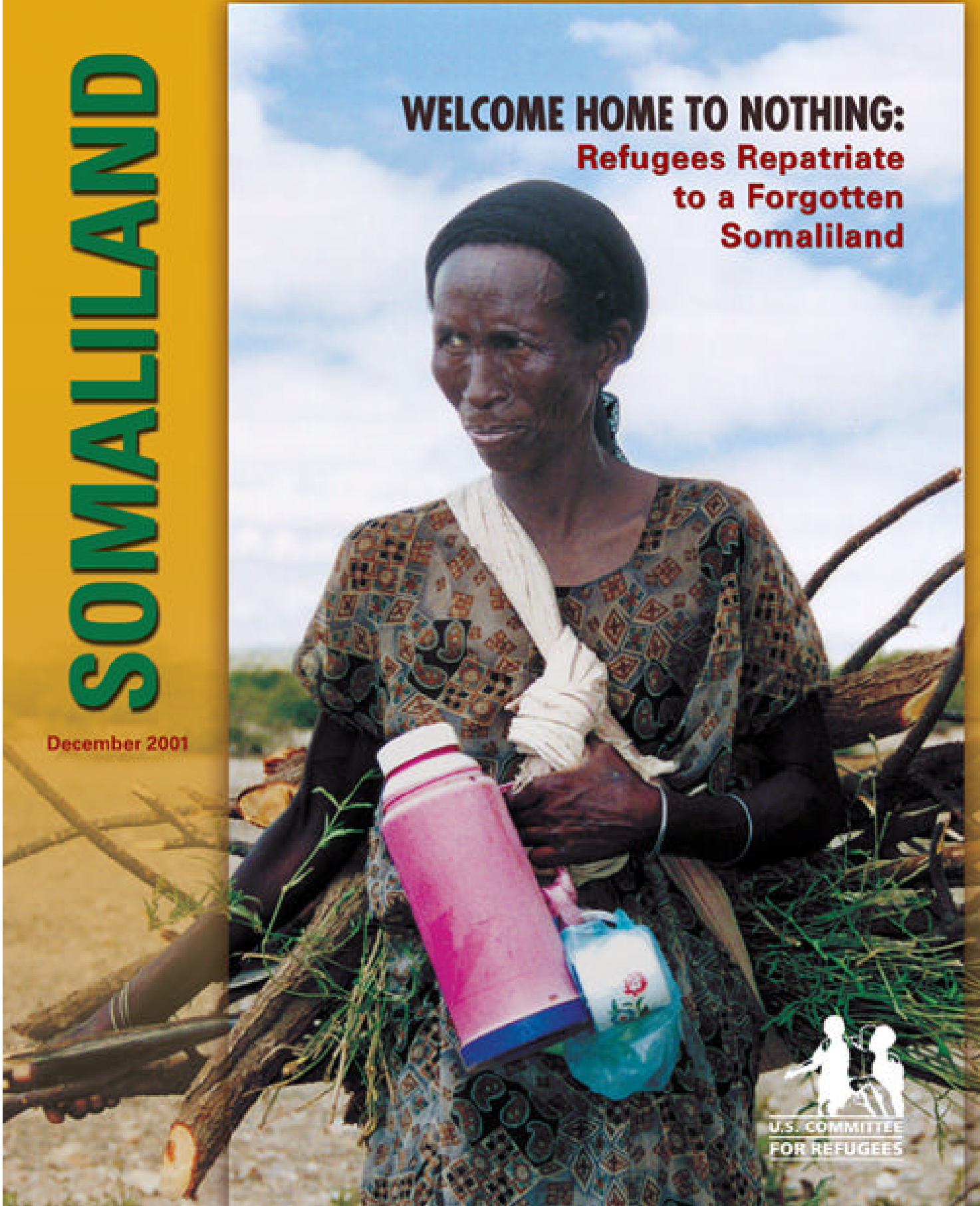


SOMALILAND

December 2001

WELCOME HOME TO NOTHING:
Refugees Repatriate
to a Forgotten
Somaliland




U.S. COMMITTEE
FOR REFUGEES

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Cover Photo by Joel Frushone

WELCOME HOME TO NOTHING:

Refugees Repatriate to a Forgotten Somaliland



"You can only quench your thirst by lifting water with your own hands"
Somali Proverb

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, more than at any other time during Somaliland's complex recent history, peace is prevalent and refugees are readily returning home. A self-declared independent republic located in Somalia's northwest region, Somaliland has not received the international recognition it has hoped for and has endured more than a decade of unwanted anonymity.

