

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF **PEACE** IN THE HORN

Advancing Conciliation and Social Cohesion among Somalis



FORUM REPORT 2023

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About the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies

The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) was established in Mogadishu in January 2013 as an independent, non-profit, nonpartisan research center that aims to inform and influence public policy and practice. HIPS produces original research on strategically important issues for Somalia's peacebuilding and socioeconomic development agenda, mainly policy briefs and thematic reports. HIPS has an extensive network of collaborators and experts across Somalia who work in various research areas. It benefits from having a positive image among local authorities, decision makers, and heads of local communities. HIPS also conducts forums and capacity-building workshops that contribute to the formulation of public policy formulation

About the Annual Forum for Ideas

The Annual Forum for Ideas (AFI) is a flagship event organized by HIPS annually since 2016. It provides an engaging, deliberative platform for Somalis in the Horn of Africa and in the diaspora. With the exception of 2020, all AFIs took place in Djibouti. More than 300 stakeholders—including policymakers, business leaders, academics, traditional elders, women, youth, and religious leaders—participate in the forums to discuss pressing issues that require conciliation and peace in the Somali community.

Three months before the AFI, researchers are invited to submit policy papers on a particular theme; guidelines and deadlines are shared through social media. Accepted papers are presented during the forum, and the respective authors are granted a full travel package to Djibouti, including a ticket and accommodation, to present their studies. The theme for AFI 2023, "Fostering a Culture of Peace in the Horn: Advancing Conciliation and Social Cohesion among Somalis," was aimed at discussing a way to bind the societies in the region and to minimize the divisive potential of the multifaceted challenges they face, which range from inter-communal conflicts and violent extremism to climate change and geopolitical rivalry.

The AFI is conducted over three days, excluding participants' arrival and departure days. It features inaugural addresses, keynote presentations, high-level panels (plenary sessions), and panel discussions. In the evenings, the AFI offers special events: a sightseeing program to explore Djibouti's rich cultural heritage on the evening of Day 1, a HIPS anniversary dinner on the evening of Day 2, and a networking dinner hosted by the Djibouti government providing an opportunity for informal interactions among delegates on the evening of Day 3.

The seventh edition of the AFI, was held in two phases, in Djibouti and Mogadishu respectively. Each phase attracted approximately 500 stakeholders, including peace practitioners, policymakers, business leaders, academics, traditional elders, women, youth, and religious leaders working in peacebuilding and reconciliation. The two phases of the forum addressed pressing issues related to conciliation, social cohesion, and peace among Somalis.

Participants discussed the conflagration of violent conflicts in the Somali regions in the Horn of Africa and recommended practical ways to address them. Well-researched papers were presented that explored conciliation processes within Somali communities emerging from conflicts, the role of traditional elders and Islamic approaches in peacebuilding, and the best ways to incorporate private sector and civil society efforts in the peacebuilding and conciliation processes.



Message from Mursal Saney

Executive Director, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies



Since 2017, our flagship event, the Annual Forum for Ideas, has provided one of the largest annual platforms bringing together Somali stakeholders, such as scholars, political leaders, religious leaders, the business community, women, and youth leaders, to deliberate on pressing issues that affect Somali society. In line with our motto, Harnessing the Power of Ideas, we invite Somalia's divergent stakeholders to convene and exchange ideas on a particular theme based on what we believe needs urgent deliberation. Since 2022, we have issued a call for papers to attract more academics to the AFI and to ground our forums academically. As a result, we have been able to release conference proceedings that contribute to the literature on Somali studies and to put forward valuable recommendations that can inform decision-making in Somalia.

This year's theme, "Fostering a Culture of Peace in the Horn: Advancing Conciliation and Social Cohesion among Somalis," was informed by our belief in Somalis' need for conciliation and social cohesion. Somalia's political debate and literature on peacebuilding is dominated by talk of reconciliation. However, as much as achieving reconciliation is a noble endeavor, let us ask ourselves this question: Have we been conciliated in the past for us to be reconciled in the present?

In other words, reconciliation entails that we, as Somalis, have been conciliated in the past, and after years of civil war we now need to reconcile. What we need, therefore, is to conciliate because we have not been effectively in conciliation with each other.

The seventh edition of the AFI was initially planned to take place in Djibouti on December 19–21 2023. However, one of Heritage Institute's dearest friends, the late Minister of Women and Human Rights, Khadija Mohamed Diriye, who was in Djibouti to participate in the forum as a keynote speaker, suddenly passed on December 20. This forum was suspended to mourn her. We have the deepest appreciation for the government of Djibouti who, besides partnering with us in organizing the forum over the past years, also ensured that the body of the late minister was immediately and respectfully escorted to Mogadishu where she was laid to rest.

To complete the forum, a second phase was organized, this time in Mogadishu. The second forum was timely as it came when Somalia's territorial integrity and sovereignty were being threatened by Ethiopia. Leaders from Somalia and across the region, including Somalia Prime Minister H. E. Hamza Abdi Barre, H. E. Moumin Hassan Barre, Djibouti's Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, and the Hon. Yusuf Hassan, Kenyan Member of Parliament, all stressed the need for intra-Somali unity and warned against the regional consequences of Ethiopia's plan to annex part of Somalia's territory.

It is an honor for us at the Heritage Institute to continue hosting this invaluable forum to provide Somalis with their largest regional platform where Somali affairs are discussed and recommendations made to support peace initiatives and state-building processes.

I would like to acknowledge His Excellency Ismail Omar Guelleh, President of the Republic of Djibouti, and the people of Djibouti for their longstanding role as a hub for dialogue and peace in the region. Notably they hosted successful Somali peace conferences in 2000 and 2008, which were instrumental in reconstituting state institutions in Somalia.

I would also like to express appreciation to His Excellency Hamza Abdi Barre, the Prime Minister of Somalia, and to all the senior government officials from Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia for attending the forum and for providing valuable insights on sustaining peace and social cohesion among Somalis.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the staff of the Heritage Institute, our interns, Djibouti University's leadership and students, and the Centre d'Etude et de Recherche de Djibouti (CERD) for their relentless efforts to ensure the excellent organization of this forum.

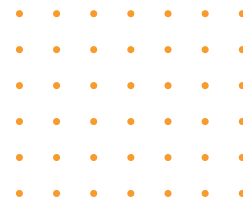
THE SEVENTH EDITION OF THE ANNUAL FORUM FOR IDEAS – PHASE I

The seventh edition of the AFI was initially scheduled for December 19–21 in Djibouti. While the meeting started well, on Day Two, the forum was suspended in the afternoon after the tragic news of the passing of the then Minister of Women and Human Rights, Khadija Mohamed Diriye. The late minister was in Djibouti at the time at our invitation to deliver a keynote address in a panel on the role of women in conciliation. This section covers the forum proceedings that took place before it was suspended.

Opening Remarks

Abdulkareem Jama

*Chairman of the Board of Directors,
Heritage Institute for Policy Studies*



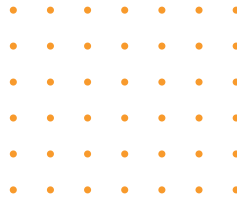
Dr. Abdulkareem Jama, Chairman of the HIPS Board of Directors gave the opening remarks at the forum and thanked the President of the Republic of Djibouti, H.E. Ismail Omar Guelleh, for hosting the seventh edition of the forum. He also thanked the Prime Minister of Somalia, H.E. Hamza Abdi Barre, and ministers and government officials from Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

Dr. Abdulkareem Jama highlighted the importance of this year's theme for the region and noted that more than thirty-five research papers will be presented this year on conciliation and social cohesion among the societies in the region. He also expressed appreciation to our former executive director, Dr. Afyare Elmi, for his contribution to the Heritage Institute, specifically, for the initiative to issue a call for papers and for the Heritage internship program. He thanked Mursal Saney, the new Executive Director of the Institute, who was its deputy director for eight years and who has extensive knowledge of Somali society. Mursal also has a high level of expertise in protocol skills, as he previously served as the Chief of Protocol for President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed of Somalia.

Dr. Abdulkareem Jama emphasized the relevance of the conference, as it addresses pressing issues both globally and in the Horn of Africa. He mentioned that international law is becoming weaker day by day, especially considering what is happening in Ukraine and Palestine, and noted that the Horn of Africa is similarly affected by these issues. The core of this conference is a genuine dialogue and discussion on these issues, with the aim of finding solutions. He stated the main reason for the conference was to propose pertinent solutions to these pressing issues, with the hope that policymakers would benefit from the knowledge-driven analyses and solutions presented. He noted that informal discussions, networking, and talking to each other are also crucial to the impact of the conference. He expressed gratitude to the steering committee, organizers of the conference, the University of Djibouti, the Centre d'Etude et de Recherche de Djibouti, and everyone involved in supporting the successful occurrence of this conference.

Mursal Saney

Executive Director,
Heritage Institute for Policy Studies



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Mursal Saney, Executive Director of the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, began his address by commending the Somali federal government's achievements in securing debt relief and in joining the East African Community (EAC). He expressed gratitude to the Djibouti government for their warm reception and emphasized the pivotal role of the Arta conference in Somalia's state-building process.

Saney advocated for a shift in Somali debates from reconciliation to conciliation. Under the theme "Horseed uu Maanka Hago," meaning "Harnessing the power of ideas for a better Somalia," experts have been convened to discuss pressing issues, including such opportunities as the lifting of the arms embargo and securing membership into the East African Community. Saney highlighted the presence of stakeholders from across Somalia, including SSC-Khaatumo and Somaliland, to engage in dialogue to generate innovative and sustainable solutions. He thanked all participants, including Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, and other esteemed delegates from the Horn of Africa and around the world for their dedication to the conference. Saney acknowledged the limited numbers of invitations due to space and cost constraints. He also emphasized the importance of evidence-based discussions and vigilance against misinformation on social media. He concluded by encouraging genuine reconciliation efforts and learning from past experiences, and urged influencers to verify information before disseminating it. Saney stressed the need for charismatic leaders committed to serving society's needs over personal interests. In essence, Saney's address underscored the importance of constructive dialogue, evidence-based policymaking, and genuine reconciliation efforts for Somalia's progress.

H. E. Moumin Hassan Barre

*Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments,
Djibouti*



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Moumin Hassan Barre, Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowment, emphasized the necessity for critical thinkers to provide timely solutions when faced with emerging problems. He highlighted the pivotal role of the 2000 reconciliation conference in Arta, Djibouti, in addressing the longstanding civil war that embroiled Somalia.

He stressed the significance of writing and conducting research, noting that every written piece or study aims to provide solutions to existing problems. He cited the Somali proverb "Dunida maskax bay magan u tahay," meaning "The world relies on a knowledgeable mind," underscoring the importance of experts in addressing challenges as they arise. Additionally, the minister emphasized the paramount importance of peace, referring to it as the cornerstone of all progress. He reiterated the significance of reconciliation, citing the Arta conference as a prime example in its effectiveness in resolving political tensions. Drawing from the poetry of Hadrawi, he conveyed the message that "Peace is the supply for development and prosperity." He expressed gratitude to the Djibouti government for hosting the conference and extended a warm welcome to the esteemed delegates, including Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre of Somalia.

H. E. Hamze Abdi Barre

Prime Minister of Somalia



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The prime minister of Somalia, Hamza Abdi Barre, expressed his gratitude and appreciation to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti for hosting the annual conference of ideas organized by the Heritage Institute. The prime minister noted that Somalis from all corners of the region and walks of life, residing in various cities such as Galka'yo, Marko, Godey, Baidoa, Garissa, and Garowe, face different challenges and obstacles, but all share a common desire for peace.

He mentioned that Somalia has been plagued by terrorist organizations such as al-Shabaab and noted that many Somali soldiers put their lives on the line as they fight against Khawarij—a derogatory term for al-Shabaab—sacrificing their lives for a peaceful and prosperous Somalia for their mothers and children. The prime minister also expressed hope that the conference will result in initiatives that contribute to achieving genuine peace and reconciliation and to alleviating the implications of insecurity and instability in the country. He acknowledged the longstanding conflicts that have existed among societies in the Horn of Africa, as well as among Somalis themselves. These conflicts have arisen due to economic, political, cultural, and religious perspectives, as well as disputes over land, resulting in significant negative impacts on both culture and the livelihood of communities. He expressed gratitude to the Heritage Institute for its role in addressing political, security, and governance matters, and for successfully bringing together Somalis from around the world and bridging the gap between the diaspora and the local community. He also extended thanks to Somali business owners and to Djibouti society for their unwavering support during critical times. It has been twenty-four years since President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti facilitated the Arta Peace Conference that helped the Somali people establish their government. He highlighted Djibouti's role in peacebuilding for Somalis and its military contributions to the fight against al-Shabaab.

Hon. Abdiqadir Jirde

*Member of Parliament,
Somaliland*



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Abdiqadir Jirde, a member of the Somaliland parliament, emphasized the need to foster cultural peace in Somaliland and the Horn of Africa. He highlighted the historical context of conflict in Somaliland, dating back to pre-colonial times. He underscored the importance of addressing identifiable clan-based grievances and the necessity of charismatic leaders to facilitate this process.

