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**UNITED NATIONS
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FOR AFRICA**

**THE ROLE OF WOMEN
IN THE PEACE PROCESS IN SOMALIA:
PROGRESS AND SETBACKS**

**SULEIMAN AHMED GULAIID,
CONSULTANT.**

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A Note From The Consultant

The African Center for Women (ACW) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) has bestowed on me the honor of writing a short paper about a very difficult subject at this point in time and that topic is on women in the peace process in Somalia. I am sure there are many individuals, especially, Somali ladies, who are more qualified to undertake this important assignment than I do. Having accepted the assignment I was immediately faced by the near impossible task of finding more or less accurate and reliable data on the role and progress made by Somali women in recent decades. No topic is more relevant and yet more tasking than this issue in the present Somali context. However, the constraints must be realistically taken into account. To write a technical paper on this aspect of Somali life to day is not an easy assignment. Firstly, almost all past records were destroyed or removed and thrown away in the ongoing turmoil (a friend of mine told me that he recovered his passport by mere chance from a group of youth who were also carrying other valuable documents belonging to the former immigration department of Somalia). No reliable data can easily be found anywhere in the country. Secondly, free mobility is not easy through most parts of the country for security reasons.

One is, therefore, compelled to rely primarily on personal experience and recollections and on information obtained from individuals, including past decision makers who were intimately involved in Somalia's management (or mismanagement) at the highest level. Much information can also be obtained from the numerous refugees and displaced groups, particularly women who are present all over the Horn of Africa.

Under these circumstances any limitations observed in this paper, and there are many, ought to be judged in the light of these constraints.

1. Executive Summary

1.1 There is a growing realization throughout the world today that development and its many facets cannot be achieved without recognizing the important role of women and accommodating them as full partners in this process. In addition to their primary role as family managers, women invariably contribute in a very significant way to the overall stability and harmony of human society although this crucial aspect is often overlooked. In recognition of the indispensable role of women in today's world and in the interest of ensuring a better future for posterity whose attainment is impossible without the genuine and active involvement of women, the international community has recently taken tangible measures and devised concrete strategies to remedy past errors and to involve women in all phases of the development effort. The numerous regional and international conferences devoted to the cause of women and the action oriented decisions emanating from them were put in motion partly as a result of the historical United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

1.2 The contributions of women and their indispensable stabilizing role in African societies assume even greater dimensions in the light of the unprecedented upheavals and internal conflicts that characterize the continent today. In this regional tragedy a significant portion of the continent's population has either perished in the past and present factional and tribal conflicts or have become displaced lots within the continent. While African men are exclusively the culprits in all of these tragedies, women are primarily responsible for reducing the suffering and misery of the weaker members of the African society. This is a great tribute to African women who are making these life saving contributions from a position of absolute disadvantage resulting from their past exclusion from any decision-making role. Any improvement in Africa's position in this highly competitive world obviously requires that immediate steps be taken in empowering women and eliminating all impediments against their progress.

1.3 Typical of the contribution of African women today is the role being played by women in Somalia's present crisis. While they are the main victim of the internal conflict they are at the same time attempting to keep this society afloat under tremendous risks. Of course, this is a continuation of the centuries old sacrifices by Somali women in maintaining the welfare of their families and communities but the burden and pressure have been tremendously increased by the ongoing tragedy. It must be underlined, however, that the ability of Somali women to effectively contribute to their society in this difficult moment has been partly enhanced by the progress they have made towards their empowerment since 1960. During the first decade of independence the right of girls to education and to employment, necessary tools in empowerment, has been accepted by the Somali society, although the pace of progress was admittedly slow.

1.4 During the past two decades women have taken significant strides in their empowerment. Enrollment in schools has been tremendously boosted by the introduction of universal primary education accompanied by information and publicity campaigns in favor of female education carried out by the government. Special steps were taken in the employment of an increasing number of women in various government institutions. As an additional commitment to the legitimate cause of the empowerment of women, the former regime enacted several far-reaching legislations aimed at eliminating barriers against progress of women.

1.5 Unfortunately this impressive march by women to narrow the gender gap has been fully interrupted by the present turmoil in Somalia at a time when they were laying down the foundations towards becoming a significant voice in national affairs, including a prominent role in enhancing social stability. Instead, they and their children have become the main victims of this senseless calamity. In spite of this unwanted burden, however, Somali women are playing an active role in mitigating the suffering of their society and have made many attempts to influence the events there, with varying degree of success.

1.6 However, it is necessary to recognize that the cause of women in that country can be put back on track only and only if peace and statehood are restored in Somalia. Unless this is achieved women and their dependents will remain the main victims of a man-made catastrophe they had no role whatsoever in its ignition. The efforts of the international community to achieve this end has not so far succeeded for a number of reasons but it is incumbent on the world community not to abandon Somalia, and particularly its brave women and their unfortunate children, at this difficult moment. This requires that, among other approaches, a comprehensive peace plan accommodating all social categories, including women and encompassing all geographical regions (most of which are relatively peaceful) be devised and implemented with a significant input by local populations and their traditional leaders. The support of women, youth, intellectuals and traditional leaders must be actively sought to counter the negative role played by armed hooligans and factional militia's. A local campaign for peace, assistance to police units, disarming hooligans and a partnership between the local population and the international community will enhance the chances of peace. Externally imposed solutions seldom work in such settings.