The long-awaited opportunity for the international community to help Somaliland's long-term refugee population repatriate, reintegrate, and rebuild its homeland is greater than ever. Despite its poverty and growing needs, however, Somaliland is still largely forgotten by the rest of the world.

The humanitarian and emergency aid trickling into Somaliland is meager compared to what the rest of Somalia and other Horn of Africa countries receive. With negligible help from the international community, Somaliland continues to absorb tens of

thousands of refugees repatriating from eastern Ethiopia's refugee camps.

The large-scale return home, though welcomed, is placing additional stress on Somaliland's fragile, war-torn infrastructure. The continued lack of meaningful development assistance has limited the already weak capacity of Somaliland's government, UN agencies, and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) striving to properly reintegrate returnees.

A decade after declaring independence from the rest of Somalia, Somaliland remains devastated; its government lacks the institutional capacity and financial resources needed to address the physical, social, and economic needs of its own citizens, including repatriating refugees. Reviving its shattered economy to foster job creation, rehabilitating water infrastructure, and enhancing and expanding education and health care systems are but a few of the seemingly insurmountable tasks facing 3.5 million war-weary Somalilanders who have an equally pressing concern: overcoming an identity crisis.



Somaliland In The Greater Horn of Africa

Somalia in Africa



Somaliland



ZONES
● Major Cities



Somaliland is an anomaly in today's Africa. Modern Western democratic principles, fortified by clan tradition and centuries-old cultural beliefs, hold Somaliland together. Refugees returning to Hargeisa, the Somaliland capital, find stoplights pacing a steady flow of commercial traffic, teeming outdoor markets, and uniformed policemen patrolling the streets. In May 2001, a resounding 97 percent of Somaliland voters approved a new constitution, affirming the self-declared nation's ten-year-old independence from Somalia.

Despite Somaliland's dramatically improved security situation and modest political progress, the international community continues to ignore Somaliland's claim to independence and draws no distinction between Somaliland and Somalia.

Somalia—one of Africa's largest producers of refugees and internally displaced persons—remains a nation rife with lawlessness, violent inter-clan and sub-clan warfare, and pervasive food insecurity. Since the collapse of the repressive Siad Barre regime in January 1991, violence and population displacement in Somalia have resulted in more than a half-million deaths, according to various estimates.

In 1992, during the worst of Somalia's anarchy, an estimated 800,000 Somalis were refugees in neighboring countries, and an additional 2 million people struggled to stay alive as internally displaced persons. Even with the formation of a new national government in 2001, conditions in Somalia have improved only slightly.

As divergent as Somaliland and Somalia have become, international recognition and subsequent multilateral development assistance for Somaliland remain elusive. This fact encumbers rehabilitation, development, and refugee reintegration in Somaliland.

From February 1997 to October 2001, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) officially assisted the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 170,000 refugees back to Somaliland. UNHCR expects that the remaining estimated 80,000 refugees living in eastern Ethiopia's refugee camps will voluntarily repatriate by the end of 2002.

What is in store for refugees upon their return to Somaliland? Why has such a large number, many of whom have struggled as refugees for more than a decade, waited so long to repatriate? To where in Somaliland are they returning? What obstacles have returnees encountered? What critical assistance do they need? Who is able and willing to aid their survival?

The U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR) con-

ducted site visits to Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Kenya during 2001 to assess the repatriation and reintegration of refugees to Somaliland.

USCR visited the Dadaab refugee camps in north-east Kenya in May 2001, home to some 100,000 Somalis from central and southern Somalia, and the Aware refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia, home to an estimated 30,000 refugees from Somaliland. In July 2001, USCR conducted an assessment trip to the Somaliland towns and surrounding rural areas of Hargeisa, Borama, Burao, and Berbera.

USCR returned to Ethiopia's Aware camps in August 2001, and also visited Hartisheik and Kebribeyah camps housing Somaliland refugees in eastern Ethiopia.