He provided examples of grievances leading to rebel groups in Somaliland, contrasting the articulation of grievances in Somaliland with the situation in the southern region, where warlords often articulate false grievances. He delineated two types of conflicts in Somaliland following the collapse of the Siyad Barre government: internal clan conflicts and the broader conflict against Siyad Barre's regime. Despite initial concerns about post-Barre weapon distribution, peace was eventually achieved through negotiations and amid war fatigue and challenges. Abdiqadir Jirde advocated for locally owned peace initiatives and highlighted the significance of elite rotation in democracy to prevent factionalism. He criticized the dual party political system in favor of a multiparty system in Somaliland (northern Somalia) and the rest of Somalia as it would give space to diverse voices. He recommended the decentralization of power and the importance of returning power to the community.

Prof. Abdullahi Barise

President, City University of Mogadishu



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Professor Abdullahi Barise, the president of City University of Mogadishu, commenced his address by quoting a Hadith (saying) from the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), underscoring the paramount importance of reconciliation. The Prophet emphasized that reconciliation is rewarded better than voluntary fasting, prayer, and charity.

Professor Abdullahi Barise further elaborated on the significance of locally led reconciliation efforts, emphasizing the necessity of community ownership. He argued that solutions should not be imposed by external actors, as communities possess the deepest understanding of their problems and potential solutions. Additionally, he emphasized the crucial role of stakeholder participation in the reconciliation process. He advocated for the inclusion of all segments of society, including youth, women, religious leaders, civil society, and the broader community. He stressed that genuine reconciliation requires the active involvement of every relevant party. Furthermore, he highlighted the importance of impartial mediators in facilitating reconciliation. He emphasized that mediators should not harbor any personal agendas, but should ensure their neutrality and commitment to fostering genuine reconciliation.

Panel 1: The Role of Media in Conflict and Reconciliation

This panel brought together senior Somali journalists to discuss the role of the Somali media in conciliation and conflict resolution.

Keynote presentation:

*The Role of Somali Media
in Conciliation*

Khadar Hared,

*journalist with Voice of
America's Somali Service*

Khadar Hared began his presentation by underlining the importance of media in fostering conflict and facilitating reconciliation. In post-conflict societies like Rwanda and Liberia, the media has played a significant role in promoting peace and reconciliation, offering platforms for dialogue and advocating for forgiveness and justice.

He noted, however, that in dictatorial settings, the state can use the media to spread propaganda and misinformation. He argued that under the regime of Siyad Barre in Somalia, the media was tightly controlled to serve specific agendas, stifling freedom of expression. There was no freedom of media in Somalia at the time. State-owned media like Radio Mogadishu, Daily October, and the Somali News Agency (SONNA) were used by the military regime to promote its agenda. After the civil war erupted in Somalia, various media outlets emerged, with radio being the most influential.

Today, Hared argued, the emergence of social media has empowered journalists. The media can oversee governance activities and provide the public with alternative platforms to express their thoughts. This has been the case in Somalia, according to Hared. In recent years, the Somali media has been very powerful in shaping public opinion and promoting peacebuilding efforts. It has also promoted diversity and mutual understanding and facilitated constructive dialogue among the Somali communities. More than 2.3 million Somalis use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. Unfortunately, social media has also had negative consequences as it has been used to fuel clan divisions and radical ideologies in recent years.

Hared pointed out, however, the growing media sector faces significant challenges. These include the fact that many journalists in Somalia lack professional training, are censored by the government—which curtails freedom of speech—and face threats and the risk of being killed by al-Shabaab militants.



Panel Discussion

Moderator:

Omar Ali Basha,
CEO, Infinity Media



Abdirizak Atosh,
*former BBC journalist and
social media influencer*



Abdimanan Yusuf,
CEO of Astaan Media



Hassan Ali Gesey,
*Executive Director, Dalsan
Media Group*




Awo Abdi, *Presidential
Communications Office*



Mohamed Dahir Hassan,
*Veteran journalist with Radio
Television of Djibouti*

This panel discussion delved into the role of media in conflict and reconciliation among Somalis.

Mohamed Dahir Hassan, a veteran journalist, emphasized the role of journalism in fostering social harmony in post-colonial divides. He highlighted the media's responsibility to focus on unifying topics rather than divisive narratives. He also emphasized the need to regulate hateful content on social media. Mohamed recommended providing media training for journalists to instill in them responsible reporting practices.



For her part, Awo Abdi discussed the role played by the media in community interaction. She also emphasized the significance of impartiality in journalism and said journalists should give equal chances to different voices when reporting. She recommended creating institutions that work on fact-checking. Additionally, she pointed to the importance of practicing the regulations and ethics of journalism.

Abdimanan Yusuf highlighted the profound impact of media on conflict-affected societies, noting how war disrupts communities, erodes trust, and alters relationships. During conflicts, he argued, parties utilize media channels to disseminate their propaganda and hate speech, raising concerns about the responsible use of media platforms. He pointed out the significant influence wielded by conflicting parties and private business leaders who control media outlets, potentially prioritizing profit over ethical responsibilities. Despite a widespread belief in the media's potential for conflict resolution, he noted the absence of scientific studies examining its efficacy in ending civil wars. He advocated collaborative strategies between the government and the media to address societal challenges and promote positive change.

In his remarks, Abdirizak Atosh underscored the importance of individual responsibility among journalists when reporting. He illustrated this with an example from Dhushamareb, where the dissemination of news on Somali TV outlets and social media platforms about the killing of two businessmen fueled hatred and a desire for revenge, particularly among impressionable youth. He also highlighted the role of social media influencers in spreading propaganda and false information, often with the support of governments and politicians seeking to manipulate public opinion. He noted that focusing on independent journalists with large followings on social media is as important as focusing on media entities, asserting that regulations should target harmful content on social media. He underscored the need for comprehensive regulations and individual accountability in addressing the negative impacts of social media on Somali society.

Hassan Ali Geesey focused his speech on the dangers of spreading fake or unconfirmed news. He used an example where a social media influencer shared a picture and the name of an individual shortly after a terrorist attack in Mogadishu, accusing him of being behind the attack. The fake news spread widely and was taken by several media outlets as fact. He also discussed the role the media community played in promoting peace and state-building during the civil war years.

Panel 2: Promoting Conciliation and Social Cohesion through Dialogue and Negotiations

This panel explored the role of indigenous mechanisms, such as traditional elders, in making peace together with intergroup and kinship-based conciliation. Similarly, it highlighted the utility of much confused federalism and the role of the National Consultative Council (NCC) in stabilizing Somalia through political settlements.

Moderator:

Abdisatar Gelle,
Somali Dialogue Platform



Presentation Title:

Analysis of Lessons Derived From Successful and Unsuccessful Conciliation Endeavors among the Somali People over the Past Three Decades

Presenter: Dr. Shariff Osman,
Director of the Institute of Peace, Water, and Environment, Mogadishu University



Dr. Shariff Osman explored past reconciliation efforts in Somalia to identify best practices and revitalize traditional methods like the Somali customary law, Xeer, and argued that Xeer traditionally functioned based on social trust. However, he identified a decline in social trust as a major threat to its effectiveness. This decline applies not only to elders but also to the government and to youth militias affiliated with clans. For instance, the Dhusamareb conciliation process, which Shariff examined as a case study of an unsuccessful conciliation process, came to an end after a militia man shot at the participants, halting the entire process. Additionally, he identified a lack of representation, in which traditional elders nominate government officials in indirect elections, as another factor undermining conciliation efforts. This system creates a loop where the government (at the federal and state levels) influences elder selection and approval, further compounding trust issues and inadequate representation. He also identified the legal complexity in Somalia as another hurdle. He explained how Somalia's legal system, involving a mix of Sharia law, Roman law, and Xeer, creates ambiguity and uncertainty.

Presentation Title:

"The Nexus of Federalism, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding: Evidence from Somalia"

Presenter:

Abdihakim Omar Abdullahi

This session focused on the relationship between federalism, conflict dynamics, and peace processes in Somalia. Abdihakim Omar Abdullahi's research findings showed that federalism can be a helpful tool to increase the level of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Somalia. This is especially true when federalism is put into practice effectively.

However, if federalism is not implemented well, it can hinder conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. He highlighted key demands for successful conflict resolution in Somalia. These include a holistic approach involving local ownership, international collaboration, and adaptation to challenges for a cohesive society. He also highlighted the importance of inclusive governance, power-sharing arrangements, conflict prevention mechanisms, institutional strengthening, reconciliation efforts, dialogue, and adaptability in Somalia's pursuit of stability and sustainable peace.



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Presentation Title:

Group-based Emotions Regulation and Process Model to Attain Lasting Conciliation within the Somali Community

Presenter:

Dr. Fawzia Osman Essa

This session explored the mechanisms that facilitate the control of emotions based on group membership to foster intergroup harmony. Dr. Fawzia Osman Essa explained how ethnic kinship, which creates intergroup relationships based on social and psychological ties, is also a source of ethno-nationalism.

She also emphasized how emotions play a crucial role in intergroup reconciliation and that the success of reconciliation processes hinges on effectively managing these emotions. She recommended that policymakers employ cognitive change as a strategy to help groups reassess conflict and consequently pave the way for national reconciliation.



Presentation Title:

Strengthening Social Cohesion and Peace through Communal-Level Environment Agreements: Lessons from Dharoor Valley, Bari Region, Somalia

Presenter:

Mohamed Ahmed Adan

This presentation focused on the paper, co-authored with Najma Abukar, describing the impact of climate change on social conflicts in Somalia with specific emphasis on experiences from Dharoor Valley, was presented by Mohamed Ahmed Adan.

The authors highlighted how climate change has increased social conflicts and inter-clan disputes caused by increased competition over natural resources such as arable land and water. The authors also emphasized that the communal-level agreement is crucial in mitigating climate-related social conflicts and enhancing social cohesion in Somalia. According to the authors, the lessons learned from Dharoor Valley provide a road map for communal-level dispute resolution. This case study highlights how the traditional Xeer system can be utilized for environmental protection.



PLENARY SESSION 2

High-Level Panel: What Makes Certain Reconciliation Efforts More Sustainable than Others?

This session revisited successful conciliation efforts among Somalis over the past three decades. Among other examples, panelists considered sustainable reconciliation initiatives such as the Arta Peace Process, which led to the birth of the Third Republic in Somalia, the Burao Agreement, which forms the foundation of Somaliland's political settlement, and the Galkayo Peace Agreement, which keeps the peace between Puntland and Galmudug.

Panel Discussion

Moderator:
Yusuf Garaad



Fawziya Yusuf Haji Adam,
former Deputy Prime Minister
and Member of Somalia
Parliament



Asha Gelle Diriye,
Peace champion and
former Minister, Puntland
State



Aden Hassan Aden,
Ambassador, former
Minister, and advisor to
Djibouti President



Prof. Hassan Keynan,
academic and former
senior UN official



Hussein Moallim Iman,
peace activist and
scholar



Mohamed Abdi Ware,
Deputy Executive Secretary of
Intergovernmental Authority on
Development (IGAD) and former
president of Hirshabelle state

Summary

Over the past three decades, Somalia has experienced civil unrest, clan factionalism, warlordism, ideological conflict, and constant political instability throughout the country. Against this backdrop, reconciliation, and dialogue have been crucial tools for peacebuilding and stability in the region. While many peace talks among Somalis failed, others were more sustainable and enduring. One example of a successful reconciliation effort is the Somali National Peace Conference in Arta, Djibouti, where Somali stakeholders were convened to reconcile and talk, leading to the formation of the Transitional National Government, the first Somali government since the fall of Siyad Barre.

This session brought together current senior and former government officials, members of academia, and leaders of civil society organizations to deliberate on the previous reconciliation and peace process in Somalia: why some agreements were successful, and others were not. Hussein Moallim Iman pointed out that tribalism was a major obstacle, emphasizing the impact of clannism on failed agreements.

Mohamed Abdi Ware argued that clannism is not necessarily the problem unless it is hijacked by politicians. He also pointed out several factors that make reconciliation efforts successful, the first being willingness from the conflicting sides. He mentioned a recent case in Guriceel town in central Somalia where justice was sought for the murder of a doctor, highlighting the role of community accountability. The parents of the murderer also supported calls for justice, which prevented the matter from escalating into an inter-clan conflict.

Asha Gelle Diriye noted that one of the crucial factors for successfully building sustainable peace on both sides was addressing the root causes of the problem. She mentioned one root cause as the politicization of peace efforts, where politics took precedence over community-led initiatives. Clan dynamics also played a significant role, along with the influence of media in polarizing communities and financing from the diaspora. Additionally, she mentioned al-Shabaab's role in implementing a “divide and rule” strategy to foster conflict and hostility among communities to serve their interests.

Aden Hassan Aden pointed out the importance of understanding cultural dynamics and effective communication skills among the community, mentioning that peace and conflict are not inborn; they are learned behavior and are influenced by environmental factors. He emphasized the importance of researching clannism, religiosity, and nomadism extensively.

Fawziya Yusuf Haji Adam, former Deputy Prime Minister of Somalia and MP, reiterated the importance of locally led initiatives, rooted in Somalis culture, in having successful peace initiatives. She gave the example of the Grand Borama Conference, which took place between January and May of 1993 in Borama, where 2,000 individuals convened to address conflict and achieve peace. This conference was led by local people, led to the end of prolonged conflict, and formulated Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal's administration. This highlights the potential for clans to work together toward peace and stability.