2- The General Context

2.1 The role of women in contemporary world society is undeniably one of the most relevant issues that recurrently appeared in the agendas of regional and international fora during recent decades. The world community has finally recognized the fact that no nation can hope to attain balanced development including internal stability without properly accommodating and addressing the legitimate interests and concerns of women who constitute nearly half of mankind today. In recognition of this hard fact numerous conferences were held at the regional and international levels and governments were persuaded to commit themselves to implement the resolutions and declarations emanating from those gatherings. In this regard, much progress has been made at the world scene in formulating the necessary legal instruments and policy decisions as well as the strategies for their implementation. In particular, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) constitutes an important watershed in the international effort to narrow and eventually close the gender gap. As an instrument of international Law it commits member States of the United Nations to enact the necessary legislations and formulate the required strategies for implementing the articles endorsed in the Convention. This Convention was a landmark in the struggle of the world's women to highlight the rampant discrimination, official and otherwise, that was practiced against them throughout the world in various proportions. The United Nations Decade for Women and the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies For the Advancement of Women, as well as numerous other gatherings, were all aimed at realizing the primary objective of improving the position of women as an indispensable group in improving and maintaining human civilization.

2.2 This issue assumes more important dimensions in the African continent where two contradictory trends are simultaneously at play. Firstly, after three decades of post colonial governance, most African countries are beginning to assess the extent of and the reasons for their failure in achieving the aspirations of their citizens and for their marginalization in the international scene. The need for this reassessment is based on the growing realization that nothing short of a radical and immediate change in the systems that led to such a failure, including the autocratic modes of conducting national affairs, can save the continent. Secondly, the manner of reassessing progress (or lack of it) and devising strategies for the necessary changes is having serious implications throughout the continent. In some countries the task of charting new strategies has come about peacefully, though not without pains. For many of them, however, violence has become the only way to register failure and to attempt at devising alternative routes of achieving national ends; the ensuing upheavals are threatening the statehood of more than half a dozen African countries. Thus, the desire of African nations to devise and implement more effective modalities for development and the reluctance of certain segments,

particularly the ruling elements, to accept the need for and the legitimacy as well as the inevitability of this changes has plunged the continent into a violent carnage seldom witnessed in other continents during their transitional processes. Today, the internal conflicts and civil strife in abroad segment of Africa have destroyed most of the achievements of recent decades, caused millions of the continents citizens to perish or become displaced and threatens to destroy the social fabric of Africa.

2.3 Under these circumstances, it is extremely important to recognize and highlight the fact that while women (and their children) are generally the main victims in Africa's trouble spots, they are at the same time responsible for preventing many situations from developing into self-inflicted holocausts at the grassroots. While men are invariably engaged in factional, clan and tribal wars women in today's Africa are the main bread winners and care takers for most of the dependents, including children and the aged. In these disaster situations they continuously attempt, often against overwhelming odds, to take the vulnerable into safe places through risky and long journeys. In a real sense Africa's surviving children owe more for this to their mothers than to their fathers. This contribution alone makes the African women one of the most crucial pillars in the peace process in Africa's turbulent transition. A relevant example is the case of Somali women: the progress they have made in recent decades, their suffering in the present turmoil and their immense contributions to the survival of the Somali nation in its tragic hour. Only those who are familiar with the present Somali crisis can fully appreciate the role of women in salvaging whatever is left of the Somali society, a sharp contrast between the destructive acts of men and the constructive roles of women in conflict situations.

✓ 2.4 Finally, the concept of peace implying an overall human harmony based on social, economic and political justice and not merely the absence of war is followed here. In this scenario women's partnership is a necessary condition and in order to fulfill this crucial role they must equip and empower themselves. It only logically follows, then, that for women to empower themselves they must have free and full access to all the educational and employment opportunities that are available to their male partners. This is the main reason that progress in education and employment made by Somali women in recent decades is emphasized in the following pages.

3. An Overview of the Role of Women in Somali Society

3.1 Women play a very important role in the overall management of the Somali family, a role more prominent than in many other Moslem societies. While their generally accepted scope of operation is family-centered, they are involved in numerous activities performed or executed outside the home. In nomadic settings women normally fetch water, often from distant sources, oversee the grazing of livestock and are fully responsible for the making and maintenance of the family house and all household items without much assistance from their male partners. When these chores and their primary role as mothers and teachers of children are taken into full account the pressure and burden on nomadic women is admittedly heavy compared to those on men.

3.2 In more sedentary communities where cultivation of crops is involved, women play an equally prominent role in the family economy and livelihood. They are key participants in the production mechanism from the first to the final phase and in the eventual management of the harvest or output. Of course, this prominent role of rural women in the day-to-day management of the Somali family (in and outside the home) is partly dictated by environmental factors, and most Somalis see no contradiction between this and the Islamic Shariat. This harmony-as perceived by the Somali society-between the active involvement of women in community affairs and religious interpretations partly accounts for the pride and freedom of Somali women in both rural and urban settings.

3.3 In urban communities their role assumes even more prominence. In addition to their role as primary family managers, they are often key bread winners for the family equal and, in some cases, more important than men. They are involved in the trade of merchandise in markets throughout Somalia and in recent decades in more sophisticated small businesses that not only enhance family welfare but substantially increase their prestige and empowerment. Unfortunately, however, this vital contribution of women within the Somali community is not appropriately reflected in the overall decision making process. That still remains predominantly the domain of men.

4. The Status of Women During the First Decade of Independence

4.1 Since independence in 1960 much progress has been made in recognizing the vital role of women in the overall development effort in Somalia and steps were taken to upgrade their status and position. This process started with the introduction of girls education programs in schools throughout the country soon after independence including rural areas; it was obviously the most logical place to start since there were very few educated women in the country as a whole and upgrading the position of women in the government systems required that as a matter of policy girls had to have access to educational opportunities on equal footing with boys. The pace of enrolling girls in schools was admittedly slow during the first decade of independence mainly because most parents, while generally aware of the value of education for their children, could not easily overcome the age-old practice of assigning girls to traditional, mainly home-centered,

activities and modifying this cultural limitation took sometime, especially in rural areas. It was only after the first groups of girls completed their education and joined government employment with the associated prestige as wage earners that parents fully realized the value of girls' education. While this initial experience was similar to that in most other African countries, it was particularly significant here where women contributed heavily to community progress but received proportionately less benefit from the results of their efforts and sweat.