In Somaliland, USCR conducted many interviews with returnees and internally displaced persons. While in Ethiopia, USCR interviewed Somali refugees in various stages of readiness to return. In Kenya, USCR talked with Somali refugees about their fears of returning to southern and central Somalia. USCR also met with government officials, international and local relief organizations, representatives from UNHCR and other UN agencies, and private citizens in Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Kenya.

This report includes key findings regarding the repatriation and reintegration of Somali refugees to Somaliland, a historical description of Somaliland's refugee crisis, current conditions in Somaliland, profiles of returned refugees, and USCR policy recommendations.

II. KEY FINDINGS

With proper support for refugee reintegration, the international community can play an integral and overdue role in the rehabilitation of Somaliland.

Somaliland's five years of uninterrupted peace, one of its greatest achievements since declaring independence in 1991, currently presents the international community with a long-awaited opportunity to significantly assist many long-term Somali refugees in repatriating, reintegrating, and rebuilding their homeland.

Meaningful international financial investment and technical expertise to rehabilitate Somaliland's inadequate and deteriorating social services, repair water and transportation infrastructure, and improve education capacity could dramatically assist Somaliland's government and non-governmental



organizations in their efforts to reintegrate returning refugees.

A decade after declaring independence, Somaliland remains devastated and economically depressed.

A three-year war for independence, fought on Somaliland soil from 1988 to 1991, and two subsequent civil wars, in 1992 and from 1994 to 1996, completely shattered Somaliland's frail economy. Many refugees who repatriated to Somaliland ten years ago live in makeshift camps and slums in their own homeland and are no better off than refugees repatriating today.

Repatriating refugees find inadequate social services in Somaliland.

Prompted by UNHCR's closure of several Somali refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia during 2001, Somalis are readily repatriating to a peaceful but war-scarred and economically depressed Somaliland.

The marginal rehabilitation of social services achieved over the past decade falls far short of providing repatriating refugees with the most basic life-supporting needs. Throughout Somaliland, in designated and potential returnee areas in particular, there are virtually no reliable public health care systems. Limited and overcrowded public education facilities lack teachers and learning materials. Assistance to build or repair rudimentary housing is unavailable.

The international community does not recognize Somaliland's independence. Somaliland is barred from receiving most multilateral financial assistance.

No government or international body formally recognizes Somaliland, which broke away from Somalia and declared independence in 1991. Lack of international recognition disqualifies Somaliland from entering into formal trade agreements with foreign governments and receiving multilateral financial assistance from international banking institutions.

A nation with few exploited natural resources, Somaliland depends primarily on export earnings from its struggling livestock trade for a substantial portion of government revenues. The Somaliland government's Ministry of Resettlement, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (MRR&R) has inadequate funding and human resources for refugee reintegration and rehabilitation programs.

Lack of international financial assistance or direct foreign investment seriously hampers rehabilitation, development, and refugee reintegration in Somaliland.

The true number of Somaliland refugees and returnees has long been unclear because of poorly managed programs and corruption.

Official statistics state that hundreds of thousands of refugees have repatriated to Somaliland during the past ten years, but the true number is unknown because thousands repatriated spontaneously without assistance. Thousands of others have repatriated as part of an officially assisted repatriation program that has suffered from duplication, fraud, and corruption that persist today.

The number of Somaliland refugees who remained in Ethiopian refugee camps as of mid-2001 was probably fewer than officially reported by UNHCR and Ethiopian authorities. Although UNHCR reported in October 2001 that 80,000 Somaliland refugees remained in Ethiopia awaiting repatriation, the actual number was probably 30,000 to 60,000. UNHCR staff and the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugees and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) privately acknowledge that the official number of Somaliland refugees has long been inflated.

A decade of corruption in the refugee program in Ethiopia affecting Somaliland refugees has hurt the reputation of UNHCR/Ethiopia and Ethiopian government refugee officials in the eyes of international donors.

Refugee reintegration in Somaliland is difficult in part because of persistent drought and a ban on Somali livestock imposed by Saudi Arabia.