Aden Hassan Aden underscored the significance of continuous dialogue and reconciliation in Somalia's peacebuilding efforts. He argued that none of the reconciliation efforts have failed, instead presenting opportunities for improvement over time. He stressed the importance of accountability, suggesting that any shortcomings in peace processes lie with the incumbent administration to complete them or continue into another progressive stage. He believes conflict resolution skills in maintaining harmony and addressing community differences are indispensable for sustainable peace and stability.

Keynote presentation:

Dr. Abdirahman Moallim Abdullahi (Baadiyow),

Senior Presidential Advisor on Reconciliation and a distinguished academic

In this presentation, Dr. Abdirahman Moallim Abdullahi (Baadiyow), argued that the conflict in Somalia is driven by political elites and tribal differences. He discussed the historical context of Somalia's conflict and emphasized the importance of learning from history.



He identified several layers of issues that need to be addressed. First, there is the state-society conflict, in which Western-style state structures imposed by colonialists clash with Somali clan and Islamic principles, leading to instability. Second, there is the political-elite conflict, in which disagreements among elites have resulted in the formation of both government-led groups and clan-based militias, further politicizing and weaponizing clans. This division contributed to the collapse of the government and the onset of civil war. Lastly, the lack of institutions and the lack of the rule of law, which he termed as the "law of the jungle," allowed power to be concentrated among religious leaders and armed clan militias, exacerbating the conflict. Political instability has been perpetuated by a history of colonial rule, transitional governments, and failed constitutions. Since 1960, governments have often acted against their people, resulting in militia movements and further conflict.

Dr. Abdirahman Moallim Abdullahi (Baadiyow), proposed several solutions for achieving lasting peace and stability in Somalia. First, there must be reconciliation among political elites; this requires agreement and mediation. Cultural reconciliation is also necessary to address divisions and achieve consensus. Additionally, religious reconciliation is needed to bridge gaps among religious groups. Strengthening civil society is crucial, with robust professional associations supporting government stability. In conclusion, he called for broad reconciliation and the establishment of strong institutions to create a stable and peaceful Somalia. This involves a wide-ranging reconciliation process addressing all divided elements of society and a cultural shift toward sustainable governance.

PLENARY SESSION 3: High-Level Panel: The Role of Horn of Africa States in Conciliation, Conflict Mitigation, and Management of Fault Lines

This session explored the role of governments of the countries in the Horn in promoting conciliation, mitigating conflicts, and systemically managing fault lines and advancing opportunities. The session delved into triggers of conflicts, such as competition for resources, power projection, and geopolitics.

Keynote Statement:

Mahamoud Ali Youssouf,
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Djibouti



Panel Discussion

Moderator:

Dr. Aden Omar Abdillahi,
*Director of the Institute of
Political and Strategic
Studies of Djibouti*



Panelists



Ilyas M. Dawaleh
*Minister of Economy and
Finance of Djibouti*



Mahdi Mohammed Gulaid
*former Deputy Prime Minister
and Member of Somalia
Parliament*



Umul-Kheir Kassim,
*Women Representative,
Mandera County*



Dr. Khadija Ossoble,
*Businesswoman and
Peace Activist*



Dr. Hussein Kassim,
*Chief of cabinet and minister of
the president's office | Somali
Regional State | Ethiopia*

The Horn of Africa (HOA) is home to more than 294 million people. The region has been facing multiple and complex challenges, including conflict and insecurity, climate change, and external interference, among others. Ethiopia has been facing internal conflict in the Tigray, Amhara, and Oromia regions, ushering in a catastrophic humanitarian crisis. Meanwhile, civil war has engulfed Sudan as the Sudanese army led by General Abdulfatah Alburhan has sought to defeat forces and militias loyal to Mohamed Hemedti, displacing more than 9 million people and claiming the lives of thousands. In Somalia, the election process of 2021–2022 has been marred by disputes that have put the country on the brink of civil war. Meanwhile, inter-communal conflicts keep recurring while al-Shabaab continues to remain the biggest security threat in the country. This panel featured esteemed panelists who explored the role of governments of the countries in the Horn in promoting conciliation, mitigating conflicts, and systemically managing fault lines.

Remarks: H. E. Mahamoud Ali Yousseuf,

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Djibouti



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H. E. Mahamoud Ali Yousseuf discussed the causes of civil war, highlighting bad governance as a major cause. “Bad governance causes political instability, and political stability leads to civil war,” he warned. He noted that once civil war erupts, citizens lose what he termed their “moral compass.” He also encouraged governments to ensure equal distribution of resources as this contributes to poverty eradication and peaceful coexistence.

The minister took the opportunity to discuss the Israeli war on Gaza and its regional and global implications. He highlighted the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, underlining his country’s steadfast commitment to a peaceful Palestine while calling on the world to stop the war. While noting the regional consequences of attacks on the Red Sea by the Houthi group—a rebel group in Yemen—in response to Israel’s war on Gaza, he said Djibouti did not condemn the attacks in solidarity with their Palestinian brethren, and it also refused to join a western alliance to punish the Houthis. He noted that the Houthi attacks on the Red Sea led to a crisis along the Bab el-Mandab strait that is gravely affecting Djibouti’s economy and global trade. He urged the world to stop the Israeli aggression on Gaza noting the consequences of the war on regional security and global trade.

H. E. Ilyas M. Dawaleh, Djibouti’s Minister of Economy and Finance, argued the key drivers of conflict and instability in the region are competition for resources at the local level, such as competition for water, particularly in distant rural areas. The minister also noted that governance and state-building efforts did not wholly reach most areas or people in the region. “Scarcity of resources and political instability are like twins; they go hand in hand,” he said. The government’s monopoly to use violence is crucial in maintaining peace and security. He noted that the possession of weapons by clans and armed groups undermines stability. The minister also underscored the impact of climate change that has caused migration within the region. He highlighted the impact the global power competition over the control of the Red Sea has had on the stability of the region.

In her remarks, Dr. Khadija Osoble discussed the role of the Horn of African states in reconciliation and peacebuilding. She described external interference in state affairs as informed by national interests. She noted that states may see their interests in supporting peace in their neighboring state or otherwise. She described Nigeria's intervention in Liberia as an example of a country that sees a conflict in a neighboring state as a direct threat to its security. Nigeria feared that the conflict in Liberia would spill over into its own borders. On the other hand, she argued that the Ethiopian government sees a stable Somalia as a threat to its existence due to the historical rivalry between the two nations.

Hon. Mahdi M. Gulaid, former deputy prime minister of Somalia and current Member of Parliament, underscored the historical interconnectedness of Horn of Africa nations and advocated for regional integration as a catalyst for peace and development. He emphasized the pivotal role of institutions like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in promoting economic cooperation and conflict resolution, citing examples of successful regional initiatives such as the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). He emphasized Djibouti's significant contributions to restoring peace in Somalia, noting the historical connection between Somalia and Djibouti's struggle for independence. He highlighted Somalis' prominent role in Kenya's economy, particularly in sectors such as infrastructure, finance, banking, oil, and gas. He also encouraged elites in Ethiopia and Somalia to engage in open dialogue to overcome historical rivalry and to create a Horn of Africa community with a shared future. The former deputy prime minister recommended that the Horn of Africa region have one currency, one passport, a central bank, and a development bank for the region, akin to the European Union. This would benefit Somalis because the integration of HOA societies will be the integration of Somali people across borders.

Dr. Hussein Kassim, Chief of Cabinet and minister of the president's office, Somali regional state, Ethiopia, gave his perspective, explaining the importance of decentralization, opposing the idea of expanding the government, and urging the importance of a central point where the power is decentralized. He pointed out the importance of an HOA African solution to HOA African problems. He also noted there is recognition that Ethiopian policies toward Somalia were previously more of an intervention. But Ethiopia's foreign policy toward Somalia is more a matter of respecting the sovereignty of Somalia. He highlighted common ground challenges between Ethiopia and Somalia, such as fighting al-Shabaab together. Somalis can be a bridge for stability and development in the region.

Climate change has brought about dramatic changes, leading to the loss of both livestock and human lives, as well as the destruction of farming activities. This has forced pastoral communities to migrate in search of livelihoods and has contributed to widespread displacement. Consequently, there is a layered pressure among people in the region as they grapple with the challenges posed by these environmental changes. This is a common problem in the region. In a nutshell, the speakers underscored the interconnected nature of conflicts in the Horn of Africa and stressed the importance of collaborative efforts, inclusive governance, and economic integration in fostering lasting peace and stability in the region. They called for a concerted approach to address shared challenges and leverage regional cooperation to unlock the region's potential for socioeconomic development and prosperity.

Panel 3: Building a Case for Inclusivity in Conciliation, Social Cohesion, and Peace Processes

This panel discussed promoting conciliation through community cohesion and social inclusion with special emphasis on enhancing the integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into conciliation and social cohesion processes.

Panel Discussion:

Moderator:

Ali-Nur Adan,

Executive Director, GREDO




Mohamed Abdurrahman
(PhD Candidate):



Mohamed Khalid
(PhD Candidate):



Zeinab Abdillahi Ahmed
From Margins to Mainstream



Since 1991 the protracted civil war in Somalia has led to the displacement of millions of people. This has been complicated by humanitarian challenges such as droughts and floods. The latest of these crises, the famine of 2021, was particularly devastating, resulting in the loss of 250,000 lives and the displacement of many more. The persistence of conflict and the presence of violent groups like al-Shabaab have forced many to seek refuge in urban areas in search of safety and economic opportunities. This influx of displaced persons, combined with cyclical natural disasters, has led to a significant increase in urbanization rates. For instance, Mogadishu alone saw the number of IDPs increase from 300,000 in 2012 to 845,005 in 2019. This influx of urban-rural migration is a critical challenge in Somalia and has exacerbated layered displacements affecting the social cohesion between host communities and displaced ones. This has fostered concerns over the role of such massive segments of the society with regard to conciliation and social cohesion.

Zainab Abdillahi Ahmed noted several policy instruments such as the National Policy on IDPs and Refugee Returnees, the National Durable Solutions Strategy (NDSS), and the National Eviction Guideline, which are aimed at improving the lives of IDPs through social cohesion. However, the lack of prioritization and effective funding have made it significantly more difficult to operationalize these policies. Her presentation noted several points; one crucial issue is the hosting community's perception of IDPs as outsiders, which results in their exclusion and reduces their participation in re/conciliation efforts. She also highlighted the past initiatives of IDP inclusion in Mogadishu like the promotion of Socio- Economic Inclusion of Extremely Poor IDPs (SEIPP) and Residents of Host Communities in Garowe, Puntland project and the Danwadaag Durable Solutions Consortium sponsored by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ). These resulted in the construction of 700 homes for IDPs, the protection of their rights, and the fostering of their integration and social cohesion. She proposed that community-based initiatives that encourage integration and tolerance are necessary to foster social cohesion between host communities and IDPs.

Mohamed Khalid underscored the importance of fostering social cohesion and peace through women's involvement in household decision-making. Through an in-depth analysis of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in southern Somalia, Khalid found a positive correlation between women's age and their autonomy in decision-making, indicating that older women are more likely to participate in such processes. Khalid highlighted the significant impact of economic status on women's decision-making autonomy, observing that women from poorer households have notably lower odds of being involved in decision-making processes. He highlighted the pivotal role of economic factors in shaping decision-making dynamics and the necessity for policies aimed at enhancing women's financial independence. Such initiatives could encompass programs focused on financial literacy, microfinance opportunities, and support for women's engagement in the labor market, particularly within economically disadvantaged households. He also noted that women who have been employed have higher levels of decision-making in the household, suggesting the need for policies that promote women's employment. By addressing economic barriers, these measures have the potential to pave the way for greater inclusivity of women within society.

In his presentation, Mohamed Abdurrahman underscored critical issues facing Somalia, notably social exclusion and marginalization. He identified the clan-based social structure prevalent in the country as a primary root cause leading to the exclusion of marginalized groups from political representation, institutional access, and resource allocation. Consequently, youth from minority groups are often vulnerable to migration or recruitment by non-state armed groups due to inadequate community protection compared to dominant social groups. He advocated for promoting inclusivity in Somali societies to address deep-rooted divisions and foster a more cohesive and peaceful society. He emphasized the importance of addressing historical grievances, promoting economic empowerment, and fostering gender inclusion. His recommendations included facilitating open discussions among different clans, ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups in governance structures at various levels, and implementing educational programs and awareness campaigns to promote values of tolerance, acceptance, and diversity. He described genuine efforts to address exclusion and promote social cohesion as essential for Somalia to achieve durable reconciliation and to pave the way for a peaceful future.

Panel 4: Unleashing the Role of Arts, Poetry, and Literature in Peace in Somalia

This panel investigated the power of poetry (suugaanta) in promoting reconciliation and constructive cultural dialogue. It also indicated the role of traditional crafts and museums in strengthening intergenerational dialogue and shared understanding. The authors focused primarily on female Somali poets, including Hawa Jibril, Dr. Hawa Adan and Saado Abdi Amare.