5. The Progress And Empowerment of Women After 1969

5.1 The change of government in 1969 (by means of a coup) constituted an important landmark in improving the status of women in the overall social, political and economic context of Somalia. Soon after assuming power, the socialist oriented military regime enacted a number of far-reaching legislations, most of them favorable to the aspirations of women. These included the introduction of universal and "compulsory" primary education (up to the eighth grade) which legally required all parents in both urban and rural areas to enroll their school age children, boys and girls alike, in the educational system. The legislation particularly emphasized the under-privileged status of girls with respect to education and, consequently, in employment. In order to implement this crucial legislation the government embarked on extensive information and publicity programs promoting universal education for children in general and for girls in particular. This was a historical milestone in tracing the progress and the empowerment of women in Somalia. At about the same time, the government decreed that the Somali language to be written in the Latin script thus closing a two decade old controversy and immediately embarked on a series of adult literacy programs-in Somali-using the new script. It is interesting to note that in general women took this step more seriously than men and their literacy rate grew faster accordingly, opening for them additional routes of joining government and private employment.

5.2 These successive legislation's had an overflow effect beyond education and pioneered what many people considered at that time a form of "cultural revolution" in which women were the main winners.

5.3 At the peak of this reform period, the government introduced the famous "Family Law" decree of 1974 which attempted to radically change the legal foundations of the Somali family. The authorities openly declared that past practices in matters relating to marriage, divorce and inheritance in Somali courts heavily favored men and put women under additional disadvantages. The decree, they argued, was aimed at remedying this imbalance. Among other things it stipulated that male and female members of a family should receive equal shares when apportioning inheritance; it also placed additional and strict conditions on men's polygamy, and made divorce by men more difficult. Immediately after its introduction, this law met with serious opposition from religious leaders and a large segment of the traditional community leaders who considered it as an open challenge to fundamental Islamic laws. The government made tremendous efforts

for its implementation inspite of the strong oppositions and executed ten Sheiks in the process. It is interesting to note that a large number of traditional minded women were not also comfortable with this law as they thought, while the aim was unquestionably to raise the status of women, it introduced more controversies into otherwise stable shariat-based family relationships that worked successfully and harmoniously in the past. More progressive and educated women, on the other hand, indicated that while a reform of this nature was desirable, the strategy adopted for its implementation and particularly the timing was ill-conceived. Instead, they argued, the gains and progress already registered by women particularly in education and employment-key elements in their empowerment-should have been further consolidated and gradually extended to other areas. In addition to opposition on religious grounds, some observers of that period believe, ~~that~~ the law was partly associated with a number of unpopular and decidedly Marxist steps taken by Siyad Barre's regime at approximately the same time, including the nationalization of private institutions and the establishment of state monopolies in the marketing of locally produced crops that set low prices for most grains thus discouraging farmers. The most important legislation of this period was, in the opinion of many, the victim of poor strategy and a serious lack of awareness to Moslem sensitivities, arguing that to the authors of this particular law, quick popularity among women was more attractive than genuine step by step reform that would have furthered the cause of women more effectively in the long run.

5.4 In spite of this setback, the most important gains by women were registered during this period. Because of the government's strong commitment towards eliminating the wide disparity between men and women in almost all walks of life and due to the effectiveness of the information campaigns embarked upon in urban and rural areas alike, most communities expanded their educational and training facilities at a pace unprecedented in many African countries facing similar circumstances. A notable consequence of this rapid expansion of education was a marked increase in the enrollment of girls at all levels that in certain places outstripped that of boys. In 1979, for example, girls constituted on the average almost 38% of the elementary school population, nearly 28% of secondary enrollment and about 19% of the enrollment in institutions of higher learning. ¹ This did not include enrollment in health and secretarial training establishments where girls far out numbered boys.

5.5 These educational gains for women were crucial in at least two ways. Firstly, education was the most reliable gateway in women's entry into employment and, thus, the means to achieve parity with men in earning opportunities and a key to their empowerment. Secondly, it indicated popular acceptance, approval and sponsorship of the right of women to acquire the skills and education that were essential for improving their status, empowerment and social uplift. This silent and relatively rapid process in the improvement of women's position involved no controversies or ideological disputes and became a permanent component of the overall Somali context.

¹ Educational Statistics in Somalia, Ministry of Education, Moqadishu, 1980.

5.6 The cumulative effects of these encouraging developments was a rapid increase in the number of women in government institutions including a significant rise in those at decision making levels. While real statistics cannot be cited as most records were destroyed following the breakdown of the Somali state, sources knowledgeable about this period confirm that all government ministries and establishments had at least one or more female as head of important units, including departments and divisions. There was a simultaneous increase in the number of women professionals-especially in health and education - and a significant rise in the number of women in business and commerce. Similar improvements were registered in the position of women in the armed forces where there was a substantial number of women officers (upto the rank of colonel) in the army, the police and the custodial ²⁴¹troops (the prison regiments). Women served as counselors, secretaries and ambassadors (there was one ambassador and two charge-de-affairs in 1982) in the diplomatic services. Women parliamentarians were elected (7 out of 73 in 1984) and Vice-ministers (two in 1982) and several directors-general. These gains led to the formation of women groups and organizations of non-political nature not only to promote women's interests and welfare but to be effective participants in the national decision-making process.

