

Somaliland: An African success story

Historical background

The British Somaliland Protectorate became independent on June 26, 1960, and was the first Somali country to become a member of the United Nations. A week later, Somaliland and former *Somalia Italiana* united to form the Somali Republic. Their union was never ratified by their respective Parliaments, and their 31 year-old union remained an informal partnership with no legal binding. Consequently, the initially hopeful union of the two young countries ended in disaster and culminated in a brutal ten-year civil war between Somalia and Somaliland until they separated in 1991.

During the civil war, brutal acts of genocide and war crimes were perpetrated against the people of Somaliland. Government airplanes indiscriminately bombed our major cities while tanks and other heavy military artillery pounded civilian dwellings, flattening schools, hospitals, mosques, and

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90% of our cities. Tens of thousands of our people were massacred, and over a million driven from their homes sought refuge in refugee camps in neighbouring countries.

Demobilisation and Peace Processes in Somaliland

Since the liberation of Somaliland in 1991, the hard-won peace and stability that is enjoyed today in Somaliland was achieved through the sheer determination of our people and that of our traditional elders. Unlike peace conferences elsewhere in Africa, peace in Somaliland was homegrown and was brokered entirely with the initiatives and resources of our people.

Once peace was secured, a general and voluntary demobilisation of our Militia/Freedom Fighters was achieved



without international assistance and without foreign troops to make it happen. Once this major hurdle was overcome, our people rose to the daunting challenge of rebuilding Somaliland on a self-help basis. Reconstruction took place without political recognition or international support, and with only the meagre resources of our country to rely on.

The people of Somaliland also re-affirmed their support for their country's sovereignty in 2001 during a Constitutional Referendum that is consistent with the rights of people to self-determination as entrenched in the Charters of the African Union and that of the United Nations.

In December 2002, we held our first local government elections, followed in April 2003 by the first presidential elections when the people of Somaliland elected me to this responsibility. We now plan to hold our first parliamentary

elections on the 15th of September 2005 – in order to complete our long and difficult transition from a traditional, clan-based political system to a stable multi-party democracy in Somaliland.

Stability in Somaliland

After fourteen years, Somaliland is a country of hope and determination that was founded on peace, justice, and the rule of law. Somalilanders are committed to the peace and stability of their country, and have unreserved respect for the unity, and territorial integrity of states, standing neither for cessation, nor for the revision, of Africa's borders. Somaliland was among the first African states to be free from colonial rule, and the recognition that we seek implies full respect of the borders we had at the moment of our independence from Great Britain.

Somaliland is by no means the first African state to have entered into a voluntary union with another and subsequently withdrawn from that union intact. Egypt and Syria, Senegal and Gambia, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau, and Senegal and Mali have all done likewise.

The untapped economic potential of Somaliland

Somaliland has chosen a system of free market economy, which seems to fully agree with the entrepreneurial character of our people. This is symbolised by the dramatic economic development that has been achieved in spite of the repeated Saudi Arabian ban on the export of our livestock. Our economy is also increasingly attracting foreign investment and we have recently ratified a comprehensive foreign investment law to encourage our international partners.

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Somaliland has unexploited mineral resources, including oil, gas, coal, and the world's largest gypsum deposits, in addition, our 850 kilometre-long coastline is rich in marine resources waiting to be exploited. The Port of Berbera serves as a major outlet/inlet for Somaliland as well as for land-locked Ethiopia, with its population of over 65 million, with whom we have just signed a long-term agreement for the use of the port. Berbera airport also has the longest runway in Africa, having been built by the USA as one of the six landing sites for the Columbia shuttle.

In conclusion, even though Somaliland is a country that can be considered a success story in African terms, the international community typically places more focus on Africa's failures and conflicts than on giving credit to the sort of real achievements we have registered here in Somaliland.



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President of the Republic of
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Undermining Somaliland sadly also undermines the goals of promoting poverty alleviation, peace, stability, and good governance in Africa. Failure to recognise Somaliland would be a great discredit to human rights and to democracy itself, and would destroy the hard-won stability that Somaliland enjoys today.



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The Republic of Somaliland



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