Panel Discussion

Moderator:

Dr. Ladan Affi





Nasra Noah,
*former Deputy Prime Minister
and Member of Somalia
Parliament*



Muna Ahmed Omer
*Peace champion and
former Minister, Puntland
State*

Wambua Muindi
*Ambassador, former Minister,
and advisor to Djibouti President*

Dr Sallie Anna Steiner Pisera
*Peace champion and former
Minister, Puntland State*

Respondent:
Said Salah Ahmed,
*educator, playwright, poet,
and filmmaker*



As a result of the prolonged conflict in Somalia, Somali poets turned to poetry to promote peace. One of the most iconic lines in the history of Somali poetry is from Timacadde's poem "Dugsi maleh qabyaaladi waxay dumiso mooyaane," which translates to "Clannism provides no shelter; it only causes destruction." In addition to male poets like Hadraawi and Timacadde, female poets also contribute to peacemaking through different genres like Buraanbur, fostering solidarity, compassion, and harmonious resolution.

Panel 4, held on Day Two of the AFI 2023, delved into the profound impact of Somali poetry and traditional craftswomen's knowledge about fostering reconciliation and nurturing peacebuilding. Of particular note was the panel's groundbreaking spotlight on the crucial role played by female poets in Somalia's journey toward peace amid conflict. This panel shone a light on the courage of women who eloquently narrated the emotional toll of war, demonstrating a unique ability to advocate for peace purely from a genuine desire for communal harmony, devoid of any political or personal motives. The discussion showcased the ingenious methods of Somali female poets and their altruistic love for their Somali people to rise above societal divides, effectively engaging a wide array of stakeholders, thereby bridging differences and facilitating constructive dialogue.

Author Muna Ahmed introduced her paper titled "Resilient Voice," delving into an exploration of the bravery exhibited by Somali female poet Saado Abdi Amare. Her study focuses on Amare's role in advancing peace and fostering social unity in Somaliland. Through an analysis of Saado's poetic works, Ahmed elucidated how the poet's artistry inspired a yearning for peace among the populace, serving as a beacon of hope during the tumultuous events of 1994 when a devastating conflict erupted in Hargeisa. Saado's poignant question in her poem, "Haddaba Deeqaay, dagaalkani muxuu ahaa?" ("O Deeqa, what was this war?"), encapsulates the essence of her poignant reflections on the impact of war and the longing for peace in Somaliland.

Muna Ahmed articulated the profound emotional turmoil experienced by Saado in the wake of the betrayal and internal strife that ravaged her community, narrating her yearning for a restoration of harmony:

*Shisheeye hadduu is dilo waabu kala durkaa
Marada labadeeda dactal baa dab i qabsaday
Ee Haddaba deeqaay dagaalkani muxuu ahaa*

*Strangers fight each other then go far away from each other.
I am the one who is burning from both sides
O Deeqa, what was this war?"*

The study revealed that there is significant, untapped potential in leveraging the talents and expertise of Somali women to promote sustainable peace and development in the region. Muna Ahmed's research also found that by actively involving Somali females in peacebuilding roles, there is a greater opportunity to foster inclusive and lasting solutions to the country's complex challenges.

Nasrah Noah's seminal work delves into the profound contributions of Hawa Abdi and Hawa Jibriil in nurturing peace, reconciliation, unity, and forgiveness. Nasrah's analysis scrutinizes the essence of their endeavors, portraying a narrative deeply rooted in "And Then She Said" and "Keeping Hope Alive." The exposition sheds light on the remarkable altruism driving these two women toward the establishment of stability and fostering enduring peace. While Hawa Jibriil wielded her poetic prowess and traditional Somali Buraanbur chants to advocate for harmony, Hawa Abdi engaged actively in peacebuilding efforts, extending a helping hand to the underprivileged, irrespective of their clan affiliation or geographical origins.

Nasrah Noah's revelations underscore the monumental strides made by Jibriil and Abdi as champions of justice and equity. Their unwavering belief, as articulated by Hawa Jabril in the pivotal roles of justice and equality as pillars for cultivating sustainable and enduring peace, is not only inspirational but offers a profound lesson on the intrinsic connection between social justice, equity, and the longevity of peace in a society.

Wambua Muindi, a scholar affiliated with the University of Southern Somalia in Baidoa, authored a paper entitled "Somalis' Amity and Social Cohesion in Warsan Shire's 'Bless the Daughter Raised by a Voice in Her Head,'" which delves into the work of poet Warsan Shire. Shire's poetry, known for transcending traditional nomadic and pastoral themes, focuses particularly on the concept of home within the realm of peace. The paper argues that Shire endeavors to cultivate a culture of peace, conceptualizing peace within the country, which she refers to as "home" for harmonizing further.

Examining Warsan Shire's poem "Home" as a focal point, the paper highlights Shire's depiction of home as an active entity, suggesting that "no one leaves home unless home chases you." The analysis concludes that Warsan Shire's poetic oeuvre captures the essence of Somali identity in the contemporary global landscape and explores the potential for Somali unity, both domestically and internationally.

Dr. Sallie Pisera concluded the panel with her illuminating paper on Somali heritage and memory. Her research focuses on the craft knowledge of elderly Somali women at the Somali Museum of Minnesota in Minneapolis. Her work delves into the significance of these women in transmitting the intricate craft knowledge essential for constructing Aqal components. Notably, Dr. Pisera explored the museum's endeavor in curating the Aqal Soomaali from the village Xingalool in Sanaag province, showcasing it in a reconstructed nomadic setting within their gallery. She contended that these initiatives offer valuable insights for developing cultural policies that promote peace and communal harmony in the contemporary context of the Horn of Africa.

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF **PEACE** IN THE HORN

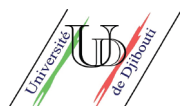
Advancing Conciliation and Social Cohesion among Somalis

7th Annual Forum for Ideas - 2023 Phase 2



FORUM REPORT 2023

www.heritageinstitute.org



THE SEVENTH EDITION OF THE **ANNUAL FORUM FOR IDEAS – PHASE II**

The forum proceedings were suspended to mourn the tragic passing of Somalia minister Khadija Mohamed Diriye who had participated as a keynote speaker at AFI 2023 in Djibouti in December 2023. The second phase of AFI 2023 was a continuation of the original forum and is covered in the remainder of this report. The conference theme, “Fostering a Culture of Peace in the Horn: Advancing Conciliation and Social Cohesion among Somalis,” underscores HIPS’ unwavering commitment to transformative policies aimed at fostering peace and conciliation.

Quran Recitation by Sheikh Bashir Salad



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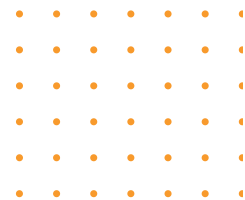
Sheikh Bashir opened the forum with a recitation of verses from the Holy Quran. He followed this with brief remarks on the numerous challenges and conflicts that have incapacitated Somalis’ ability to live peaceful and prosperous lives. He encouraged Somalis to promote goodness and collaboration to overcome such challenges.

In doing so, he underlined the importance of collective responsibility to collaborate in building a bright future characterized by peace, prosperity, unity, and stability in Somalia and beyond.

KEYNOTE REMARKS

Opening Remarks

Overview of Annual Forum for Ideas



Mursal Saney

Executive Director, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies



The executive director welcomed dignitaries, guests, and all participants explaining that the 2023 AFI had been suspended due to the sudden death of H. E. Khadijo Mohamed Diriye, may her soul rest in peace. He mentioned that the idea of establishing the Heritage Institute emanated from Somali minds and shared with the audience that HIPS' inaugural forum had taken place in Djibouti. "We drafted a proposal to President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, asking to host this forum. He graciously accepted, and we held our inaugural forum in Djibouti in 2017," he said. He explained that in one AFI gathering in Djibouti, Professor Abdirizak Jurile had stated that the last time leaders from all five Somali regions had met in the Horn of Africa was in 1947 until 2017 when HIPS managed to bring together again Somalis representing the five regions of the country and the Somali diaspora. During Djibouti's struggle for independence, Saney explained, there had been a strong idea of Djibouti joining Somalia. However, considering the hugely constructive role Djibouti played in stabilizing Somalia, Somalis realized that it was right for Djibouti to stay as an independent state. That said, Djibouti has acted in the spirit of Hiil Walaal, meaning "Help your brother."

Official Opening Statement

Hon. Yusuf Hassan

Member of Parliament, Kenya



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The Kenyan veteran politician and lawmaker appreciated the warm welcome he received in Mogadishu and emphasized that he does not feel like an outsider. Instead, he feels at home. He hailed AFI's positive impact on Somali society in the Horn of Africa for its promotion of unity and cooperation, particularly among intellectuals, professionals, and leaders and he underscored the importance of transcending unhealthy political bickering. He urged working toward common goals for the betterment of Somalia. He also conveyed greetings from Eastleigh's Somali population to the AFI.

H. E. Moumin Hassan Barre

Minister of Islamic Affairs and Endowments, Djibouti

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The minister began his speech by thanking the Somali government and HIPS for the warm welcome. His Excellency explained that peace is essential to human survival and existence and noted that it is an integral part of Islamic values and Somali culture, saying that both the name of Islam and Islamic greetings reflect the importance of peace. Additionally, he highlighted the unpredictable current trends and instability in the Horn of Africa. He underlined the role of Djibouti in improving such an ambivalent situation of the Horn of Africa through its well-informed diplomacy and through its newly established Institute of Peace and Mediation. The minister emphasized the importance of creating a culture of peace in the Horn of Africa. He expects the Heritage Institute's AFI to produce recommendations advancing peacebuilding and conciliation. The minister praised President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud's description of the Somali–Djibouti relationship as “birna ma goyn karto, biyona ma mayri karaan,” (the relations between Somalia and Djibouti cannot be cut by metal/knife or wiped out or erased by water). The minister also talked briefly about the role of President Ismail Omar Guelleh in Somalia's state-building process through organizing the Arta reconciliation conference in 2000.



Official Opening Statement

H. E. Ahmed Moallim Fiqi

Minister of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation, Somalia

His Excellency expressed appreciation for the work of the Heritage Institute and described the AFI as the largest platform bringing Somalis together. The minister has also appreciated the title of AFI's 2023 conference, with its focus on conciliation, peace, and social cohesion in the Horn of Africa. He emphasized the importance of undertaking such social reconciliation and dialogue across Somalia. He also commented on the historic agreement between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Somaliland region mediated by Djibouti President His Excellency Ismail Omar Geelle at the end of December 2023. He noted that it was unfortunate that the agreement was damaged by Ethiopia's signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Somaliland's Muse Bihi. However, the minister argued that the MoU has become a unifying factor that mobilized Somalis to defend their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The minister warned that the world is becoming increasingly like a jungle where the rights of the weakest nations are violated. Therefore, he emphasized the necessity of Somali unity in the face of such unpredictable circumstances.

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H. E. Minister Hassan Moalim Mohamud

*Minister of the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs,
Federal Government of Somalia*

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The minister expressed appreciation for the role of the Heritage Institute in connecting Somali society and highlighted particularly the sacrifices made by its founders. He touched on Somalia's historical turbulence shaped by ongoing political upheavals and instability, underscoring the critical need for an effective justice system that is a pillar to peace and social harmony. He argued that the absence of robust legal frameworks and effective institutions has perpetuated a cycle of violent conflicts and hindered the nation's progress toward sustainable development and peace. Furthermore, he stated that HIPS has astutely prioritized research on pressing Somali issues identified by Somalis, not by outsiders. The minister welcomed the AFI's 2023 theme, noting that it is in line with President Mohamud's slogan “Somali heshiis ah dunidana la heshiis ah” (Somalis at peace with themselves and with the world).



Keynote presentation:

Making Sense of Genuine Conciliation

Jama Egal,

Peace and Conciliation Advocate

At the beginning of his presentation, Jama Egal declared that “Somalis are peace lovers.” He stated that Somalis’ greetings show they highly value the concept of peace. He gave examples of the Somali way of life that reflect this, such as the greeting: “Nabad ma la yahay?” (Is everyone in peace?) and also the parting phrase “Nabad-gelyo” (See you then in peace).

He explained that when Somalis first meet or say good-bye, they start and end the meeting with the term “peace.” Interestingly, he argued that in their greetings, Somalis inquire about the situation and context in which they live, while other societies enquire about individual concerns rather than the general situation. He then explained that the term “reconciliation” focuses on what has happened in the past. Instead of “dib-u-heshiisiin” (reconciliation), he suggested utilizing the Somali term “Heshiin” (conciliation). He illustrated the differences brought by the following prefixes (ka, ku, u) saying that “ka heshiin” is about reconciling what happened in the past. This means identifying the root causes of violence while “ku heshiin” is agreeing on the process of reconciliation. He concluded that “u heshiin” is focused on protecting the common good for society. He also talked about the importance of writing about tribes’ culture with a special focus on their culture of peace. He emphasized the need to reconcile concerns that matter in our future aspirations and not to be kept as prisoners of the grievances that happened in the past. Instead of dwelling on the past, we should learn lessons from what happened, asking ourselves what went wrong and how it can be corrected, then improve and go forward.