5.7 It must be pointed ^{out}, however, that inspite of these significant gains women still lagged far behind men and were not in a position to influence decisively the overall direction of national affairs, including issues relating to development, peace and stability; these were still men's monopoly. But this was an impressive beginning that was fully in line with the generally agreed upon sequence and priorities in achieving equality or at least reducing the gender gap in a developing society. In Somalia these priorities included changing popular attitudes without undue coercion in the differential treatment of men and women with respect to education and training, employment, compensation and, eventually, in the decision-making process. It is not realistic to expect women will significantly influence the course and destiny of African societies without first assisting them to equip themselves with the necessary skills, power and prestige that will make them effective and equal partners in nation-building and in the enhancement of peace and stability in their respective countries.

6. Compliance with and implementations of Regional and International Conventions on Women

6.1 The legislative reforms and the policy decisions made by the Somali government in furthering women's cause and the practical steps taken in implementing these measures were primarily aimed at rapid and balanced development and at redressing the injustices committed (though unintentionally) against half of the country's citizens; it was also a firm recognition that no effective development would be possible without the full participation of women in all phases of nation-building under a peaceful and stable environment.

6.2 But they were also aimed at complying with and implementing the relevant regional and international conventions on improving the position and status of women in the African and world societies. Somalia participated in most of these conventions and conferences and ratified the instruments that emanated from them and adopted the relevant strategies in their implementations. These include the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), the Lagos Plan Action and the Final Act of Lagos (1980); the Kilimanjaro Program of Action on Population and Self-reliant Development (1984), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of women (1985) the Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development: The Role of Women in Africa in the 1990s (1989), and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Covenants. All the declarations emanating from these Conventions and conferences stress that for women to be effective contributors to a peaceful society, they have to be empowered first, and the most potent tools of this empowerment lies in the provision of equal educational and employment opportunities for girls and boys on equal basis supported by legal provisions and safeguards against discriminatory practices in other sectors.

6.3 The impressive progress made by women in Somalia and their march towards becoming effective messengers of peace was put to a tragic halt following the increasingly violent civil strife towards the last part of the eighties and the eventual break down of law and order after the collapse of the Somali state in January, 1991.

7. The Beginning and Impact of The Civil War 1978-1990

7.1 Since mid 1978 Somalia has never experienced real peace as faction after another took up arms against the military regime of Siyad Barre for one reason or the other. The excesses of the regime was a common denominator that was often cited-with some validity-by most clan based factions, and this marked the beginning of the slide towards the final collapse of the Somali state. There were no strong, broadly-based political or professional organizations, men or women, to transcend the narrow clan tendencies that partly motivated those factions or to oppose the regime on grounds of principle as a substitute for clan rebellions.

7.2 From this period and henceforth the regime's main pre-occupation centered on its own survival and security matters received priority over development issues. The rebellion first started in the Southern regions but gradually spread to the Northern regions and eventually became a national uprising. Under these circumstances, the first casualties-as in all similar situations-were generally the vulnerable groups, especially women.

7.3 The government, weakened by mounting security problems, almost abandoned its commitment to social progress and the protection of the under-privileged and, as expected, most of the scarce resources were diverted to military and security purposes. This was accompanied by upsurge in clan chauvinism and violence in a society whose social fabric is heavily influenced by clan values. This was followed by government purges

that primarily affected members and individuals belonging to target clans at all levels of government institutions regardless of whether or not they were involved in anti-government activities. In this unfortunate scenario women as individuals and as vital family managers were among the biggest losers. While men engaged in armed activities against the regime, women alarmed by the rapidly deteriorating situation, sought safe sanctuaries for their children and the elderly. It was a situation in which most women in Somalia were loath to face but over which they had little control. Because of their weak position further undermined by clan polarization, they were not in a position to influence significantly the attitudes and actions of the mutually antagonistic sides to resort to peaceful solution of their differences and were, like most civilians outside government and factional elements, passive observers in the unfolding tragedy that unfortunately directly and negatively affected their destiny and survival as well as those of their dependents.

7.4 This rapid deterioration in the security situation that was a prelude to the breakdown of the Somali state was, among other things, a tragic experience that effectively halted women's progress and almost wiped out the impressive achievements they have made during the preceding decade and a half. These unfortunate events interrupted their march towards becoming an organized force that could eventually influence national trends including effective peace making roles. This was particularly regrettable since women in general were affected or driven less by clan or racial chauvinism and were regarded in that context as "teachers of peace". On the whole, then, women as a group were opposed to the armed confrontations that were on the rise even when those involved their respective clans. On several occasions there were demonstrations organized by women groups deploring the escalating armed confrontations (permitted only because it coincided with the regime's interest). These events clearly indicate that in developing countries women gain most in peaceful environments and suffer most in conflict situations more than men.

7.5 As the civil war escalated, violence against women increased with little protection from the weakened security forces, especially in the capital. In the mid and late eighties gangs regularly harassed women in Mogadishu and snatched their possessions, particularly cash and jewellery at day time. Very few women could dare to walk in most streets after sunset, a very unfortunate turn of fortune for a city that was once billed as the most peaceful capital in Africa where women could walk in the streets unescorted after midnight. As early as 1986 the signs of a larger disaster in the making were obvious to close observers and some shrewd businessmen started selling their properties. Therefore, the big crash after 1990 was not really a surprise but very few thought that the ensuing scenario would be so damaging.

8. The Collapse of the Somali State And its Consequences for Women

8.1 The breakdown of law and order in January 1991 and the total extinction of statehood in Somalia marked the beginning of a period of unprecedented suffering for the Somali people, particularly for women and their children. In most of the urban centers in

the Southern regions and in several places in the north lawlessness and civil strife forced hundreds of thousands from their homes. The majority were women and children as a large number of men continued to engage in the civil war for personal or clan reasons.

