extremism exists in Somalia. However,

We have to be smart with the Somalis. Why should they need Osama Bin Laden to do that? They have their own experience and repertory of what Islamist extremism could look like in Somalia and they use it.

Another frequent assumption about Somali Islamists, according to the speaker, concerns their integration into transnational terrorist networks. The conventional line of argument has it that individuals connect with each other using various means of communication, form cells and establish organisations. There are no longer any differences among them: those individuals or groups are suddenly fully globalised and share common political beliefs and the same agenda. Some academics compare this interpretive tendency, which represents an absolute regression in analytical capacities, with the period of the Cold War. Here, Roland Marchal referred to George Kennan's warning not to treat communism as a monolith. In Kennan's view, the identification of differences between communist groups provided the basis for enlarging the rifts between them and thereby weakening them. According to Marchal, international actors and observers should not merge all groups into one kind of evil, since this will not lead to the framing of sound policies on defeating terrorism.

To Roland Marchal, it is obvious that external actors did not take local realities into account: in fact they became essentially irrelevant. He illustrated this by citing the example of Hasan Dahir Aweys, one of the most prominent figures in the Islamic movement in Somalia. To most international actors, the fact that he is mentioned on the US list of terrorist suspects is proof enough.

Of course, he is on the list, the question is, what did he do? Actually, what he did, he was the head of one organisation [AIAI] that was on the list. If sections or members of your organisation are actually organising terrorist attacks, are you by definition responsible for that?

The same could be said of Shabaab, a populist group, and the Salafi organisation within the Islamic courts. Shabaab is often perceived and portrayed as the Somali group that is closest to Al-Qaeda<sup>16</sup> and is said to have killed a number of Somalis and foreign aid workers and journalists. However, there is a tendency among important actors to neglect that

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14. Tilly (2004:5–13). This argument is also made in Bloom (2005) and Sageman (2004).

15. See Marchal (2007:851).

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16. Taken with adaptations in phrasing from Marchal (2007:853).

they were also part of an underground war taking place in Somalia after 9/11, when Ethiopians and the US paid certain factions to kill and kidnap religious figures – who were sometimes far less extremist than they were perceived – and Islamist militants. “This was not quoted by any journalist. Why? Because what had happened in Somalia was irrelevant. If you can use a label why should you be concerned by facts?”

In early February 2007, the US military academy at West Point published a study called “Al-Qaeda’s (Mis)adventures in the Horn of Africa”,<sup>17</sup> which provides insightful information based on the analysis of documents emanating from Al-Qaeda members. Contradicting the conventional wisdom that Somalia, as a “failed state”, would provide a perfect safe haven for transnational terrorists, the study identifies the problems encountered by Al-Qaeda operatives in attempting to establish bases for operations and recruit followers. The main thrust of the study is that Al-Qaeda faced major obstacles in entering and operating from Somali soil, just as Western NGOs do.

Our most important new finding is that Al-Qaeda failed to gain traction in Somalia in the early 1990s because:

- (1) its members were perceived as foreigners;
- (2) it significantly underestimated the costs of operating in a failed state environment; and
- (3) its African vanguard did not understand the salience of either local power structures or local Islamic traditions. In a region dominated by clan-based authority structures and moderate Sufi Islam, the benefits of joining a foreign Salafi terrorist organization paled next to the costs of leaving one’s clan.<sup>18</sup>

Al-Qaeda thus concluded that Kenya offered far more opportunities for operations than Somalia and possessed several key advantages: working infrastructures, a corrupt and easily bribed police, freedom of movement in a far more internationalised environment (tourism industry) and high foreign interest in Kenya.

Roland Marchal continued by exploring the regional dimensions of the Somali crisis, which in his view “has become the de facto crystallization of regional hostility”, namely between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Ethiopia’s intervention has to be considered in this framework. A comparison between Ethio-

pia’s description of the threat posed by the UIC in November and the actual defeat of the UIC in a couple of weeks speaks volumes about Ethiopia’s *hidden agenda*. Despite its public pronouncements, Islamism is and was not Ethiopia’s primary concern. Ethiopia has several quite different priorities. First, it wants to maintain Eritrea’s isolation in the region. Second, Ethiopia needs to ensure that armed groups opposing it internally don’t find sanctuary in Somalia. Since 1992, the Ethiopian army has entered Somali territory several times to take action against such “enemy bases”. The fight against terrorism presented a strong diplomatic argument for implementing this hidden agenda.<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. Concluding remarks: How will the situation in Somalia evolve – an African Iraq?