PLENARY SESSION 1

High-Level Panel: Obstacles to Durable Intra-Somali Conciliation: The Role of External Actors

Despite concerted efforts to promote intra-Somali conciliation to advance peace and development across the Somali-inhabited territories, several challenges persist. While many challenges are internal, meaning they emanate from within the Somalis themselves, others are external. These include the colonial legacy and external interference. Most recently, Ethiopia blatantly violated Somalia's sovereignty when it inked an MoU with Somalia's breakaway region of Somaliland in an attempt to annex parts of it. Pursuing this under the guise of its natural right to have access to the sea, Ethiopia's action is seen as hampering the Somalia–Somaliland talks as the deal was signed just two days after Djibouti brokered a historic deal between Somalia and Somaliland leaders. This session convened senior government officials and academics from the region to discuss the external threats impacting conciliation and social cohesion among Somalis. The session was particularly timely given the threats to Somalia's territorial integrity from neighboring Ethiopia.

Panel Discussion

Moderator:

Farhiya Mumin

Member of the Independent Constitutional Review and Implementation Commission, former Member of Parliament, Somalia



H. E. Dr. Adam Aw Hirsi

State Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Federal Government of Somalia



Hon. Dr. Ali Said Fiqi

Member of Parliament, Somalia



Dr. Aden Omar Abdillahi

Director of the Institute of Political and Strategic Studies of Djibouti



Dr. Abdifatah Tahir

Research Fellow, Global Development Institute, University of Manchester



Abwaan Said Salah Ahmed

Educator, playwright, poet, and filmmaker

Keynote presenter

Ethiopia's MoU with Somaliland:

A Threat to Somalia's Sovereignty and Regional Stability.

Dr. Abdirashid Ismail

Senior Researcher, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies

Dr. Abdirashid Ismail began his presentation by describing Ethiopia's long-term quest to own the sea for the last 300 years or so. He emphasized that Ethiopia has historically promoted the narrative that it had lost access to the sea that it must reclaim. He noted that Ethiopia's emperor Haile Selassie believed that Ethiopia should border the Red Sea, and therefore worked hard to exchange the "Howd Area" with Saylac Port. He emphasized that Ethiopia's annexation plan for part of Somalia's coastal area is based on its quest to reclaim what the elite there refer to as their "traditional sea." He listed Somalia's achievements in 2023, including debt relief, and lifting the arms embargo. Therefore, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed wanted to disrupt such achievements. Based on his findings, Dr. Ismail explained that this MoU can ignite violence within Somaliland itself. The MoU also enables al-Shabaab to recruit more young people. If this MoU is to be realized, he argued, Ethiopia will become a king-maker by influencing the potential leadership in Somaliland. This is because Ethiopia will attempt to bring someone who implements their own interests in Somaliland. He listed several policy recommendations, urging the government of Somalia to develop comprehensive strategies. He also underlined the necessity of implementing the Turkey–Somalia defense pact.



The Hon. Dr. Ali Said Fiqi, a member of the Somalia Parliament, talked about barriers to intra-Somali reconciliation. He argued that Somalis are unified by many things, such as geography, clan affiliation, and Islam. However, he noted that Somalis have prioritized their respective clan identities at the expense of their common Somali identity. He explained that Somalia's federalism serves to perpetuate clannism and polarize the society and stressed the importance of holding a sincere national dialogue at different levels. Commenting on the MoU, he underlined the need for unity to resist Ethiopia's plan to annex part of Somalia's sea. He stated that Kenya also wanted to take part of Somalia, but that was made impossible by a united stance on the matter. He called for a national dialogue aimed at promoting a national vision.

According to H. E. Dr. Adam Aw Hisri, Somalia's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Ethiopia crossed a red line on January 1, 2024 by signing the MoU with Somaliland. The MoU, he said, is between a violent, reckless Ethiopian prime minister who killed his own people in masses and Muse, whose term of governing Somaliland has already expired. Therefore, he argued, Somalis should not tolerate this violation and should defend their country. He noted that Somalis were misled about ties with Ethiopia improving since their prime minister is from the Oromo tribe, which is classified as Cushites alongside Somali, Afar, and a number of Horn of African communities. Somalis developed the idea that the Ethiopian prime minister should be welcomed and collaborated with. However, the MoU has proved that to be wrong. He warned that the prime minister is dangerous, not only to Somalia but also to Ethiopia, and that if he stays in power, he could become even worse than the Tigray and Amhara regimes in the past, possibly leading to the disintegration of Ethiopia.

Dr. Abdifatah Dahir stated that, considering historical events and architecture, Somalia and Ethiopia have many similarities. For example, Ethiopia started as small city-states similar to Somalia and other African countries. Historically, Somalia also had city-states such as Adal, Ifat, Saylac, Ajuuraan, and others. He argued that we, as Somalis, should not start our governing history and state-building from 1960. He noted that the pillars of Ethiopia's state-building are unchangeable but sustained over centuries, describing Ethiopia as a fascist and expansionist state, and continuing by saying that the narrative to achieve a powerful Ethiopia cannot change but will remain and transform itself in different forms. One of Ethiopia's narratives, he explained, is to promote the idea that historically Somalia was a part of Ethiopia but was separated by Western colonial powers that then created Somalia. In contrast, he argued, the pillars and narratives of Somalia's state-building have changed over time from Somaliwayn, pursuing a greater Somalia that includes the Somali-inhabited territories in Ethiopia and Kenya, to the situation we are in now which is that of clan-based federal member states. He reminded Somalis of the precariousness of Somalia's state-building principles. He argued that in the past, we (as Somalis) believed Ethiopia to be our number one enemy. But in the last three decades, we have adopted the opposite view, saying that Ethiopia has become our good neighbor and therefore we should establish constructive relationships with them. However, Ethiopia does not share our view. He explained that unfortunately, some Somali leaders seek support and strength from Ethiopia knowing that Ethiopia's interest is to keep Somalia weak and divided. He called for unity to resist external threats, and for letting the federal government, not regional states, be entitled to sign international agreements.

Panel 1: Revisiting Justice, Traditional and Islamic Approaches to Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

This panel highlighted cultural and Islamic-related aspects in ways that promote community cohesion. The concept of “Tolnimo” was advanced as a constructive indigenous approach to strengthening social cohesion as opposed to tribalism that entails social divisions. Similarly, the panel argued the importance of community creativity in nurturing a culture of peace. It also critically explored the possibility of negotiating with al-Shabaab and concluded with transitional justice and what can be learned from other African countries that have endured experiences similar to Somalia's.



Moderator:

Sumaya Shole

Heritage Institute Fellow

Keynote Statement

H. E. Minister Hassan Moalim Mohamed
*Minister of Justice and Constitution,
Federal Government of Somalia*



The minister explained the meanings of the terms “peace” and “security,” arguing that peace is created by the wider society while security is provided by the government through law enforcement and security agencies. He stressed that there was peace before Somalis gained independence from colonial powers; such peace and stability were created by the Somali communities (clans and tribes). As such, he argued that Somali society has the potential to make and restore peace. The minister continued, explaining that the concept of the modern Somali state was midwived and brought by the colonial powers and did not provide Somalis with the security they expected the state to provide its citizens.

He said he believes, conversely, that the state has become a curse on Somalis and a source of instability.

Presentation Title:

Tolnimo versus Tribalism: Conceptual Foundations for Social Relations and State Formation

Presenter:

Hon. Dr. Elmi M. Nor

former Minister of Finance and current Member of Parliament

Dr. Elmi's paper shed light on the differences and similarities between tol (kinship) and qabiil (clan/tribe). Dr. Elmi argued that there are many factors including socio-cultural contexts and religious values that shape and naturally organize human relations. He explained that while the concepts of kinship (tol) and clan/tribe (qabiil) share some general characteristics, they still have diametrically contrasting implications on many levels. For instance, qabiil (clan) glorifies distinctive identities and what separates clan A from clan B, rather than stressing commonalities and what unifies them. In contrast, the concept of tol (kinship) conveys positive civic meanings such as social cohesion, construction, knitting or joining things, individuals, or groups together. In that sense, tol implies goodness, compassion, and unity against injustice and external aggression, as well as civic belonging beyond the immediate kin. So, while qabiil and tol have some commonalities in the traditional sense, they are very different in the conceptual imagination and, most significantly, in their practical applications. The concept of tol also has a connotation of territorial relations of the neighborhood (Deris-wadaad or Ood-wadaag) as well as the meaning of communal relations and shared sociopolitical interests and cultural values, such as Dan-waadag (shared common interest) and arrin-wadaag (shared understanding).



Presentation Title:

*Negotiations with al-Shabaab:
Opportunities, Obstacles and Threats*

Presenter:

Sheikh Suldán Qorane,

PhD candidate and prominent traditional leader

Sheikh Suldán Qorane began his presentation by explaining the constructive role of Islam in teaching reconciliation and peace. He argued that peace is embedded in our language, explaining the phrase “Ma nabadbaa?” (Is there peace?) and response “Waa nabad” (Yes, there is peace) which are used when greeting. So, culturally, Somalis talk about other life aspects after making sure there is peace or otherwise while greeting each other. Suldán also inferred from Quran and Islamic teachings that negotiated peace should be pursued relentlessly. “...and settlement/reconciliation is best” (surah an-Nisaa, Aayah, 128). “...and amend that which is between you...” (Surah al-Anfaa, Aayah 1) “...so make settlement between your brothers...” (Surah al-Hujuraat, Aayah 10).

In his view, all these Quranic verses teach us the centrality of restoring peace and promoting reconciliation should there be war among human beings. While Islam fundamentally strengthens and urges reconciliation, Suldan Qorane argued that there are barriers to reconciling and negotiating with al-Shabaab. He insisted that the historical background of extremist violent groups shows that al-Shabaab and their associates are not ready for negotiation. He contended that, in the past, extremist groups have never reconciled with any group or country. He continued by stating that some Somali clans have been misled by the rhetoric of al-Shabaab and by the exploitation of Islam in wrong ways. There is no clan, he declared, that al-Shabaab had a peace agreement with.



Instead, they pretended to have a settlement and rapprochement with some clans and killed the important figures of these clans. In Sheikh Suldan Qorane's view, al-Shabaab believes that they are the only righteous group practicing Islam properly while considering others apostates. He continued by emphasizing that al-Shabaab and their like do not believe in the concept of compromise and insist that their opponent should surrender. He contested that al-Shabaab are not an independent organization and therefore are unable to reach any agreement with the government of Somalia because they are part of a global terror group, the al-Qaeda, and they have an internationalist agenda as opposed to a nationalist one. Sheikh Suldan Qorane has the view that al-Shabaab believe the Somalia government to be an apostate government that is a stooge of the West. Therefore, if there is any possibility of talk in the future, they (al-Shabaab) will only talk to their real opponent which is the USA and the West. In that argument, al-Shabaab imitated the Taliban movement that negotiated with the US government when Afghanistan was marginalized. He concluded that any suggestion to negotiate with al-Shabaab is driven by emotion not logic and therefore will end in failure.

Keynote presentation:

Bazi Bussuri Sheikh

Director of Finance, Help Yateem

As an ice-breaker, Bazi Bussuri Sheikh started his talk with the Somali wisdom “Yaaq yaanbo ma goyso” (an ax cannot cut a baobab tree). This is because a baobab tree is a giant, enigmatic, and solid tree. However, the baobab is often weakened or killed by an internal disease or bacteria that grows inside it and then decays the tree, causing it to collapse. By using this metaphoric explanation, he wanted to say that Somali society is similar to the baobab; it cannot be defeated by external enemies but unfortunately can be harmed by internal divisions. Another metaphoric example used was likened qabil to the grape, which can produce delicious juice. On the other hand, grapes can be used to make alcohol, an intoxicant that is harmful and impermissible in Islam. Similarly, qabil has a dual effect.



Bazi Bussuri Sheikh argued that cultural creativity constitutes the glue that repairs the relationships of a society broken by violent conflict. In his view, such social and cultural creativity can lead to the birth of a beautiful, cohesive, prosperous, and peaceful Somali nation. He argued that, in the past, the Somali culture, and its creative arts—such as poetry, proverbs, and wise sayings—have contributed immensely to reconciliation and peacebuilding processes; therefore, they can contribute to solving current and future Somali conflicts. He shed light on the role of traditional Somali elders in keeping social harmony and also solving problems when violence erupts. He explained the importance of traditional Ergo (mediators) in the reconciliation processes, stating that the traditional Somali mediators or conciliators were culturally required to possess the qualities of patience, resilience, honesty, and integrity. Therefore, the Somali culture promotes a sense of dialogue and negotiation. In his view, Somali proverbs and wisdom demonstrate the importance of employing peaceful language and a soft approach that can promote social harmony and repair the social damage done by war. In conclusion, he recommended nurturing a culture of peace in early childhood at families, schools, and traditional Quranic teachings where Somali children start their lives. He also suggested teaching children life skills and handcrafts that will contribute to the culture of peace.