Chronic drought and a 14-month Saudi Arabian ban on Somali livestock have crippled Somaliland's already struggling economy and severely affected returnees' ability to earn income. Livestock traders and milk wholesalers, vocations many refugees endeavor to resume upon their return to Somaliland, have been hit particularly hard.

Most refugees are repatriating to areas in and around Somaliland's major population centers and not to their areas of origin.

Instead of returning to their village or town of origin, the majority of refugees are repatriating to Somaliland's



cities and suburbs of Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao, despite exceedingly difficult living conditions there. Returnees have the false notion that greater economic opportunities and better social services await them in urban areas.

Lack of jobs throughout Somaliland has hindered the ability of thousands of repatriated refugees to reach even a modest level of self-sufficiency.

Somaliland's post-war economy is growing, but jobs remain scarce relative to the demand.

The construction industry is prospering with the repair of war-damaged businesses, government buildings, and homes. Private telecommunications companies, business technology centers, hotels, and financial institutions are emerging and becoming successful. Smaller businesses such as restaurants, bakeries, grocery stores, and dry good and clothing wholesalers are also earning better profits.

Somaliland's estimated unemployment rate in mid-2001, however, exceeded 80 percent. Many refugees are repatriating with limited education and negli-

gible skills. They cannot compete for scarce jobs and have no income-generating alternatives.

The majority of the estimated 30,000 to 60,000 Somali refugees who remained in Ethiopia as of December 2001 are generally poorer and less educated than refugees who have already repatriated.

Absent opportunities to enhance their education or learn new job skills, thousands of Somali refugees have sat idle for as many as ten years in Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps, where they still receive food rations and minimal social services. Many refugees who remain in Ethiopia are hesitant to return home because of the rising cost of living.

Reintegration programs for Somaliland returnees are relatively small, under-funded, and difficult to sustain.

Since 1993, UNHCR has invested approximately \$15 million in small-scale development projects to assist



A Somali woman and her daughter tend to family chores in the entryway of their makeshift home, a single room in the former residence of the governor to British Somaliland. Abandoned decades ago, the residence and surrounding grounds are now home to thousands of former refugees who have repatriated to Hargeisa. Photo credit: USCR/J. Frushone



the reintegration of approximately 400,000 refugees. The weakness of the Somaliland government has resulted in the collapse of many projects funded by UNHCR that addressed needs in education, health, water and sanitation, agriculture, and income generation. The international donor community's lack of commitment and poor representation of other UN agencies in Somaliland have further diminished support for current and future refugee reintegration programs.

UNHCR budget cuts negatively affect the repatriation and reintegration of Somali refugees.

Cutbacks imposed by international donors on UNHCR worldwide programs in 2001 significantly reduced the agency's already under-funded and understaffed refugee program in Somaliland. The 20 percent reduction imposed on UNHCR's operating budget in Somaliland and 40 percent reduction in personnel further undermine UNHCR's ability to assist with the repatriation and reintegration of tens of thousands of returnees to Somaliland.

Budget cuts within UNHCR have hampered the ability of international aid organizations to plan and implement projects.

Funding difficulties have undermined UNHCR's Somali repatriation program and have impeded ongoing reintegration projects in Somaliland. The Somaliland government and humanitarian agencies are growing reluctant to enter into contractual agreements to implement refugee returnee rehabilitation projects because they are uncertain of sufficient UNHCR funds.

As a result, many refugees are repatriating at a slower-than-anticipated pace from Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps to areas devoid of essential services and facilities throughout Somaliland.

The Somaliland government currently is unable to provide the most basic of services to returnees and other citizens.

The government of Somaliland does not have the institutional capacity or financial resources needed to sustain the physical, social, and economic needs of repatriating refugees. The government's Ministry of Resettlement Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (MRR&R) maintains a skeletal staff that struggles to address the basic needs of a limited number of

Somaliland's tens of thousands of refugee returnees. The effectiveness of basic refugee reintegration programs in Somaliland depends on large-scale assistance by bilateral donors.

Lack of appropriate investment in Somaliland's returnee areas could result in a backflow of repatriated refugees to Ethiopia.

The majority of Somaliland's returnee areas cannot currently accommodate the housing, health, water, and sanitation needs of repatriating refugees without additional assistance.