According to Roland Marchal, the most likely scenario in the absence of real political dialogue is an African Iraq. There are several reasons for taking this view.

First, as in Iraq, the American-supported Ethiopian invasion removed the conditions for national authority in Somalia. The end of the UIC marks the provisional end of the centralisation that took place in June 2006 with the advent of a body with influence over a large portion of the country. Now there is a return to the constellation of local situations that will evolve more in terms of local history and local interests than national or foreign policies.

Second, not unlike the Iraqi people, the Somalis first took note of the TFG and the Ethiopian victory. They noticed the relative international silence over Ethiopian intervention and, in vain, expected international aid to arrive as part of some kind of reconciliation. Yet, as in Iraq, the Somali people are not unanimous. Old antagonisms re-emerged and could explain why there has been no miraculous convergence into national unity against the common aggressor.

Moreover, in Iraq talk of foreign jihadists nowadays is less prevalent than talk of a plurality of groups with different political agendas and different attitudes towards Iraqi citizens. The situation is similar in Somalia, where armed opposition groups will reveal those deep ideological differences, diverse political projects and varying attitudes towards civilians that were already present in the Islamic tribunals.<sup>20</sup>

17. See Combating Terrorism Center/Harmony Project (2006)

18. *Ibid.*, executive summary pp. iii–iv.

19. Compare for this section Marchal (2007:12).

20. This section is taken from Marchal (2007:15).



Concluding his lecture, Roland Marchal reiterated that political Islam in Somalia would remain part of the political landscape. However, the question remains, in what shape and in what ways will international actors come to terms with that reality.



Roland Marchal talking about political Islam in Somalia. Picture taken 16 October 2007 at ABF Stockholm.  
Credit: Catrin Rosquist.

## SEMINAR

Asha Hagi

30 October 2007

# Women's Contribution to Peace in Somalia

ASHA HAGI, born in 1962 in Somalia, is chairperson and founder of Save Somali Women & Children (SSWC). She is also a member of the Transitional Federal Parliament. In January 2004 she became the first Somali woman to sign a peace agreement. Between May and October 2000 she was vice-chair of the steering committee of the Somalia Peace & Reconciliation Conference in Arta, Djibouti as well as chair of the Sixth Clan.

### 1. The impact of the conflict on Somali women

Asha Hagi introduced her lecture by reviewing the impact of the conflict on Somali women. As has always been the case in armed conflicts, women and children are the first and the last victims of war, though war is neither their desire nor decision. During the conflict, women were killed, raped, tortured and displaced. They also lost their loved ones, i.e., husbands and sons, fathers and brothers. As a result, they suddenly had to take up the additional burden of providing for their families. This was indeed a new phenomenon for women, since being the breadwinner had been the sole responsibility of men in the past. Moreover, those who suffered most were women from cross-clan marriages because they were mistrusted and rejected by both their clans of origin and by marriage. As a result, these women experienced emotional trauma.

Despite these immense sufferings, Somali women did not resign themselves to being perpetual victims, but rather played an active role in promoting peace and reconciliation and demonstrated that they are fundamental actors in the Somali political process.

In order to illustrate the role of Somali women as peace makers and agents for change, Asha Hagi presented the organisation Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) as a case study.

### 2. What is Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC)?

According to the speaker, "SSWC was born out of [the] anger, pain and frustration of Somali women

during the civil war". The founders were women from different clans, different political affiliations and different socioeconomic backgrounds who, however, shared common commitments and concerns about the promotion of peace and the protection of women's rights. The organisation is renowned for being among the first organisations to go beyond clan boundaries and to adopt a kind of national outlook. SSWC committed itself to achieving, among others, the following objectives:

- a) To bring an end to a senseless war since it has nothing to offer women other than death, destruction and devastation.
- b) To unite women beyond clan boundaries and strive for a women's identity.
- c) To promote peace from a women's perspective and articulate women's common voice in the political process.