8.2 No reliable statistics are available but the casualties of women, children and other unarmed civilians in this tragic episode was heavy by all estimates. In addition to deaths resulting from deliberate acts of mass killing for clan or other reasons, thousands have perished through accidents, starvation and diseases while they were on the run for their lives and those of their dependents. For women and their dependents in particular this painful experience marked a sad interruption in their march towards becoming an effective force to influence events in Somalia especially in the peace process and became the main victims of a senseless war they had no hand in its making. Instead, they and their children have either become displaced within their own country or refugees around the world desperately looking for a second home. The accumulated suffering, frustration, and resentment of Somali women resulting from this ~~Euagmire~~ was reportedly well expressed in an incident in Addis Ababa where an elderly Somali male noticed a scantily dressed Somali girl going into a dance hall and advised her to dress more decently in line with Somali values. Furiously, the girl looked at the man and his three male companions and replied, "What values do you possess. We were ladies in our own homes. You men evicted us by artillery shells. You have really no right whatsoever to advise me here." People at the scene including the man and his companions were reported to be shocked by the ~~ver~~similitude of the girl's statement and with no word simply walked. They obviously all thought the girl concerned had a point for which no answer was available.

8.3 The period from January 1991 to September 1992 witnessed the largest exodus from Mogadishu and several other urban centers in the Southern regions as the collapse of state machinery was followed by a period of total anarchy, mass killings, robbery and insecurity. The largest number of deaths in Somalia was during this period, mainly among male combatants belonging to warring factions but also including significant numbers of innocent, unarmed civilians. Here, also, women and children suffered tremendously in the hands of unruly armed elements.

8.4 The most destructive acts of the civil war in the Southern parts of the country took place between November 1991 and early December 1992 just before the arrival of the American forces. While violence, killing, and looting characterized many parts of the country, Mogadishu, the capital, saw a full scale fighting where heavy weapons were used by thousands of militia of mainly rural origin supporting one or the other of the two principal contenders in the capital, General Mohammed Farah Aideed and Ali Mahdi Mohamed. This led to further displacement of civilians and the total or partial destruction of vast areas of the city including residential sections. Although no one was spared from this calamity, women, children and other unarmed civilians sustained the highest degree of suffering mainly as a result of the indiscriminate shelling. In an interview by the consultant in Jiggiga, Ethiopia, a refugee lady by the name Waris Ali expressed the sad state of affairs in the capital during this period. Declaring that four of her family members lost their lives

there, she said "This was an example of the survival of the fittest, and in this case fitness depended to a large extent the type of weapons one possessed. Those of us who were not armed or not protected by armed relatives were simply considered as insects; it was a sad experience." This period was also characterized by mass starvation, epidemics and untold suffering.

9. The International Intervention And The Attempts at Resolving the Somali Crisis

9.1 It was in reaction to this grave human tragedy that the international community responded magnanimously by mobilizing substantial resources and peace keeping forces aimed primarily at making the delivery and distribution of donated assistance possible. In this regard it must be said that this aspect of international assistance was crucial and generally successful in attaining its immediate objectives. Without this substantial international intervention the world could have witnessed a human tragedy of unprecedented proportions.

9.2 Since December 1992, the world community has invested a lot of resources (both material and manpower) in Somalia in a genuine spirit of international co-operation. While this international goodwill has tremendously reduced the suffering of the Somali people-especially women, the poor and the unarmed civilians-the situation remains today as explosive as in 1992. The relief program was a successful operation and all those who contributed, UN. organizations, donors, NGOS and individuals, must be commended for this; limitations observed in its implementation ought to be considered in the light of the difficult circumstances obtaining in the country at the time of intervention. Most Somalis in the areas of operation express a high degree of gratitude for the international community, particularly for the aid workers who had to work under difficult circumstances, sometimes beyond the call of duty.

9.3 Unfortunately, attempts at resolving the political crisis and arresting the precarious security situation existing in the country on a long-term basis was admittedly a failure for complex reasons that are not obvious to the casual observer. This is specially difficult to understand when one recalls that the United Nations has amassed close to 30,000 armed peace keepers at the beginning of the intervention not only to safeguard the passage of relief goods but presumably to help in the restoration of law and order throughout the country. To day, almost one half years after the international intervention, there is increasing evidence that the violence, looting, lawlessness and the factional fighting are re-emerging once again on a larger scale at a time when the interest of the international community in Somalia has markedly decreased.

9.4 In all fairness failure to arrive at a durable solution to the Somali problem rests fully on the shoulders of the Somalis, particularly the multitude faction leaders and their followers who are at the core of the problem. Since June 1991 until to-day they have met at numerous formal gatherings in Djibouti, Addis Ababa, Nairobi and Cairo not to mention those held at secret venues (mainly for plotting against one another) inside the country.

They have also signed under the auspices of the UN and neighbouring governments many declarations and agreements committing themselves to:

- a. Unconditional and binding cease-fire in all parts of the country under the control or influence of the warring factions;
- b. Cessation of hostile propaganda against one another and the creation of an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation and peace;
- c. Encampment and subsequently disarming faction militias and other armed elements;
- d. Providing safe passage to humanitarian assistance aimed at affected areas;
- e. The formation of an interim body (transitional administration) to manage the affairs of the country until the situation becomes normal to make elections possible.