Many repatriated Somali refugees are hesitant to remain in Somaliland because basic services are lacking. Refugees who have repatriated to Somaliland do not rule out returning to refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia. Lack of appropriate infrastructure and social services in Somaliland's returnee areas could result in large backflows of already repatriated refugees.

International aid agencies in Somaliland are numerous and have the structure and strategy needed to assist repatriating refugees.

Despite poor funding, numerous international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operate refugee reintegration programs in Somaliland. Many have worked in Somaliland since the mid-1990s and maintain good working relationships with government authorities and Somaliland citizens.

Many indigenous NGOs are emerging in Somaliland as well. While most indigenous NGOs are ineffective, some are working rather successfully in conjunction with international partners.

With proper support from international donors, NGOs in Somaliland could expand and enhance critical refugee repatriation programs.

UNHCR plans to end its programs in Somaliland by the end of 2002.

UNHCR plans to close its Somaliland operations when it completes the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees from Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps and fulfills basic reintegration program responsibilities. The long-planned phase-out is not a result of recent UNHCR global budget reductions. International development workers in Somaliland strongly believe that UNHCR's departure will create a vacuum difficult to fill.



There is little confidence in a plan by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to facilitate reintegration of refugees in Somaliland.

Although refugees are steadily returning to Somaliland, the UNDP plan contains no development projects to reinforce the continued reintegration of returnees. As of December 2001, the plan's inadequate budget was not fully funded, and critical staff positions remained unfilled. Initially supportive international NGOs, UN agencies, and Somaliland governmental officials are growing weary of the insufficient and long-discussed UNDP plan.

Availability of potable water is a chronic concern of repatriated refugees.

Throughout Somaliland, access to water is essential to the survival of repatriated refugees. In designated and potential returnee areas, however, water infrastructures, where available, are unreliable and fail to meet the needs of growing populations. Somaliland governmental officials engaged in reintegration programs cite the provision of water to returnees as their biggest challenge.

Without adequate water in Somaliland, returnees are likely to go back to Ethiopia in search of reliable and accessible sources of water.

Many Somalis living in Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps travel freely to and from Somaliland.

Before repatriating, many refugee heads of households conduct assessment missions to Somaliland to better understand living conditions and economic opportunities. The free flow of refugees to and from Somaliland is also an indicator that the time for repatriation is now.

Ethiopian citizens who have lived for up to ten years in refugee camps intended for Somalis will face special problems as the camps close in Ethiopia.

Many Ethiopian citizens live in Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps intended for Somali refugees. As UNHCR gradually closes the camps, Somali refugees repatriate to Somaliland and the displaced Ethiopians disperse. While many Ethiopians attempt to return to their areas of origin, most simply remain in close proximity to the closed camps.

In 2000, UNHCR initiated a program that provides to Ethiopian families in the camps a nine-month

food supply package, commensurate with the repatriation package provided to Somali refugees repatriating to Somaliland. Neither Ethiopian authorities nor international humanitarian organizations have other large-scale assistance programs in place to address the special needs of this uprooted population.

A residual number of Somali refugees from south and central Somalia will remain in Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps.

A prominent reason refugees are repatriating to Somaliland is the assurance of peace and security there. Conversely, because of continued factional fighting and overall lack of peace and security in the rest of Somalia, refugees from south and central Somalia cannot safely repatriate.

UNHCR plans to close all but one or two of Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps by the end of 2002. An estimated 10,000 refugees from south and central Somalia will remain there under UNHCR's care.

III. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The current notion of a separate Somaliland is not new. For more than a century, northwest Somalia saw itself, and was even treated by colonialist Britain and Italy, as separate from the rest of Somalia.

In 1887, Major A. Hunt, representing Great Britain, drafted and presented to several Somali clans inhabiting coastal towns on the Gulf of Aden formal protection treaties guaranteeing military support in the event of armed aggression by surrounding territories ruled by other nations. Clan elders accepted and ratified the treaties, establishing the British Somaliland Protectorate and securing trade routes for Great Britain, including the strategic strait of Bab Al Mendeb, long coveted by the British East India Company.