Since its inception in 1992, the organisation has been instrumental in promoting peace and has become actively involved in mitigating, resolving and managing inter-clan conflicts. SSWC tried to use inter-clan marriage as a way to bridge the divisions among warring clans. In this way, those women became ambassadors for peace.

These vital activities on the ground enabled SSWC to mobilise, organise and prepare women and articulate their agenda in the peace process. In line with its objectives, the organisation has scored some tremendous achievements. The most historic and notable achievement was the formation of the Sixth Clan – the women's clan – as an identity in order to participate fully in and contribute to the national peace and reconciliation process.

### 3. Why and how the Sixth Clan was formed

During the Somali conflict, there have been several international and regional attempts to bring the warring factions together and solve the Somali political crisis. By 2000, 12 conferences had been held, but all failed because they were warlord-oriented and allowed only armed groups to participate. Women

and other civil society actors were not granted the right to participate equally.

In 2000, the president of Djibouti convened the first all-inclusive national reconciliation conference, which aimed to end clan hostilities and to produce a comprehensive national solution. Unlike previous attempts, participation in the Arta conference was based on clan affiliation. Since women are granted no space in the traditional clan structure due to its patriarchal and patrilineal nature, they were totally excluded from that important national reconciliation conference. Asha Hagi and other Somali women would not accept this unfairness and social injustice. With courage, tenacity, vision, activism and dynamism, the SSWC – led by her – organised Somali women beyond clan boundaries and brought them together to form a women's clan as an identity in order to participate fully. Women demanded their rightful space in the national reconciliation process. To achieve acceptance as participants, they exerted pressure on the government of Djibouti, paramount clan elders, religious leaders and others. Furthermore, the Sixth Clan built strategic alliances with some of the clan leaders, Islamic scholars, politicians and others from different clans to support their cause.

Asha Hagi faced strong resistance from prominent politicians and traditional leaders from her clan, who even tried to bribe her. They offered her a position on her clan's team as a privileged person and urged her to give up her fight. However, she turned down the offer and instead tried hard to convince them to support the women's cause. Eventually, after various obstacles had been overcome, the women's claim to participate in the negotiations was recognised.

The name "Sixth Clan" was chosen as five major clans were granted participation at the Arta talks. The Somali clan structure is made up of five clans or clan families.<sup>21</sup> Referring to that structure, Somali women became the sixth clan family. Soon after the clan was formed, Asha Hagi was chosen to be its leader. She joined the five male clan leaders who were steering the Arta conference: "That is how I went to the high negotiating table together with men as equal partners in decision-making for the first time in history".

21. There are different ways of delineating the clan structure. Asha Hagi is referring to the model adopted for the Arta talks, at which four major clan families, namely Daarod, Hawiye, Dir and Rahanweyn were granted seats, with a grouping of minority clans forming the fifth group.

In Asha Hagi's view, the selfless role played by women, their tireless efforts to act as a binding glue as well as a pressure group among the warring clans and their positive contribution to the national reconciliation process made history. Women had been the midwives of the Transitional National Government that was formed at the Arta conference. Both the Somalis and the international community acknowledged that women's active participation represented an historical landmark.

Moreover, the creation of the Sixth Clan was an innovative initiative "outside the box", which enabled women to make the following gains:

- a) Transformation of the women's role from their traditional passivity to being indispensable stakeholders in the national peace and political process.
- b) Overcoming women's marginalisation by securing their participation at the negotiating table as equal partners in decision-making.
- c) Challenging the social-cultural paradigm and carving out political space for women in the national political dispensation.
- d) Taking part in drafting the first gender-friendly charter that included a quota for women, which guaranteed the allocation of 25 seats to women in the then parliament (Transitional National Assembly).

#### 4. Somali women at the Mbagathi conference

Since the government installed at the Arta conference did not survive long, yet another conference was convened by IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) under the auspices of the Kenyan government. It was held at Eldoret/Mbagathi in Kenya from 2002 to 2004 and it gave birth to the current Transitional Federal Government. The earlier achievements of the Sixth Clan once more enabled women to participate on an equal footing and their participation also reflected recognition of women's distinct value in the political arena. Women featured among the conference luminaries, civil society leadership, the specialised committees and the plenary. For example, five women were included in the Leaders' Committee, the top decision-making organ comprising 26 factional and political leaders. Furthermore, there was a woman vice-chair on the civil society steering committee and one chair position among the six specialised working committees of the conference (drafting the federal charter, reconciliation, disarmament, rehabilitation and reconstruction, etc.).

