



THE HERITAGE INSTITUTE FORUM FOR IDEAS

The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies' Annual Forum for Ideas
Djibouti, 18 – 22 December 2017

After event report





Introduction

The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) held its first Annual Forum for Ideas (AFI) from 18-22 December 2017 in Djibouti. The theme of the three-day discussion was The State of Somalis: Towards Peace, Stability and Prosperity, and it touched on a wide range of issues affecting Somalis in Somalia/Somaliland, in the diaspora, the Somali regions in Ethiopia and Kenya and the economic, social and political situation in Djibouti.

The AFI is a Davos-style roundtable discussion where the policy makers and opinion makers from Somalia, the diaspora and around the region gather to discuss strategic issues facing the country, the Horn of Africa and Somalis everywhere.

Presenters and participants included the President of Djibouti, ministers, members of parliament, diplomats, intellectuals, business leaders and civil society and youth leaders.

Delegates from Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti played a prominent role in the forum due to the strategic importance of the Somalis in these countries and their connections with Somalis at home, in the region and in the diaspora. There are entire regions or provinces in both Kenya and Ethiopia that are inhabited by ethnic Somalis. Somalis also play important roles in the leadership of these countries including Djibouti led by ethnic Somalis.

Participants:

Keynote speakers at the opening session included Somalia's Minister of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, Gamal Hassan and Moumin Hassan Barreh; and Djibouti's Minister of Islamic Affairs and Culture. Both the President of Djibouti, H.E. Ismail Omar Guelleh, and his Prime Minister joined the participants at the closing ceremony with President Guelleh giving the keynote address. Other high profile participants included Somalia's then ambassador to the United States, Ahmed Ise Awad who current is the foreign minister; Djibouti's Minister for Foreign Affairs Mahamoud Ali Youssouf; and Sheikh Ahmed-nur Ali Jimale, Somalia's most prominent businessman. Several well-known Somali women leaders attended and gave presentations including Dr. Hodan Ise, Asha Haji Elmi, Asha Gelle, Hon. Mariam Arrif, Dr. Khadijo Osoble among others. Political, business and academic leaders from Somaliland and Puntland as well as ministers from Jubaland and Southwest State also presented and participated in the deliberations. Over 30 Somalis academics attended from Somalia, the Somali region and as far away as California and Kuala Lumpur.



Sponsors, Partners, Funders and Contributors

The government of Djibouti provided accommodation and logistical support and President Ismail Omar Geulleh hosted the forum and acted as its patron. Turkey's Presidency for Turkish Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) through *Africa Foundation* provided the plane tickets for participants. Premier Bank of Somalia Salaam African Bank and the Somali Business and Investment Council provided sponsorship contributions that covered contingent expenses. CERD, a Djibouti research institute, was AFI's local partner and coordinator. The forum took place at Djibouti's Palais du Peuple where the manager ensured the event unfolded flawlessly. The Djibouti embassy in Somalia and Ambassador Aden Hassan Aden in particular played a catalyst role for the idea of Annual Forum for Ideas to materialize as a reality.

Significance

The forum was the first of its kind for decades. It had been 70 years ago since Somalis from across the Somali-inhabited (but colonized) territories last met in Mogadishu in 1946. The convening of a similar gathering in 2017 for Somalis from across the globe was a symbolic and historically significant event. The forum captivated the imagination of those who attended as well as those who followed it in the media. The fact that a president, a prime minister, business tycoons, foreign ministers, MPs, ministers, academics and diplomats from across the Horn and beyond attended made the forum a highly acclaimed event. Some even dubbed it the Somali version of the World Economic Forum. Faisal Roble, a Somali writer and the principal city planner for the City of Los Angeles, captured in his [reflection piece](#) on the forum the overall optimism and enthusiasm of the participants.

Panel Discussions

The first panel focused on assessing the opportunities and challenges facing Somalis in the Horn of Africa in the short and medium term. Other panel topics included: a status report on the situation of Somalia/Somaliland; a situation report on Djibouti; an update on the state of Somalis in Kenya; and an assessment of Somalis in Ethiopia. Other thematic areas that were addressed included: the state of Somalis in the diaspora; the role of Somali women in peace and development; and the role of the business community in regional integration and local development.