Presentation Title:

Implementing Transitional Justice: Core Functions in Somalia

Presenter:

Ahmed Abdiyadi Abdullahi

Researcher and Director of the Somali Civic Studies



This presentation was on transitional justice. In his research, Ahmed Abdiyadi Abdullahi looked at three cases—Rwanda, South Africa, and Morocco—and how Somalis can potentially benefit from their experiences. In the Rwanda case, he found that the Rwanda government has adopted the concept of “memory preservation” by keeping the scars of the civil war, such as skulls of victims, in museums to help younger generations observe and learn about the genocide to avoid repeating it. Similarly Somalia can learn from Rwanda and preserve the scars and memories of the civil war in museums and libraries and can also build monuments reflecting the civil war. As an example, he suggested developing a powerful monument for October 14, 2017 instead of the current small monument that does not reflect the scale of explosion and disaster. Regarding South Africa and Morocco, Ahmed discussed the role of their commissions, and how Somalia can also learn from their experiences. He argued that political will is the first step expected from the government. He suggested that all social groups and civil society be included in the process of transitional justice and that the memories of the civil war and its consequences should be taught in schools as is the case in Rwanda.

Panel 2: Health-Centered Initiatives for Conciliation and Peace in Somalia

This panel addressed the connectedness between health services (both physical and mental), and food security on one side, and peace, conciliation, and community well-being on the other side, particularly in the conflict-affected Somali society.



Moderator:

Dr. Abdirisak Hersi Hassan,
Senior Technical Advisor, Ministry of Health

Keynote Statement

H. E. Dr. Mohamed Hassan Bulale,
Deputy Minister of Health, Somalia



During his keynote statement, Deputy Minister Mohamed Hassan Bulale explained that security is the government's number one priority and other services, including health, come next. On another note, he said social cohesion has been improved as a consequence of providing health services. The deputy minister also explained that the health sector contributes to security and stability by providing health services to the injured, treating locals in areas liberated from al-Shabaab, and so on. The staff from the health sector on the frontline encounter dangers similar to those on the battlefield. "As the Ministry of Health, we are part of the fight against terrorists; some of our staff are on the frontline, and they are dying to secure our country; we are part of any battles in all regions," he said. He also explained the displacement, agony, and suffering of pregnant Somali women in remote and unsafe areas and the attempt by the Ministry of Health to find health solutions. He said, "At the time of speaking, a Somali mother is delivering her baby in a remote area that has no health service due to security; they are dying, getting injuries, and in addition to that, they are displaced. Where there is no security, there is no healthcare."

Presentation Title:

A Systems-Thinking Approach or Methodology to Explore Healthcare Access during Conflicts in Somalia

Presenter:

Adam Abdulkadir Mohamed,

*PhD candidate,
Interconnections between Health and Peace*

In his research, Adam Abdulkadir Mohamed found the interconnectedness between health and peace through a unique methodological approach known as systems thinking. His research found that good access to health services results in a good level of social cohesions, and vice versa. Similarly, low access to healthcare has been linked to the high probability of conflict escalation.

His research underlines peace as a fundamental prerequisite for health, while poor access to health and other basic social services entails mass displacement and violent conflicts, either directly or indirectly. On the other hand, he argued that both health and peace are threatened by various factors, such as conflict, violence, climate change, poverty, inequality, human rights abuses, social tensions, and the scarcity and degradation of resources and the environment. Continuing, he argued that “conflicts cause injuries, disabilities, and mental illness and increase of sexually transmitted diseases, which tells us the interrelationship between these two variables.” He proposed creating a health program in each military operation, underscoring the importance of peace for access to health.



Dr. Abbas Haji Abdullahi Fiiqow

a clinical Socratic and mental health doctor, focused on the mutual relationship between health, environment, and peace. He drew his insights from the Somali proverb “Nabadaa naas la nuugo leh,” arguing that the intended meaning is that peace is the source of feeding, which indicates the nutritional interconnection with peace. He also talked about the basic rights of human beings, including health, water, peace, and so on, which the government is required to provide for its citizens.



Dr. Abdulkadir Wehliye Afrah

a medical doctor with years of experience in the health sector, is also a senior maternal and child health advisor. In his remarks, he described the interconnectedness between health centers and social well-being, explaining that the indicators of good healthcare are also indicators of community well-being. Unfortunately, in Somalia, health indicators often show shocking results, which indicates a low level of community well-being. Somalia is in the lowest rank in global healthcare, and the government, with the support of the community, needs to prioritize the development of healthcare centers. He argued that due to violent conflicts and instability, the magnitude of mental illness and mental disorders in Somalia is increasing, reflecting the level of conflict.



Panel 3: Talo Wadaag: Conciliation within Communities Emerging from Conflicts: Experiences and Insights from the Talo Wadaag Program

This panel offered unique lessons, insights, and experiences on conciliation and peacebuilding activities drawn from fieldwork in Puntland, Galmudug, and Benadir.



Moderator:
Dr. Yusuf Sheikh Omar,
Director, Talo Wadaag 2 Program, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies

In his keynote statement, the minister gave an overview of Somalia's conflict. He, particularly, explained the importance of understanding the root causes of Galmudug's conflicts including tribal conflicts as well as political dynamics in order to develop appropriate solutions.

The minister emphasized the significance of understanding each conflict according to its context-specific needs.



KEYNOTE STATEMENT

H. E. Abdi Mohamed Jama (Waayeel),
Minister of Interior, Federal and Reconciliation, Galmudug state, Somalia

Ubah-Roda Abdi Ali,

Commissioner of Abdiiaziz District, Benadir

The commissioner explained her district's constructive relationships with HIPS and Interpeace through partnering in the Talo Wadaag program and the joint activities focused on assisting Abdiiaziz District's local authorities to interact with and encourage local citizens to get involved in governance, reconciliation, and conflict resolution. She also talked about the activities of Abdiiaziz Peace Committee and the general situation in Abdiiaziz District.



Ramla Habad

Research Assistant with Talo Wadaag, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies



Research Assistant with Talo Wadaag, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies In her presentation, Ramla Habad argued that even though the program is rather new to HIPS, compared to other consortium members its content and purposes are very much in line with HIPS' vision, and principles. She stated that HIPS' Talo Wadaag 2 works directly with the grassroots. Showing its impact on its partners, she elaborated on how Talo Wadaag 2 has empowered marginalized groups such as youth and women to participate in governance, state-building, conflict prevention, and conciliation. She explained that HIPS' Tolo Wadaag 2 provides opportunities for diverse

social groups to come together, share their experiences and stories, and learn from each other. Similarly, the Talo Wadaag program organizes purposefully designed events to help ordinary citizens interact with their local authorities and discuss with them matters concerning their everyday lives and needs. She highlighted the program's collaboration with relevant authorities on national, regional, and local levels, explaining that HIPS' Talo Wadaag operations focus on the Benadir and Galmudug regions. In Benadir, the program has partnered with Abdiiaziz District to help develop good governance, reconciliation, and community participation in public life. In 2023 the work was mainly in Benadir; three participatory action research activities were conducted with youth and women as well as with female and male Islamic scholars to examine their views on governance, politics, state-building, and conflict resolution. Several training workshops and forums held in 2023 were also described. She acknowledged that in 2024 the program is prioritizing Galmudug where it has already conducted participatory action research sessions and forums in Gaalkacyo and Dhuusamareeb. The research is focused on the perceptions of youth and women regarding reconciliation and peacebuilding in Galmudug.

Abdirahman Said Bile

Researcher, Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC)

Abdirahman Said Bile began by explaining that Talo Wadaag is a project aimed at increasing the engagement of citizens in governance. He stated that peace and reconciliation are an integral part of good governance because, without peace, it is very hard to improve Somalia's governance system. He mentioned that in Puntland, Talowadaag's peacebuilding activities focus on social reconciliation, particularly between warring communities. He shed light on PDRC's Talo Wadaag activities in Puntland, describing the following emphases of the program:



- 01 Supporting peace and mediation initiatives in Puntland in various forms, such as advocating for local mediation processes and offering financial and logistical support to mediation committees.
- 02 Endorsing the creation and implementation of joint peace committees aimed at preventing the recurrence of conflicts and enhancing positive social relations between communities involved in disputes.
- 03 Conducting research and baseline assessments to evaluate the causes and effects of conflicts to follow up and measure the progress.
- 04 Supporting peace and mediation initiatives in Puntland in various forms, such as advocating for local mediation processes and offering financial and logistical support to mediation committees.
- 05 Conducting an annual peace conference aimed at bringing together peace practitioners and peace scholars to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and information.
- 06 Documenting peace initiatives for future use as well as for public awareness.

He also talked about how Talo Wadaag's long-term efforts to build peace can sometimes take many years. He shared PDRC's experience in this sector, acknowledging that peace requires the combined efforts of different social segments starting from the grassroots up to the government. This is because peace cannot be sustained without community involvement and government enforcement. He argued that the most important factor in peacebuilding is to ensure that the process is initiated and owned by the local people. He claimed that external stakeholders can support but they cannot dictate what should be done.

Ahmed Gure, Senior Advisor to Interpeace

Ahmed Gure explained that the essence of Talo Wadaag is focusing on strengthening social contracts in the local Somalia context. He emphasized the importance of citizens' engagement in governance, peace, and state-building, which will facilitate local citizens' ability to bring local issues to their local authorities. Ahmed briefly talked about Phase 1 of the Talo Wadaag program, which started in 2017 in Somaliland and Puntland. In Phase 1, the focus was on silencing guns and enhancing conflict resolution skills. The lessons learned from Phase 1 were positive and therefore facilitated the launch of Phase 2, which has focused on citizens' participation in politics, governance, conflict prevention, environment, and climate change.



Panel 4: Promoting Conciliation, Social Cohesion, and Peace through Education

This panel explored the crucial role of education in bridging social divides, fostering peace and conciliation, and advancing social cohesion with special emphasis on the critical role that institutions of higher education can play.



Moderator:
Dr. Afyare Abdi Elmi,
Senior Fellow, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies

Presentation Title:

The Promise of Education as a Bridge to Advance Social Cohesion among Somalis

Presenter:

Zayid Abdi Garcad,
PhD candidate, Taylor's University



Zayid Abdi Garcad talked about the importance of traditional Quranic schooling in connecting and forging together different tribes and social groups and facilitating their development of a shared understanding, a common identity, and their future aspirations. To have a society with a unified sense of belonging, he argued for the importance of developing standardized, transformative national education policies and philosophies that promote unity, identity, tolerance, social interconnectedness, and social cohesion. Additionally, he suggested the necessity of encouraging different perspectives within teaching systems.

Presentation Title:

Can Peace Education Be a Strategy for Fostering Lasting Conciliation within the Somali Community?

Presenter:

Shamsudin Abikar,

PhD



During his presentation, Shamsudin Abikar explained the challenges of peace education within Somalia's complex context. He emphasized education's pivotal role in advancing peace amid ongoing conflict, socioeconomic instability, and political fragility. His findings revealed significant challenges facing Somalia's education system, including the absence of a unified national curriculum, inadequate teacher training, and a low level of educational quality, which has a negative impact on peace, development, and community well-being. He argued that corporal punishment practices within different levels of educational institutions can hinder efforts to promote a culture of peace, reconciliation, and social cohesion. He explained the importance of aligning Somalia's educational philosophies with Somalis' values and culture, such as the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (may peace be upon him) on mutual love and compassion. Additionally, he underscored the importance of prioritizing Somali language literacy to support social, academic, and identity development. Finally, He highlighted education's critical role in fostering peace and social cohesion in Somalia, calling for tailored strategies to address the country's unique challenges and prolonged violent conflict.

Presentation Title:

The Inclusion of Peace-Related Pedagogies in the National Primary Education Curriculum Helps Foster a Culture of Peace in Somalia: Opportunities and Challenges

Presenter:

Dr. Abdishakur Tarah,

Senior Lecturer in Education Policy and Management, Nottingham Trent University, UK.



Dr. Abdishakur Tarah's research examined the potential benefits and challenges of integrating peace-related pedagogies into Somalia's national primary education curriculum. Topics suggested for addition to the curriculum include children's rights, conflict awareness, violence prevention, conflict resolution, empathy, respect, love, understanding the drivers of conflict, communication, and critical-thinking skills. The study explored the importance of the Islamic perspective on teaching peace, emphasizing the principles of mercy, security, and justice from the Quran.

Furthermore, he discussed current trends in peace education, distinguishing between education about peace from education for peace. The latter aims to equip learners with the skills to learn peace values and relevant skills to respond to conflict nonviolently while education about peace is learning about the history, types, and theories of peace as knowledge, not as an application. He also described the negative impact of conflict on education in Somalia, as millions of children have no access to school.

Panel 5: The Role of Inclusive Governance in Conciliation and Political Stability

This panel discussed the crucial relationship between inclusive governance, socioeconomic factors, the effective role of legislative bodies, and their impact on conciliation and political stability. Case studies include local governments and the National Consultative Council (NCC).



Moderator:
Abdifatah Hikam,
Social Development Pillar Senior Advisor

Presentation Title:

Somalia Decentralization: The Role of Local Governments in Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention, Service Delivery and Social Cohesion

Presenter:

Mohamed Mohamed (Joobe),

Political Affairs Officer, United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)



Mohamed Mohamed (Joobe) argued that, while numerous factors contributed to the collapse of the central government, dictatorship and the centralization of power and services were among key factors that led to its collapse. To overcome such strong centralization, in post-conflict state formation Somalia agreed to adopt an inclusive federal system with strong constitutional foundations. Though federalism is a new concept to Somalia and very challenging in Somalia's context, it has been accepted and embraced. This new political system has been adopted as a mechanism for power-sharing, state and peacebuilding, and conflict resolution at the federal, state, and local government levels. He explained how Somalia is going to implement the Wadajir Framework for Local Governance with special emphasis on social healing, peace dividends, civic dialogue, and building functional local governance. The study examined the national stabilization strategy of security and rule of law, local governance, social cohesion and reconciliation, and community recovery. The study emphasized district peace and stability committees and their role in building peace and preventing violent conflicts from erupting at the community and district levels.