Women were, moreover, active and made resourceful contributions in the plenary sessions.

Five women were among the 39 leaders in the retreat that brokered solutions for the serious constitutional deadlocks that posed the biggest threat to the conference. Thanks to the goodwill demonstrated during the marathon 22-day constructive brainstorming session at Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi, and the intervention and facilitation of Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni – then chair of IGAD – a final agreement could be reached. The strategic role of women in brokering compromises by playing a shuttle diplomacy role among the various leaders at the retreat has to be emphasised.

The final agreement was signed by nine prominent leaders, among them Asha Hagi and the former TNG prime minister and the current TFG president, Abdullahi Yusuf. The signing ceremony took place on 29 January 2004 at State House, Nairobi. The Kenyan head of state – Mwai Kibaki – and other dignitaries from the region and the international community were present at the ceremony. Somali women made history on that day, since it was the first time that a Somali woman had signed a peace agreement.

As in the Arta conference, women once more achieved historic gains, namely:

- a) A 12 per cent quota of seats under the Transitional Federal Charter to be allocated to women.
- b) The signing of the peace agreement by a woman.
- c) The creation of a women's ministry, which had before been a department in the ministry of social affairs.
- d) Changes to the Charter language, which initially had been male-dominated.

#### 5. What challenges did women encounter?

Of course every great achievement has a price to pay and we paid a huge price in promoting peace and women's participation in armed conflict situations. We risked our lives, sacrificed our families and lives. We lost some of our beloved ones and some of us, who were in the forefront in the struggle were assassinated. Others died of stress-related illnesses because of the hostile situation we were in. Some of us are still living under current life threat.

In 2002 Istarlin Arush – who was a renowned Somali women's, peace and human rights activist – was assassinated in Nairobi. In 2005, another

prominent male peace activist – Abdulkadir Yahya – was murdered in Mogadishu. In addition, verbal threats are very common, as Asha Hagi knows from several personal experience:

Ten days after the Somali Transitional Federal Parliament, which I happened to be a member of, had been convened, a powerful faction leader who is also an MP confronted me and said: "Asha, we all respect and admire you but it seems as though you are taking advantage of that and overstepping the boundaries. Now you are too much and becoming a pain in the neck". I was shocked and said "But what did I do wrong to deserve all these remarks?" He replied, "Asha don't you know that you are the one that brought all those lousy and useless women into the parliament? You will be asked that on the day of judgement and you will be held accountable for that". I said, "If this is the case I don't mind taking the responsibility but don't you also know that in this house we equally have lousy and useless men, too?" In fact, I did not say what I could have said that there were warlords and criminals in this parliament and that he was one of them. That was clear intimidation, threat and discouragement but the good news is that we will not be shaken but continue with confidence and vigour as long as we believe in it.

#### 6. What is the added value of women's participation in the peace process?

Based Asha Hagi's experience, women can provide a different perspective from men. The most important lesson she learnt was that women are focused not only on power-sharing, but also want to talk about issues. In her experience, men tend to focus solely on power-sharing. This does not mean that women do not have ambitions to be active in political leadership positions. However, women seem to have another responsibility towards the society. Asha Hagi calls women the voice of the voiceless, of the silent majority. Therefore she considers their active, and not only symbolic participation at the high negotiating table to be imperative.

#### 7. The role of the international community and the main obstacle to peace

Though she believes that the international community has a role to play, she emphasised that Somalis need to overcome the syndrome of waiting for everything from the international community. In her view, the prime responsibility lies with the Somalis themselves. The majority of Somali people are sick and tired of the culture of war. The main obstacle to peace is the lack of a genuine and respected lead-

ership. Nevertheless, Somalia is in need of support from the international community, which could facilitate the process of bringing all Somali parties together by providing an environment in which that kind of positive exercise could take place.