Outcomes

- The forum participants thanked the people and government of Djibouti for their warm welcome and their reassurance that Djibouti is the home of all Somalis. Specifically, they thanked President Ismail Omar Guelleh for his support and for his closing remarks and presented him with a gift of the Holy Quran.
- The forum commended HIPS for organizing a flawless event and called on it to make this an annual gathering for Somalis.
- The forum thanked Turkey for its support, particularly YTB and the Africa Foundation. Representatives of YBT and Africa Foundation were given the floor to address the participants and they were greeted with warm applause.
- Participants highlighted that the forum is a knowledge-sharing platform, which allows Somali decision makers and opinion makers in the Horn and the diaspora to consult and strategize about the common future of the Somali people. It was also underlined that the forum is not political but exists to encourage intra-Somali collaboration for common interests, such as stability in the region, peace and economic development.
- The gathering listened and welcomed the remarkable progress made by the Somali communities in the Horn of Africa. In particular, the forum praised the achievements made by the Republic of Djibouti, 40 years after independence. The attendees commended Djibouti for its remarkable development in the economic, social and political spheres. Participants also noted Djibouti's ability to forge a strategically balanced foreign policy despite being a small country.
- The forum welcomed the positive assessment of the state of Somali Kenyans and the fact that they are fully integrated within their country's economic, political and social spheres and play significant leadership roles. While Somalis in Kenya are the sixth largest ethnic group in the country, their political, economic and social clout is far more pronounced than their numbers. Within 20 years, Somali Kenyans will overtake the top three largest communities in Kenya and will be the most populous group if the current population trends remain.
- The forum also commended Somalis in Ethiopia, particularly those in the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia (DDSI). Ethiopia is one of largest and most populous



countries on the continent and Somalis are the third largest ethnic population, with the largest region in terms of landmass. Participants welcomed the stability and progress in the DDSI region. However, it was highlighted that the Somali Ethiopian's role in federal politics has not been sufficiently developed. Participants encouraged them to strengthen their role in national politics and to contribute to regional or intra-Horn economic integration.

- The forum praised the people and the leadership of Somaliland and welcomed the outcome of smooth and peaceful elections. The forum agreed that Somaliland's democratic system is something that all ethnic Somalis can be proud of. The forum called for Somaliland to continue negotiations with the Federal Government of Somalia in order to reach a long-lasting political solution and encouraged the continuation of trade and social relations between the two sides.
- The forum welcomed the significant progress made by the Somali Federal Government and its member states. It highlighted that the problems in southern Somalia are of the utmost importance to all Somalis and encouraged the government and regional states to accelerate the establishment of public institutions and provide basic services such as education and healthcare.
- The forum thanked the diaspora for their contributions to the Somali people and praised them for their visible role in their adopted home countries where many have become national or state officials. It also commended the diaspora for their role in the reconstruction of Somalia. However, the forum warned that no employment or other opportunities should be taken away from local Somalis and called for improved relations between the returning diaspora and those who remained.
- The forum paid tribute to Somali women, their distinguished role in Somali society and their leading contribution to peace building and state building. In particular, the forum reiterated the important leadership role of women in society, particularly in policymaking and economic development.
- The forum welcomed the role of the business community in the development of the economy, be it in Somalia or the Horn of Africa as well as the creation of job opportunities and business opportunities in their respective locales. The



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participants also encouraged Somali business leaders in the Horn to seek innovative ways to collaborate and to develop their businesses.

- The forum highlighted that the problems that occur in one area of the Somali territories in the Horn have been directly or indirectly affecting the rest of Somalis in other countries and regions. Therefore, the forum highlighted the necessity for Somalis to collaborate to tackle challenges such as natural disasters and the elimination of violence and insecurity in Somalia.
- The forum agreed that the lack of an integrated economy and weak business relationships between the Somali business community in the Horn is a challenge for regional economic development. It called for states in the region to facilitate the flow of people and goods, which the forum recognized as a way of achieving stability, peace and development.
- The forum called for Somalis in the Horn of Africa to collaborate and integrate in order to strengthen stability, peace and development in the region.

The way forward

- The forum requested that HIPS continue this visionary Annual Forum for Ideas (AFI) and called on the governments in the region and international partners and friends of Somalia to assist in the development of this important annual event.



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Tiigsiga Xasillooni, Nabad iyo Horumar

#SOMALIFORUM2017

18 -22 DECEMBER 2017
Palais du Peuple, Djibouti

TAAGEERAYAAL



Front row, left to right. Dr. Abdusalem Omar, former Somali foreign minister, Hon. Yusuf Hassan, Kenyan MP, and Sheikh Ahmed-nur Ali Jimale, senior Somalia man





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Economic Panel. From right to left: Dr. Hodan Isa, PhD in economics and first lady of Puntland, Dr. Ali Isse, long term IMF country director, Dr. Khadija Osoble, Dr. Abdirasid Ismail, Dr. Abdirizak Hassan and Fatima Ali





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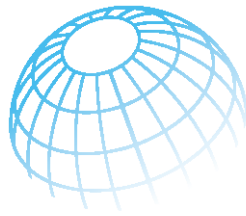
Djibouti Minister of Culture and Islamic Affairs, Moumin Hassan Barre





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Gamal Hassan, Somalia's Minister of Planning, investment and economic development





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