9.5 However, none of the measures agreed upon have ever been implemented in full. The main conclusion is that most Somali faction leaders were not, in the first place, sincere about the commitments they have entered into and were only drawn into the affair for fear of being singled out as the scapegoat. While unconditional cease-fire was unanimously agreed upon in all those meetings, armed confrontations were generally the pattern as soon as those faction leaders returned to their home bases. This unwillingness on the part of the Somalis to live up to their commitments for their own interest is one of the main reasons for the waning interest of the international community in the continuing Somali crisis. In the opinion of many Somalis, there are a number of reasons that account for this failure. Firstly, most faction leaders are primarily seeking personal power instead of being seriously dedicated to the solution of the national tragedy and this personal motive is portrayed to their clan followers as a mission on their behalf. This is a primitive and dangerous emotive chord that works effectively in such situations. Secondly, these warlords have partly lost control over some of their heavily armed elements who were originally mobilized by these same faction leaders on the promise of higher status, power and a better way of life. Most of the present militias are from rural origin occupying spacious residences whose legitimate owners are now refugees or displaced elsewhere. Thirdly, there is a total absence, at least presently, of leaders with national platforms that transcend narrow clan boundaries. Finally, most of the educated man-power and influential urban dwellers have either left the capital or have been pushed to the back seat by the gun wielding gangs whose main motive is to live by the day and who have no idea about the demands of nationhood. This is a complex situation where the requirements of modern statehood and the influence of traditional culture are in conflict with each other and the key players are not so far able or willing to face the dilemma realistically.

9.6 Next to the local leaders, members of the international community who have spent considerable resources to contain and resolve this tragedy cannot escape to bear part of the blame. The biggest obstacle against stability at the moment is the presence of arms in the hands of irresponsible gangs throughout the country with little discipline or social awareness. High hopes were put by most Somalis at the beginning the United Nations

intervention that disarming these elements would be carried out parallel with the relief operation. In fact, most factions were reported to be so awed by the magnitude of the international force that they were ready to surrender their weapons on serious instructions. This was also the wish of the civilian population in Somalia and, many thought, the key to a solution of the continuing dilemma. It was a missed opportunity by the international forces who were fully capable of implementing the operation without much cost. In retrospect one can only postulate that there were many players in this unfortunate game with cross purposes.

9.7 Another error by the international forces and the UN was obviously their concentration on military confrontation in Mogadishu. Of course, the capital as the chief port, was significant but it was well known at that time Mogadishu was a bone of contention between two groups of the same clan. However important the capital might have been it did not justify the attention it was given and the huge resources that were wasted in the process. It was also well known that by that time most of the residents of Mogadishu who belonged to other clans have sought sanctuary in those regions where their clans resided and these regions were relatively peaceful compared to Mogadishu and its surroundings. More attention should have been given to those regions in terms of rehabilitation and assistance to local community leaders and authorities in an effort to consolidate the fragile stability there as an incentive to encourage local populations to continue the trend. It appears that many expatriates mistook Mogadishu for Somalia, a great error of judgment that made an otherwise honest international effort a total failure. Also strengthening the infrastructure and assisting in the improvement of the conditions of life in the rest of Somali where the majority of the population lived might have drawn many trouble makers back to their home villages.

9.8 Even in Mogadishu, many Somalis and aid workers feel, citing concrete evidence, that the resources donated by the international community have not actually been put to proper use as most of them were used for providing comfortable logistics for the expatriate elements in the city, a practice that created a lot of resentment among Somalis.

9.9 In summary initial attempts at restoring peace and stability in Somalia was undermined by concentrating on narrow military ends on specific targets in the capital, and by lack of commitment by Somali groups. Many volunteer aid workers have voiced concern over this trend from the start but unfortunately could not influence remote control decision-making. Should the United Nations and contributing donors decide to give this effort another chance, and there is a case for this noble mission, it is essential that critical review be made regarding past strategies including failures and a more realistic macro approach be adopted. In this aspect Mogadishu should no longer be a trap for the Somali people and the international community.

10. The Peace Making Role of Women in the Present Somali Crisis

10.1 The positive influence of women in minimizing the suffering of the Somali society in the present tragedy is far-reaching although this noble contribution is often overshadowed by the theatrical maneuvers by male players in this crisis. Less publicity is given to the fact that while male dominated factions are invariably engaged in activities that in practice maximize the suffering of the civilian population, women are struggling to ensure, often against overwhelming odds, the survival of the weaker segments of this society. They are forced to stay long hours away from homes in risky situations to buy and sell whatever can contribute to the survival of the dependents at home (chat, cigarettes, water, charcoal etc.). In most of the crisis centers in Somalia today women are the chief bread winners. In a real sense Somalia's surviving children owe more for this to their mothers than to their fathers and this act alone makes women the central pillars in the peace process in the country. While Somalia's tragedy is exclusively created by men in the form of clan factions, women at various times during this crisis have rallied to the cause of peace and reconciliation and averted further destruction's. Some of these include:

A. Women were not officially invited even by the UN during the numerous peace conferences on Somalia that started in 1991, at least not officially. But in all of those conferences women have forced themselves to have a say in the process and to be heard. Their aim was to force feuding factions into making concessions for restoring peace in Somalia. They often recited moving nationalist songs and poetry that work effectively in Somali setting; these introduced an element of emotion and seriousness into those situations, often moved all Somali and non Somali participants alike and took the steam off tense situations. A particularly moving instance was the performance of the large women squadrons who made their presence felt during the conference on Somalia in Addis Ababa on March 1993; they openly exerted so much pressure on the delegates through a combination of lobbying, songs and even the threat of hunger strikes. Almost all of the faction leaders were forced to meet individually with women groups and partly as a result modified their non-conciliatory stands. This was an effective performance by women for the cause of peace in Somalia. Of course, they were not in a position to influence fully the implementation of the agreements made, but they at least played a significant role in forcing men to agree on certain preliminary issues as an initial step to break the impasse.