#### 8. The importance of the grassroots

It is very clear that Somali women leaders as well as the Sixth Clan would not be nationally visible if they were not supported and approved by the women and the people on the ground. Therefore, SSWC started activities on the ground before becoming engaged at the national level. Only by interacting with the people is it possible to gain their trust and support to act on their behalf. Apart from peace promotion and women's and human rights protection, there have been and still are many activities on the ground, especially in the areas of education and economic empowerment. Asha Hagi considers these to be the two main sources of women's political and public visibility.

SSWC created a centre in Mogadishu where women who have never had the chance to be formally educated receive education. The project was launched in 2001 and today more than 3,000 women have graduated from the centre. Education is absolutely vital, since women cannot change their lives and have an impact on the society unless they are economically and educationally empowered. SSWC

uses education as a tool for bringing about social transformations. According to Asha Hagi, SSWC receives very strong grassroots support. Without that the organisation wouldn't have survived at the national level.

#### 9. Conclusions

Asha Hagi concluded that Somali women have played a vital role in advocating for equal participation in the peace and political process and in steering that process. Despite the suffering, killings, torture and marginalisation, women did not resign themselves to persistent victimhood but rather took risks for peace, mobilised their communities, developed new peace-building strategies and demanded a place in peace negotiations. From their experiences, we learn that women can have a positive impact, play an active role and make a huge difference if they unite their voices, articulate their agenda, put aside their differences and focus on their cause. Moreover, women add immense value to peace talks. They bring in practical solutions, compassion, tolerance and forgiveness. These are the basic tenets of true reconciliation. Consequently, the active role of women in the Somali peace process is not optional but is, rather, imperative. Furthermore, according to Asha Hagi, the vital role played by women in the peace process resulted in historic social and political gains.



Asha Hagi. Picture taken 30 October at ABF Stockholm.  
Credit: Catrin Rosquist.

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## SEMINAR 4

Panel Discussion

Moderator: Marika Fahlén, Swedish Foreign Office

Ambassador to the Horn of Africa

17 November 2007

# Somalia – Prospects for Peace?

### Panelists:

- JENS ODLANDER, Swedish Ambassador to the Somali Peace Process
- SHANE QUINN, Programme officer, Life and Peace Institute
- SAHRA BARGADLE, Swedish Somali Association
- HAYAN ISMAIL, Employment agency Spånga/Tensta at Stockholm

### 1. Introduction – Synopsis of the three seminars

#### *Marika Fahlén*

Marika Fahlén, Swedish Ambassador to the Horn of Africa, started by providing a short synopsis of the three seminars:

In the **first seminar**, the world famous Somali writer Nuruddin Farah looked at the history of Somalia. He addressed one specific question: To whom does the land belong? By asking this, he identified the land issue as one key element in Somali politics. After elaborating on Somalia's early history and the era of colonial rule, he assessed the situation in the country under the Siyad Barre regime. Nuruddin Farah then discussed relevant issues in Somalia's post-1991 and current political dynamics.

The **second seminar** was dedicated to the role of religion within Somali society and the dynamics of the conflict. Roland Marchal, a French researcher with longstanding experience in Somalia and the Horn of Africa, focused on the phenomenon of political Islam in Somalia. He also elaborated on the emergence and role of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and the failure of the international community to understand the developments in Somalia after the rise of the UIC.

Asha Hagi, a prominent Somali women's leader, talked about the role of Somali women in the **third seminar** of the series. She described the initiative of the Sixth Clan, which deliberately reaches beyond the divide along lines of descent and assembles all

Somali women of whichever clan. She emphasized that the role of women should be more prominent in central power-sharing.

Marika Fahlén then gave a short introduction to the ensuing panel discussion. As with the seminar series itself, the panel brought together different perspectives. First, the different views of the Swedish Somali diaspora were represented by Sahra Bargadle and Hayan Ismail. Second, Shane Quinn from the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) shared his insights from the perspective of an international civil-society organisation that has only recently re-established a presence on the ground in southern Somalia. LPI has been engaged in Somalia for a long time. Third, Jens Odlander, ambassador to the Somali peace process, represented the position of the Swedish government.

The panel discussants were asked to share their view on the future – or as Marika Fahlén put it, their vision – of Somalia and to identify issues they consider to be of great importance for building peace in Somalia.