Presentation Title:

The Role of the National Consultative Forum (NCC) in Establishing an Inclusive and Sustainable Political Settlement in Somalia

Presenter:

Omar Yusuf,



In his presentation, Omar Yusuf discussed the role of the NCC in governance and state-building processes. He stated that the NCC was established with the aim of improving cooperation among the executive branches of the federal government, the federal member states, and the Benadir regional administration and of establishing a national mechanism for political dialogue among the executive leaders of Somalia at both the federal and federal member state levels. He particularly discussed the NCC's deliberation on critical issues for state-building such as security, power-sharing arrangements, and constitutional reform and it analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the NCC's approach. Noting challenges facing the NCC such as lack of implementation of decisions and agreements reached and the absence of Puntland and Somaliland, he recommended putting into place mechanisms to monitor and ensure the effective implementation of agreements and to strengthen inclusivity.

Presentation Title:

Somalia's Political-Elite Settlement: The Role of the Parliament

Presenter:

Ahmed Mohamoud Mohamed

*Master of Public Management in Global Governance and Political Economy,
Korea Development Institute of Public Policy and Management*



Ahmed Mohamoud Mohamed defined a political settlement as a social order based on a political compromise between powerful groups. In his presentation, Ahmed shed light on political settlements among Somalia's political elites through parliament, which is a formal institution that is more inclusive with a constitutional mandate compared to the NCC. He found that significant impediments remain unresolved due to the absence of parliament's role, which is caused by the executive government's constant interference in the affairs of the parliament together with the intertwined nature of members of parliament and the council of ministers. Another issue raised during his presentation was the low level of political settlement and trust between the federal government and the federal member states. In conclusion, he argued that a low level of political agreement undermines state-building and peacebuilding processes, the fight against al-Shabaab, and the federal constitutional review process.

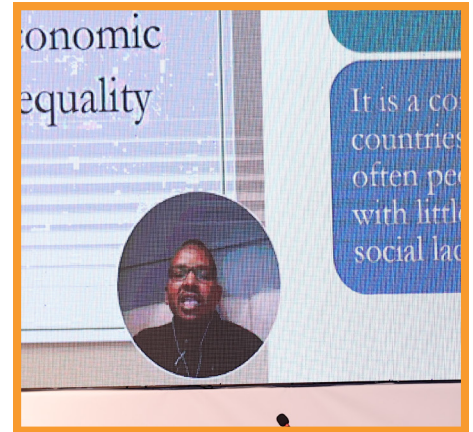
Presentation Title:

*Fair Distribution of Economic Opportunities
and Social Cohesion in Somalia: A
Multidisciplinary Study*

Presenter:

Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim Nor

Minister for Presidential Affairs, Southwest state, Somalia



Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim Nor investigated the complex relationship between economic equality and social cohesion within the Somali context. He described economic equity as a fundamental prerequisite for long-term stability, prosperity, and state-building processes in Somalia and said that economic equality nurtures social cohesion among diverse Somali communities. He argued that when individuals and communities experience a fair distribution of economic opportunities and resources, the incentives for conflict diminish while the foundations for trust and cooperation are cemented. For that reason, he emphasized the importance of understanding the root causes of economic inequality and the need to establish robust institutional frameworks and international support to facilitate equal access to resources. His paper offered useful guidance to policymakers, civil society organizations, and international stakeholders seeking to contribute to the country's reconstruction and stabilization through equal access to economic resources.

Panel 6: Incorporating Private Sector and Civil Society Efforts in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

This panel discussed the role that the private sector and civil society can play in conciliation and peace. Case studies such as the role of Somali businesswomen in peace and stability were presented.



Moderator:

Abdi Mohamed (Baffo)

Executive Director, Dhaxalreeb

Presentation Title:

The Role of Businesswomen in Somaliland's Peace and Stability

Presenter:

Nasra Dahir Mohamed,

Master's degree in Public Policy, Riphah International University, Pakistan.

Nasra Dahir Mohamed stated that Somaliland people are considered business tycoons. This is because, historically, the coastal regions of Somaliland were centers for trade. She highlighted the role of ordinary Somaliland women in the business sector. She explained the remarkable role of women in creating small businesses and their role in economic recovery and employment opportunities that can promote peace and security. Since women are more vulnerable than men, she argued, they (women) believe that peace is in their interest and in that of other marginalized groups. Therefore, women's businesses symbolize peace and stability in Somaliland and beyond. She noted that scholars often highlight women's business in the gold sector as demonstrating peace, stability, and prosperity, explaining that women's huge contribution to the establishment of Somaliland's bustling markets have contributed to their development. She recommended that small business women be supported with more resources and business skills.



Presenter:

Hassan Abdikadir Hussein,

Researcher and Senior Lecturer, SIMAD University



Presentation Title:

*Building Peace and Reconciliation in Somalia:
The Role for Civil Society Organizations*

Presenter:

Hassan Abdikadir Hussein,

Researcher and Senior Lecturer, SIMAD University

Hassan Abdikadir Hussein's study examines the contributions and outcomes related to the function of civil society organizations in Somalia's rebuilding process. It finds that civil society organizations in Somalia play a crucial role as change agents by leveraging their close connections to communities and comprehensive knowledge of local dynamics. The study reveals that business unions and educational organizations have a positive and significant impact on peacebuilding and reconciliation in Somalia. It also emphasizes the significance of civil society groups in promoting social justice, gender equality, and human rights. It argues that civil society plays a crucial role in conflict transformation by advocating for peaceful methods of resolving complaints, supporting open discussions and mediation, and encouraging the process of reconciliation. However, the civil society faces a number of obstacles hindering its positive role in the society; these include financial constraints, security risks, political demands, and a lack of institutional capacity.

Presentation Title:

The Role of the Private Sector in Supporting the Development of Strong Institutions and peacebuilding in Somalia

Presenter:

Abukar Mohamed Farah,

University of Nairobi



Abukar Mohamed Farah's study examined the role of the private sector in fostering robust institutions and contributing to peacebuilding efforts in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Somalia, arguing that development and peace are two sides of the same coin. He found that Somalia's private sector provides needed services such as education, health, hospitality, poverty reduction, and employment that all contribute to peace and stability.

He argued that it is in the best interest of the private sector and businesses to contribute to peacebuilding to have a safe environment for business. He mentioned the corporate responsibility to give back to the community and contribute to peace and stability. He discussed potential mechanisms and strategies for promoting sociopolitical stability and economic prosperity through collaborations between the private sector, governments, and civil society. His study found that business, if not regulated well, can harm society instead of helping it.

Professor Issa Halane,

Deputy Director General, Somali Chamber of Commerce



Professor Issa Halane linked business activities to both peace and violence. While focusing on the positive impact of businesses on peace and development in Somalia in general, he also hinted at businesses' contribution to violence and destruction but elaborated on the positive side of business that facilitates peace and prosperity. From his perspective, the key aspects of Somali business that contribute to stability and development include offering useful business training and small startup funding that creates hope and future aspirations. He acknowledged that businesses create many employment opportunities that prevent young people from criminal involvement and at the same time give them a sense of purpose, positive direction, life skills, hope, and opportunities for positive contribution to society. He also discussed the role of the Chamber as a bridge between local and international businesses for collaboration and investment in the country. He mentioned that the Chamber also advises the government on the development of policies relevant to business, development, and investment in Somalia context and explained that Somali women actively participate in the business sector.

Duniya Mohamed Arshan,

a prominent representative of civil society, talked briefly about the establishment of civil society after the collapse of the military regime. She elaborated on civil society's significant contribution to peacebuilding, development, and reconciliation giving the example of "Hadraaw's Peace Caravan" or peace journey in 2003. Hadrawi led an impactful peace journey from Kismayo to Burco in which many poets, artists, and other prominent civil society groups participated. She also mentioned the critical role played by the Formal Private Education Networks in Somalia, the educational umbrella known FPENS, in providing educational opportunities for young people, arguing that education has shifted the mindset of young Somalis' as they abandon guns and embrace pens and critical thinking, which instill peace and hope in their minds. However, she argued that without effective government institutions and law enforcement, the impact of civil society cannot sustain peace.



Abdallah Said Waiss,

Head of Corporate Division, Salaam Bank in Djibouti, explained that in Djibouti the government is strong enough to provide security and stability. Therefore the role of the private sector was very much limited to creating employment opportunities, which contributes directly or indirectly to sustaining peace and stability. Regarding Somalia, he argued that business people and civil society have played a major role in stabilizing Somalia by providing social services such as employment opportunities, education, health, electricity, and so on. Therefore, he suggested strengthening public-private partnerships.



Presentation Title:

The Role of Civil Society in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding

Presenter:

Faisal Ahmed Warsame,

prominent civil society activist. Puntland

Faisal Ahmed Warsame defined civil society as an organized social group that does not aim to make a profit. Instead, civil society advocates for human rights and the betterment of the Somali community. He explained how the collapse of the central government of Somalia in 1991 was the catalyst for the emergence of an active civil society that filled the gap of the collapsed government until the formation of the Arta conference. From Faisal's perspective, the Arta reconciliation conference, in which the third Republic of Somalia was established, was the biggest accomplishment of the civil society. Since then, the civil society has actively participated in reconciliation and state-building processes. The civil society engages proactively when crises emerge, encouraging politicians to overcome their differences and to solve their conflicts peacefully and it advocates for peaceful, free, and fair elections and for the orderly transfer of power.



Panel 7: Contribution of Youth and Women to Conciliation and Social Cohesion

This panel discussed the centrality of inclusion of women and youth in conciliation, peacebuilding processes, and economic development. Youth-initiated mechanisms for social cohesion and conciliation were suggested.



Moderator:

Zainab Hassan,
Executive Director, Somali Gender Equity Movement (SGEM)

Keynote Statement

H. E. Mohammed Barre Mohamud,
*Minister of Youth and Sports,
Federal Government of Somalia*



play in reconciliation and peacebuilding. He noted that many peace processes that occurred in the aftermath of the civil war failed because they excluded the youth. Although women were also largely excluded in the peace process, Barre noted that they were at least involved as representatives of the civil society. Excluding the youth was a big mistake, especially when considering that they formed the majority of the armed militias that took part in fighting and looting. The minister called for directing more efforts toward youth as they are an essential part of the success of any nation. He also highlighted his achievements thus far as the minister of youth in raising awareness and campaigning for the inclusion of youth in peacebuilding and reconciliation. He gave an example of his visit to Somalia's central town of Gaalkacyo in the Mudug region, which has been a center for fierce inter-clan conflicts over the past three decades. His aim was to support the youth association of Walaalaha Mudug, which has played an instrumental role in the peace the town has enjoyed in recent years. He noted that this is a clear example of what youth can do in restoring peace and harmony in conflict-ridden societies.

Presentation Title:

Promoting Social Inclusion: A Strategic Approach toward Achieving Durable Conciliation among Somalis

Presenter:

Mohamed Abdurahman,

PhD candidate in Economics and Finance, Sinnar University, Sudan.



Mohamed Abdurahman's study aimed to examine how social inclusion can promote conciliation and cultivate peaceful cultures among Somalis. He conducted semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis to collect data. Various stakeholders, including members of marginalized communities, civil society organizations, academics, the private sector, and government officials were interviewed. His findings show that the protection of minority rights is an essential element of any effort for conciliation and sustainable peace among Somalis. This is because conflict is likely to resume where the root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed. Further, conflict factors that have roots in minority rights violations in Somalia include weak political participation, unequal access to education, job opportunities, and public services. Hence, overcoming the marginalization of minorities would significantly contribute to preventing conflict, promoting sustainable peace, and achieving lasting conciliation within Somali communities. However, he noted that challenges such as political resistance and resource constraints hamper the effective implementation of inclusive policies. He, therefore, urged the federal government and federal member states to work toward strengthening both formal and informal institutions while also promoting greater openness within society. He also called for investment in education, job creation, and social infrastructures in marginalized areas to help alleviate socioeconomic disparities and foster social cohesion. Additionally, policymakers should prioritize the inclusion of marginalized communities in peacebuilding processes, ensuring their voices are heard and respected.

Presentation Title:

Youth Initiatives as Mechanisms for Social Cohesion

Presenter:

Abdullahi Abdulqadir (Raage),

Executive Director of Damal Platform



Abdullahi Abdulqadir (Raage) investigated youth initiatives as mechanisms for social cohesion. He argued that youth, who belong predominantly to the generation born or raised during the civil war era, have created spheres of integration and social cohesion that have been under-studied and under-funded. He provided an overview of the decline in societal trust, explored techniques developed by youth, examined their types and functions, and discussed how these techniques differ from regular youth activities such as sports. In his study, he also delved into how young people have leveraged social media and technological advancements to bridge social divides and create opportunities for meaningful and sustainable cohesion to counteract the effects of civil wars. The study found that the most significant negative social impact of civil wars was a loss of trust within Somali society that forced youth to devise modern mechanisms to mitigate this impact. These mechanisms include arts, sports, book fairs, etc. However, the youth face some significant challenges in implementing such initiatives including financial constraints and the revival of clannism.