B. In 1993 there was a big confrontation between two major groups in Hargeisa city in northern Somalia in which both sides have amassed considerable weaponry to drive the other out of the city. There was no third faction ready to intervene or mediate between them and the situation looked so potentially disastrous that many started to pack up their belongings intending to seek refuge for themselves and their dependents who have just returned from exile elsewhere. To many people the situation looked extremely desperate and beyond remedy. Fortunately, at that moment, thousands of women many of

them carrying babies at other backs swarmed into the area separating the conflicting factions singing emotional slogans and cries for peace. Some of them even removed their head scarves, a desperate act for Somali women who only do so when wailing at disastrous situations. This massive emotional intervention carried the day and the potential combatants were so moved and overwhelmed by these messengers of peace that they quietly, and obviously saddened, returned to their locations. Today all people in northern Somalia recognize that this act by women peace makers averted a major disaster and was actually a turning point in the security situation of the area. No major confrontation of that size was experienced there since then; apparently this acted as a lasting preventive measure as well. From that time on-wards women groups, having tasted a measure of success, organized themselves in urban centers in northern Somalia to demonstrate against potential moves involving factional confrontations.

C. During the well-known Borama conference of the clans of northern Somalia (January to May 1993) women, while not actually represented in the official roster of delegates, have often made their way into the conference hall with speeches, songs and poetry that had marked effects on the feelings of the delegates (traditional and religious leaders and senior politicians) and acted as additional reinforcements to a more or less constructive gathering. Equally important, women groups lobbied with individuals and blocks of delegations in the cause of peace and reconciliation, moves that further enhanced the success of the most important conference held in northern Somalia to-date.

D. Since the beginning of armed hostilities between the two major factions in Mogadishu in October 1991 the city was divided by a so-called "green line" which put a limit on the movement of the civilian population. No individuals or groups belonging to one clan could cross this line to the other side without taking the risk of being eliminated or at least being subjected to a form of harassment and robbery. In order to break this barrier women groups started, amid active hostilities, to make contacts with one another and as an initial step a group of brave women belonging (in terms of clan kinship) to both factions jointly marched across the "green line" on the 8th of March 1993, the International Women's Day, protesting the artificial division in an otherwise homogeneous society. Considering the circumstances obtaining at that moment this was an extremely brave act on behalf of peace by Somali women most of whose members were not properly organized or educated but who were moved by the unnecessary suffering of their people in the hands of armed groups who did not care and who were particularly motivated by narrow personal or clan power interests. This pioneering effort made some impact but after the march the situation did not significantly change as the hostilities continued. On the same anniversary (8/3/1994) the women groups, this time assisted by the decrease of the hostilities due to the intervention of the international force, have organized a similar march protesting against the same target, the "green line" dividing the city. The march was better organized and the number of women groups was bigger. The women crossed to both sides of the "line" hand in hand with one another and were eventually joined by a

large number of men. This time it was successful and from March 8th this year there is no "green line" in Mogadishu, thanks mainly to this noble mission on behalf of peace in Somalia.

E. Women through similar moves contributed significantly to the success of the Kismayo (Southern Somalia) talks in which hostilities between warring clans have been resolved, at least temporarily. This happened once in 193 and twice during the current year. In this mission local women were joined by a well organized group from Mogadishu. In addition to the pressure they exerted on the delegates for the cause of peace, the women groups belonging to both sides of the contending ^{tribes} ~~groups~~, demonstrated in practical terms acts of unity and sisterhood that could be a model for men.

11. Conclusion

11.1 The role of women in the peace process around the world is an area of contemporary relevance and there is a growing realization that no nation can and hope to achieve balanced development and social stability without properly accommodating and addressing the interest of women.

11.2 It is regrettable, however, that the world society has failed to adequately address the legitimate interests and concerns of nearly half of their population. This is particularly important in the African continent where the attempts to assess the extent and reasons for the failures of past decades and the desire to devise alternative strategies is being accompanied in many countries by internal violence and carnage seldom witnessed in other continents during their transitional processes.

11.3 Somalia is one of the countries that failed to make this transition peacefully and the world is witnessing today a crisis of tragic proportions in that country. It is ironic to note that during the two decades preceding its collapse, Somalia registered one of the most impressive gains in narrowing the gender gap in all areas of endeavors and women were well on their way to become a recognized and influential force in that society. In particular, the gains made in education, employment and the gradual but steady rise of women to decision-making roles and their growing prestige were remarkable. Unfortunately these were almost wiped out in the turmoil that engulfed the whole country.

11.4 The conclusion here is that women are more directly affected by the issues of peace and war more than any other group as exemplified in the unfolding Somali crisis. Women live and operate in a context and their welfare is obviously dependent on the success or failure registered in this overall context. It is, therefore, futile to hope for meaningful progress and empowerment for women in Somalia unless and until the whole Somali society puts itself on the right track once again. The international community can and should help in this difficult process, but it is primarily the responsibility of Somalis, men and women alike, to take the lead in putting their houses in order; no one else will do this for them. While attempts at reconciliation between warring male actions is essential as no effective peace can be re-established without this, it must be recognized that whatever is left of Somalia today owes largely to the indomitable spirit of its women. In most areas they remain the bread winners for weaker dependents, and in trouble spots they are generally responsible for taking them to wherever they feel is safe often facing tremendous risks. Under these circumstances, it is important to recognize this role of women without which the situation would have been more disastrous. This and their ceaseless efforts, hardly visible to the outside world, to influence internal situations in the interest of peace is remarkable.