### 2. Keynote presentations of the panellists

#### 2.1 Sahra Bargadle

Sahra Bargadle has long working experience with issues related to women. She is one of the founders of a Somali women's association that has had a presence in Mogadishu since 2001. Currently, she is employed at the Women's Forum in Tensta (Stockholm), which focuses on gender-based violence and girls at risk. Within the Somali diaspora in Sweden, she has a high profile as president of one of the larger Swedish Somali diaspora organisations.

She began her presentation by giving her view of the conflict in Somalia, a view influenced both by her Swedish and Somali experiences. She emphasised the immense humanitarian suffering of the Somali population over the 17 years of war. Some

of the effects of the lengthy and devastating fighting are battle-related deaths, widespread poverty, unemployment and lack of water. Furthermore, difficult circumstances have also led to large-scale emigration by the Somali population, thereby draining Somalia of both knowledge and financial means. Simultaneously, Somalia has undergone a process of structural adjustment to the war-time conditions, with women and children being forced to support their families while men take part in the fighting. Sahra Bargadle particularly emphasised the vulnerable situation of women and children and demanded that those in power, especially men, should recognise their needs.

Two significant measures could constitute part of the solution to the tragedy in Somalia. First, there is a need for a ceasefire to enable a real negotiation process. Second, Ethiopia needs to leave Somalia in order for the Somali people to begin to identify their own problems and find viable non-violent solutions, irrespective of clan affiliation.

## 2.2 Hayan Ismail

Hayan Ismail, who is director of the employment agency in Spånga/Tensta (Stockholm), began by stressing the importance of the integration of and adjustment by the Somali diaspora in Sweden. He noted that, “if you help yourself, you can help others”.

The starting point for his vision is his daily work with Somalis and the unemployed. Compared to the initial years following the outbreak of the Somali conflict, the situation for unemployed Somalis has improved. Nevertheless, statistics show that Somalis have a higher unemployment rate than other newcomers to Sweden who have lived in the country for the same length of time. Numerous explanations can be found for these gloomy statistics. One of them is the lack of appropriate competencies among the Somalis who initially had to flee. Another important issue is the question of human rights. Here, Hayan Ismail drew attention to the importance of the internal identification among Somalis of those clans that suffer the most from oppression by majority clans. Finally, he stressed the importance of a vibrant civil society.

## 2.3 Shane Quinn

In his presentation Shane Quinn pointed out three issues that in his view are very important for the Somali conflict.<sup>22</sup>

### 1) *Tackling the security dilemma first*

Before talking about solutions aimed at large-scale peace in Somalia – which many people do – one has to start by discussing the issue of security. During the period of the Islamic courts a high level of security was achieved for the first time since 1991. However, this was of an ad-hoc nature and in the end led to further deterioration for the whole country. In his view, a ceasefire between warring parties would be a good start for Somalia before even mentioning political and social reconciliation. For launching the reconciliation process, the selection of people taking part in these talks is critical.

### 2) *The issue of governance*

On the **national** level, the current weaknesses of the TFG are more than obvious and its performance has declined steadily over the last years. The previous central state solution from 2000, the Transitional National Government (TNG), also did not work for various reasons. One lesson can be learnt from these experiences: If you impose a state from above or if you create a state that does not have access to finances and resources necessary for it to function, you will face serious challenges afterwards. In addition, there is the **regional** administration of Puntland – Somaliland being an issue that Shane Quinn did not want to touch upon – that forms another “block” within the state solution.

Often ignored and neglected in the various peace processes are **local** administrations and initiatives that have in some cases been working since UNOSOM (United Nations Operation in Somalia I and II). UNOSOM was established in 1992 to monitor the ceasefire in Mogadishu and escort deliveries of humanitarian supplies to distribution centres in the city. Later, the mandate was expanded to include all of Somalia, as well as enforcement measures. UNOSOM ended in March 1995. Here, one can identify reasonably functional administrative units that achieve some kind of security and governance. Examples here are Belet Weyn and Luuq. In his view, it is time to look at what is already on the ground before setting up new solutions.

### 3) *Civil society*

While civil society has changed significantly since 1991, it can still play an important role in today’s Somalia. There are a variety of actors – local NGOs, informal business networks, interest groups dealing with women’s, children’s and youth issues – that play a huge role in Somalia. These initiatives have

22. For a more detailed analysis, see Quinn (2007).

to be taken into account when talking about the role of the civil society in building peace. Other actors should be brought back into the big picture: traditional elders and religious leaders.