Presentation Title:

Strategic and Deliberative Inclusion:

The Case of Somali Women and Youth in Conciliation Processes

Presenter:

Asha Samantar,

Master's Degree in Public International Law, University of Amsterdam



Asha Samantar's study explores the role of youth in peace and conciliation in Somalia. She developed a structured questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The questionnaire covers various aspects, including demographic information, level of involvement in peace conciliation, perceptions of youth in peacebuilding, challenges faced by youth, strategies for promoting peace and reconciliation, youth empowerment and participation, and recommendations for supporting youth in peacebuilding. The findings underscore the significance of youth as active agents of change in promoting peace and reconciliation in conflict-affected regions. She revealed that youth in Somalia perceive themselves as important actors in peacebuilding, believing in their ability to make a positive impact on their communities. However, they face numerous challenges, including limited resources, lack of institutional support, and potential security risks. To overcome these challenges, youth participants employ various strategies, such as interfaith dialogue, education, community engagement, and advocacy. They emphasize the importance of youth empowerment, participation, and the establishment of supportive environments to foster peace conciliation efforts.

PLENARY SESSION 2

High-Level Panel: Conflagrations of Conflicts in the Somali Region: A Clarion Call for Action

Moderator:

Dr. Uweis Abdulahi Ali,

Deputy Director of Research, Heritage Institute for Policy Studies



Dr. Uweis Abdulahi Ali warmly welcomed the panel dignitaries and introduced the topic of the session to the audience. He began by highlighting the multitude of challenges facing Horn of Africa societies, particularly Somalis, such as protracted political and clan conflicts, ideologically driven conflicts influenced by the misconception of Islam practiced by extremist violent groups, and climate change-related problems including recurring droughts, displacement, and fights over resources such as pasture, water wells, and rainfall. At a macro level, he highlighted conflicts attributed to the Horn of Africa states and other external interferences across Somalia. He emphasized the importance of this session in which policymakers present their experiences and insights to come up with context-specific solutions.

PLENARY SESSION 2

*High-Level Panel: Conflagrations of Conflicts in the Somali Region:
A Clarion Call for Action*

H. E. Ahmed Moallim Fiqi

*Minister of Interior, Federal Affairs
and Reconciliation, Somalia*

In response to the question “What do you think are the key steps in resolving Somalia’s conflict and in achieving peace, unity, and social cohesion?” the minister compared the problems resembling Somalia’s condition to someone who has fallen from a high-rise to the ground. His body broken into pieces, he was rushed to an ill-informed traditional doctor, who in turn, did not give the patient proper treatment and repaired each part incorrectly. In that situation, it would be very hard to operate, performing another surgery to fix what had gone wrong in this fragile body. That is similar to Somalia’s state building processes post-conflict.



When the nascent government diagnosed and understood what had gone wrong and then attempted to correct it, some people rejected their suggestions, saying “We want Somalia’s situation to remain as it is now, with no change, or transformation.” This is the position of Somalia’s political actors. They have a phobia of any solution suggested by the central government. So while the mainstream Somali society has recovered and healed from the impacts of civil war, some political elites are yet to recover. As a solution, the minister recommended establishing a consensus political process. The minister also argued that, nowadays, all Somalis are talking about the political processes, such as federalism, the relationship between FGS, and FMS, and so on, which indicate social maturity. Such social dialogue and discourse about the process of state-building is the major aspect of state-building processes. He continued, saying that to hear every citizen’s voice, the current government directed the nation to hold elections, and that is the major mechanism through which every person can have their say. The minister also revealed plans of the MOIFAR to organize a national reconciliation conference to which diverse social representatives will be invited. Finally, the minister emphasized the federal government’s commitment to strengthen law enforcement institutions, such as police and courts.

PLENARY SESSION 2

*High-Level Panel: Conflagrations of Conflicts in the Somali Region:
A Clarion Call for Action*

H. E. Moumin Hassan Barreh,

*Minister of Islamic Affairs
and Endowments, Djibouti*

The minister was asked about his views on the persistence of violent conflicts in Somali society and how to resolve them. In his response, he said he did not have any magic solution. He continued, explaining that when Allah created this universe, He had chosen human beings to rule the world on behalf of Him instead of angels. This means that human beings can make mistakes, learn from their mistakes, and then develop a proper governance. He argued that where two people and more convene they need to agree on a social contract that organizes their affairs. If that is the case for a few people, having a system and social contract is especially dire for nations.

So it is pivotal to have a social contract agreed between different groups and stakeholders representing the wider society. “When you have such a social contract, mechanisms of putting the social contract into action are required,” he noted. The minister described national institutions as the mechanisms to deliver the social contract. He also mentioned the importance of having societal platforms where problems and conflicts that arise can be solved. He underlined the necessity of good intention and the will to solving conflicts before any steps are taken. The minister gave examples from Islamic perspectives in solving problems, saying that Allah teaches us that when the smallest social unit, which is family, gets into conflict, they need mediators representing both sides (the wife’s side and the husband’s side) to find a solution. He quoted the Quran: “And if you fear dissension between the two (husband and wife), send an arbitrator from his family and an arbitrator from her family. If they (both sides) desire reconciliation, Allah will guide them to restore harmony.” The minister continued by saying that conflict and its root causes should be defined first, and then suitable solutions should be developed. He contended that Somalia has gone through different stages of pain and each stage has had its own problems. For instance, he explained that there was a time when tribal mentality was the main cause of the Somali conflict. However, during the Arta reconciliation conference, the Djibouti government invited Somali intellectuals to identify and define the conflict in order to address it properly. Before the Arta conference, solutions used to be sought from warlords, who were marginalized in the Arta conference while civil society actors were empowered.



PLENARY SESSION 2

*High-Level Panel: Conflagrations of Conflicts in the Somali Region:
A Clarion Call for Action*

Hon. Yusuf Hassan,

Member of Parliament, Kenya

The Hon. Yusuf Hassan was asked to share his views on what Somalia could learn from other countries affected by conflicts and how Somali society can develop a culture of peace and a sense of unity. In his response, he recounted that the collapse of Somalia was different from that of other African countries that experienced civil wars and managed to recover. This is because their national institutions did not collapse or disintegrate completely as they did in Somalia. Therefore, during the recovery process,

these institutions constituted the center of the starting point for reconciliation. In contrast, in Somalia, the public services—including the police and the ministries of different institutions and all other institutions—disintegrated. Similarly, Somalia’s civil society institutions were already weak and the culture of togetherness, solidarity, and trust had eroded. This means that what has helped other societies to recover has been destroyed in Somalia. Additionally, intellectuals and people of binding authority fled from the country. The absence of national institutions pushed people to bounce back to the clan system. The other aspect the MP mentioned was that many Somalis from different regions in the Horn of Africa moved to Eastleigh, which he represents in the Kenyan Parliament. He recounted: “I’ve learned from Eastleigh in Nairobi that Somalis do not hate each other, but the sense of sharing among them is quite weak. I met two men who came from the same area where their two sub-clans were involved in fighting with each other. And when I asked them why they don’t make political stability over there similar to their business partnerships here in Eastleigh, they told me that the foundations of social institutions have been destroyed in areas their clans inhabit.” He argued that Eastleigh is booming and bustling because of investments made by Somali refugees who fled from the civil war in Somalia. He continued, saying, “If Somalis’ energy and innovation are directed wisely, they have extraordinary abilities to incubate peace as they incubate business here.” He concluded by saying that what is missing in Somalia is trust, justice, and good governance and therefore having effective public institutions is the key for recovery.



PLENARY SESSION 2

*High-Level Panel: Conflagrations of Conflicts in the Somali Region:
A Clarion Call for Action*

H. E. Mahdi Mohammed Gulaid,
*former Deputy Prime Minister of Somalia,
currently a Member of Parliament, FGS*

The Somali MP was asked to explain how talks between the Federal Government of Somalia and breakaway Somaliland can be improved to develop an effective reconciliation process that helps restore Somalia's unity, harmony, and solidarity. In his response, he argued that historically, Somalis have been between war and drought, emphasizing that our current generation has inherited from our forefathers a sense of stubborn tribes that are independent from each other. Such a legacy, he claimed, has been transferred to our state-building processes. Additionally, he argued that a combination of Somalis' traditional clan culture, Islamic values, and colonial legacies has shaped the state-building process. Regarding relevant solutions,

he highlighted the fledgling government, which is in place, as constituting the starting point for the recovery. He also mentioned the importance of the current constitutional debate, which he said includes, among other things, our identity, who is Somali, the state religion, freedom of expression, our borders, and so on. He continued, saying, "I believe that we should build our state-building process on our federal system and constitution." He also believes that Somalia's federalism should be defined. Similarly, power-sharing between the federal government and federal member states should be explained more and agreed upon. He then listed several achievements that constitute the basis for the state-building process, such as debt relief, lifting the arms embargo, and joining the East African Community as well as the process of Somalia–Somaliland talks. He concluded, saying that the MoU with Somaliland represents an atomic bomb in the Horn of Africa.



PLENARY SESSION 2

*High-Level Panel: Conflagrations of Conflicts in the Somali Region:
A Clarion Call for Action*

Dr. Maryam Qasim,

*former Minister of Social Affairs,
Federal Government of Somalia*

Dr. Maryam Qasim was asked to share her views on what she thinks Somali politicians could do to reach sustainable peace. In her answer, she recalled that exactly today forty years ago, in 1984, she delivered her first baby, a daughter, in Benadir Hospital where well-trained nurses helped doctors. In contrast, she said that now the birth mortality rate in Somalia is the highest globally because of the prolonged violent conflict that destroyed health facilities.

She stated that a lot of pregnant Somalis are dying before they arrive at hospitals because of the checkpoints on their way to the hospital. She compared the civil wars of Somalia and Yemen. She worked in the latter for eight years, particularly in the city of Taiz in Yemen and still visits there from time to time.

She argued that, unlike Somalia, the civil war in Yemen did not destroy public institutions. These institutions are still functioning unlike in Somalia where all institutions were burned to the ground. She explained that in Taiz the schools and other public institutions are still functional. She recognized that there is hunger in Yemen caused by civil war, yet national institutions have not been plundered and the society is still intact. "Islamic values that reconciled warring Arab tribes like Aws and Khazraj of Madina can reconcile and unite Somalis" she said. According to her, it is unfortunate that Somalis have deserted Islamic practices. She concluded by underlining the importance of law enforcement and justice in restoring peace and stability in Somalia.



Hon. Prof. Mohamed Omar Dalha,

*former 1st Deputy Speaker and
Minister of Social Affairs and Rehabilitation*

Professor Mohamed Omar Dalha, who is well known for his deep knowledge of cultural differences that exist among Somalis, was asked to elaborate on the compatibility or incompatibility between Somali culture and peace and whether, culturally, Somalis are able to come up with solutions for their problems. He first underscored the need to revisit and correct the concept that Somalis have one culture. He continued, saying, “Culture is shaped by different environments. Nomads, particularly camel herders have dominated Somali society, culturally and politically. Even our nationhood was associated with the she-camel ‘Maandeeq.’” He claimed that all Somali regional governments eulogize and take pride in their tribal armed commanders and warlords who contributed immensely to the prolonged civil war. More visibly, he pointed out, these regional governments have named their airports after their warlords whom they perceive as heroes.



To resolve Somali problems, he argued that there is need for genuine reconciliation, which has not happened so far. He attributed the lack of genuine reconciliation to a lack of will and action. To endorse his argument, he listed several initiatives that have never been delivered. For instance, there was a disarmament program but it did not work as planned. There was a program to return confiscated and appropriated properties to their owners but it did not materialize. There was an economic recovery program but it was put aside. “The problem is the lack of will and action to implement the abovementioned agreements,” he argued. He continued, saying that the former government of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo appointed a reconciliation committee that included him to negotiate with Somaliland, but no one came back to the committee and asked what had been achieved.

He believes that the problem is the lack of follow-up and lack of trust in these committees named by the Somalia government.

Another example was linked to the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies. He contested that the Heritage Institute has undertaken a lot of useful work for Somalia, such as research and conferences, but he was not sure if the Somalia government is benefiting from their research and evidence-based findings. Similar to Dr. Mariam Qasim, he believes that the solution is to apply Islamic teaching to Somalis’ lives. In his view, Islam is the key factor that united Somalis in the past in taking firm action against inequality. He stated that equality and justice are the key principles and foundations of Islam, as the prophet Mohamed taught that “People are equal like the teeth of a comb.” He argued that instead of promoting equality, Somalis put into the constitution the formula for a 4.5 power-sharing system for clans, which is a racist concept. This is because “4.5” indicates that clans with armed militias are dominant and get more shares of the government positions, while those from non-armed clans are perceived as weak minorities and hence get a smaller share of the government positions. He concluded that justice is a major factor in sustainable and effective governance. He supported his argument with the following verses from the Quran: “... And when you judge between people, to judge with justice...” (Surah an-Nisa, Aayah 57). “... And do not let the hatred of a people, prevent you from being just. Be just...” (Surah al-ma’ida, Aayah 8). Thus, he concluded that if there is no justice, there will be no peace.



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