11.5 Present efforts to help Somalia must, therefore, fully recognize these contributions by Somali women and extend more assistance than has so far been given; Somali women need a lot of encouragement and support in their worst hour.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 Until now efforts at restoring full peace and stability in all Somalia was less than successful for a number of reasons. Chief among them is the inability and unwillingness on the part of faction leaders to make the necessary concessions and flexibility that are essential ingredients in any lasting reconciliation and their concentration on narrow clan (as opposed to national) ends. This is partly reinforced by the apparent lack (not probably Intentional) of a comprehensive and coherent peace and rehabilitation policy by the United Nations. Rather, narrow military objectives have received top priority from most participants in this international effort. The resulting lack of progress led key members of the international community- with some justifications - to a rapid and dangerous loss of interest in the Somali crisis. It is increasingly becoming difficulties to convince the international community to continue providing resources to an operation in which no tangible results have so far been recorded with respect to lasting peace.

12.2 At the same time, it must be kept in mind that Somalia's problems will not disappear by the abstention of the World community of which this unfortunate society is a member. Such a move will only make the situation get worse to the extent that it may reach a stage beyond remedy at a later date. Both logic and mankind's common destiny dictate that Somalia should not be abandoned and that a new approach to the whole issue be attempted. In this regard, the following proposals may help in reviewing the situations; they are not necessarily novel proposals but are put forward for emphasis.

a. Whenever possible, efforts towards reconciliation among clans should receive full support and encouragement. The success of the Borama conference where traditional leaders of northern Somalia gathered, settled some of the old scores in a genuine spirit of traditional Somali ways, and the likely success of the Gardo conference among the clans of eastern Somalia may serve as realistic models. While the conferees included all categories of concerned communities, traditional leaders constituted the central force. Women groups, intellectuals, youth and former senior decision makers shall be encouraged and influenced to support this approach. Among others, this approach has the advantage of arriving at community - based reconciliation and makes the enforcement of agreements easier. It has the additional advantage of attracting potential trouble-makers, particularly youth, into the community decision- making mechanism and de-emphasizes the role of warlords and their gun wielding supporters. It must be kept in mind that in Somalia today there are actually no warring clans, but only confrontations between factional elements who claim to speak on behalf of clans, but there is actually a high degree of resentment of factional fighting among the vast majority of the civilian population and the factions are generally unpopular. This is definitely an advantage in favour of future reconciliation.

In addition to Borama, Kismayo and Gardo, similar conferences maybe encouraged and supported in centres like Baidoa, Garba Harre, Bardheare, Belet Weyne, Dusa Mareb and others. The main weakness of the present scenario is that most efforts and resources are being directed to Mogadishu (a bottomless container) at the expense of the rest of the country. It must be recalled that as a direct result of the collapse of law and order a large segment of the capital's population from other regions returned to their clan villages and towns. In today's Somalia one feels safe only in his clan territory. Therefore, in addressing issues of peace and stability one must take into account the new reality of rural areas and urban centers outside Maqadishu where the vast majority of Somalis live today.

b. Concurrent with the proposition made above, more relief, rehabilitation and, where possible, development assistance shall be geared to regions outside Moqadishu. This will not only assist the displaced elements in those regions but, will, hopefully, make life by the gun less attractive. It may also have the desired effect of assisting local authority as opposed to factional authority who are not really responsible for the day to day administration of these areas. More than any other step, however, this will immensely enhance the position of women as head of families in many ~~regions~~ rural and urban sections outside Moqadishu.

c. Women Associations and groups (as well as those of youth) shall receive more attention and assistance than they had so far. Traditionally and even to day women as a group are more tolerant and are less influenced by clan ~~clashes~~ ^{clashes} than Somali men. Their contributions in peace making at family and community levels are immense. women leaders in major centres should be identified, encouraged and assisted to embark on more extensive inter-clan peace-making missions and activities. There is no doubt that they will more significantly influence the course of events than is often thought. This is both practicable and, in the judgment of many observers, more effective and less costly than some of the approaches that proved to be failure earlier.

d. Regional authorities - where they exist- shall be assisted in recruiting, training and, in the initial phases, running local police units as the foundation of future integrated national police system. Already in northern Somalia, police units are operating in major centres such as Borama, Hargeisa, Berbera, Burao, Erigavo and Lasanod; in Southern Somalia similar progress is reported in Bossasso, Garowe and Gardo. UNOSOM is assisting in this noble task and must be commended. Extending this programme to other centres will reinforce ongoing efforts, raise the morale of the general public and significantly strengthen local authority.

e. Somali women groups shall be assisted in participating in regional and international conferences and encouraged to recruit, organize and mobilize more women in the country, assisting them in devising peace plans and modalities for implementing them. In particular regional and international women organizations and institutions shall be sensitized in this respect to assist their sisters in Somalia to overcome present difficulties.

f. The proliferation of all sorts of arms throughout Somalia during the past decade is a main obstacle in attempts to restore peace and stability in the country. Unless a comprehensive programme of arms collection is carried, restoration and maintenance of law and order is not feasible. Disarming factional militia and armed civilians shall receive a very high priority in any attempt at restoring statehood in Somalia. An opportunity has already been missed at the beginning of the international intervention when this move was possible but this important issue deserves serious reconsideration.

g. During the present crisis an increasing number of Somali women NGOs were formed both in the North and South of the country; most of them aim at contributing to the weakening position of women amid present upheavals and underpin their role as family managers by helping them initiate small community development projects that also strengthen the grass root this society.

While these are the primary aims, these women NGOs will no doubt strengthen and contribute towards enhancing women empowerment in the long run, raise their awareness and provide them with useful experiences in organizing themselves as a group thus helping them to become a political and social force to reckon with. This is only a modest beginning but a crucial one at this desperate moment for Somali women.

It is unfortunate, however, that while NGOs formed and managed by men received the attention and assistance from others, mainly external sources, women NGOs received little assistance particularly from the UN and donor countries. In this respect some international NGOs, such as Oxfam America, are to be commended for their contributions to women NGOs in both regions of the country. This is an area that must be considered as a priority by the international community if genuine empowerment for women is to be gradually attained here.

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