#### 2.4 Jens Odlander

The ambassador to the Somali peace process, Jens Odlander, started by giving a short introduction to Sweden's engagement in Somalia. Sweden is a member of the international contact group for Somalia, which also comprises the US, the UK, Italy, Norway, Tanzania, the European Union presidency and the Commission as well as the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the League of Arab States and the UN as observers. For security reasons, the group is based in Nairobi. Under current circumstances, it is not possible to undertake high-profile work in Somalia. Sweden is one of the biggest donors to Somalia, providing basic humanitarian assistance and development and reconstruction aid. The ultimate aim of Sweden's policy is to improve living conditions for ordinary people in Somalia.

In his view, it would be inappropriate for him as a foreigner to offer a grand vision for Somalia. Instead, he wanted to highlight some issues that the international community regards as important building blocks on the way to a peaceful and stable Somalia and highlight some of the "faults" in that vision: The 2004 Mbaghati agreement is one thing that can be built on. In his view, without this basis there would be more chaos in Somalia. Every serious international actor has signed up to that agreement.

He then summarised the transitional process that is part and parcel of the agreement reached in 2004. Before it is completed by the end of 2009, many things will have to happen. First, a federal constitution needs to be drafted. On that basis, a referendum needs to take place, a difficult and sensitive issue. The next step is the formation of political parties. The challenge here is to avoid the formation of parties solely along clan lines. Instead, other ways of organising political life have to be identified. The climax of this process would be general multi-party elections in 2009.

Jens Odlander shared some **observations** arising from his work on the Somali peace process.

There is an urgent **need for a cessation of hostilities** to serve as the foundation of a more comprehensive peace agreement between the parties. Unfortunately, the situation is currently deteriorating and all the parties continue to use violence.

Restraint from fighting is urgent to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance. According to the UN, there are some pockets where – if no humanitarian assistance can be delivered within a week – 5,000–10,000 children are in danger of dying from starvation.

Moreover, there is a need for a **meaningful political process**, meaningful in the sense that people in possession of power share it with other people and initiate a serious dialogue with the opposition. Similarly, the opposition has to act in a responsible manner. Without any such meaningful political agreement – and this has been reiterated by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon – no peacekeeping troops can be sent to stabilise the country.

In addition, he identified four issues that seem to be rather distinctive of the case of Somalia.

- 1) The issue of clan: While Somalis are said to be one nation, they are very divided. How can we find a constructive notion for the clan concept?
- 2) The length of the conflict: The fact that the conflict in Somalia has lasted for more than 17 years now has had a profound impact on the social fabric.
- 3) The regional dimension of the conflict: Though interference by regional powers and spill-over effects to neighbouring states are observed in various conflicts, the level of direct influence and interest from regional powers in Somalia is remarkable.
- 4) The issue of political Islam: The issue of extremist Islamic ideologies has gained importance.

### 3. Major discussion topics

The presentation was followed by a lively discussion on issues considered relevant to Somalia's future. This discussion involved both panel discussants and members of the audience. Among the issues were: the role of Ethiopia in the conflict and the military presence in the country; the problem of delivering humanitarian assistance in the context of violent confrontation between the TFG/Ethiopian forces and insurgents; breaches of international humanitarian law by all actors and the issue of Somaliland.

In her concluding words, Marika Fahlén highlighted that the seminars and the panel discussion were a good opportunity for exchanging views: "The art of listening and respecting is the best platform for moving into political and social dialogue".



Moreover, she called for investment in entrepreneurs of peace:

Somalis are so well known for being entrepreneurs but I am always wondering why they are so successful in the weapons trade, in khat trade, in piracy and in violence. But where are the entrepreneurs in peace, reconciliation, constitution building and giving equitable roles to women and men in the society? Maybe you are sitting here, maybe you know where they are. Invest in them.



Shane Quinn, Hayan Ismail, Marika Fahlén, Jens Odlander and Sahra Bargadle (left to right).  
Picture taken 17 November 2007 at ABF Stockholm.  
Credit: Charlotte Booth.

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