During the early 1900s, trade prospered in British Somaliland's port cities, owing in part to political stability strengthened by the presence of the British military. Despite Islamic nationalist leader Sheik Mohamed bin Abdullah Hassan's fierce 20-year armed resistance to British rule, the Protectorate also enjoyed relative peace.

After suppressing Abdullah Hassan and his movement, which culminated in his defeat and flight to Ethiopia in 1920, Great Britain launched "pacification campaigns" against Somali clans and gradu-



Somaliland's March Toward Self-Declared Independence

- 1887** Great Britain and Somali clan elders ratify treaties creating the British Somaliland Protectorate.
- 1920** Britain suppresses Islamic nationalist leader Mohamed Abdullah Hassan and institutes “pacification campaigns” against Somali clans.
- 1940** Italian troops invade and capture British Somaliland.
- 1941** Great Britain regains control of British Somaliland Protectorate and captures Italian Somaliland (central and southern Somalia).
- 1947** Italy signs peace treaty relinquishing all rights and titles in Italian Somaliland.
- 1941-50** Great Britain allows limited local governance in British Somaliland.
- 1960** Somaliland declares independence and joins Italian Somaliland to form the Somali Republic (a unified Somalia).
- 1961** National constitution for unified Somalia adopted in controversy.
- 1967** Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, former prime minister of British Somaliland, appointed prime minister of unified Somali Republic.
- 1969** Somali President Dr. Abdirashid Ali Shermarke is assassinated by bodyguard. Major General Siad Mohamed Barre seizes control of unified Somali Republic in a bloodless coup d’état.
- 1977** Somalia’s President Barre invades eastern Ethiopia, hoping to seize Ogaden region for Somalia.
- 1977-78** Ogaden War between Somalia and Ethiopia pushes 400,000 Ethiopian refugees into Somalia.
- 1978** Somalia loses Ogaden War.
- 1980-81** Drought, famine, and armed clashes in Ethiopia push refugees into northwest Somalia.
- 1988** Armed clashes in northwest Somalia between Barre’s government forces and insurgent Somalia National Movement (SNM) erupt into civil war. Somalia’s first refugees flee.
- 1988-91** More than 700,000 Somalis flee all areas of Somalia to neighboring countries.
- 1991** Siad Barre is overthrown. Struggles for power and economic assets result in anarchy in much of Somalia. Northwest Somalia declares independence from the rest of Somalia, calling itself Somaliland.” Somaliland selects its own president. About 100,000 refugees repatriate to Somaliland.
- 1992** Clan fighting engulfs Somaliland in civil war. Clan elders negotiate an end to Somaliland’s civil war.
- 1993** Mohamed Ibrahim Egal is appointed president of Somaliland.
- 1994** New civil war erupts in Somaliland.
- 1994-96** Some 90,000 refugees flee Somaliland to Ethiopia. Some 200,000 people are uprooted within Somaliland.
- 1996** Somaliland’s second civil war ends.
- 1997** Somaliland’s clans and sub-clans agree on new structure for government. President Egal remains in power. About 12,000 refugees voluntarily repatriate to Somaliland.
- 1998** About 50,000 refugees repatriate to Somaliland, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- 1999** Some 20,000 refugees repatriate to Somaliland, according to UNHCR.
- 2000** New government is established in central and southern Somalia, based in Mogadishu. An estimated 45,000 refugees repatriate to Somaliland, according to UNHCR.
- 2001** UNHCR closes two refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia to promote repatriation to Somaliland. Somaliland voters approve new constitution that affirms self-declared independence from rest of Somalia.



ally moved inland to assume more stringent control over greater British Somaliland.

In 1940, Italy declared war on Great Britain and France, and Italian troops invaded and captured British Somaliland. Great Britain recaptured the Protectorate in 1941 and proceeded to seize the entire Italian-ruled Somali peninsula. Following the defeat of Italy in World War II, British authorities placed British and Italian Somaliland under British military administration.

In 1947, Italy signed a peace treaty relinquishing all rights and titles it still maintained in Italian Somaliland. In 1949, under UN direction, Italian Somaliland was placed under a ten-year trusteeship administered by Italy with the understanding that upon the conclusion of the trusteeship, the territory would become an autonomous state. British Somaliland was also on course toward independence.

From 1941 to 1950, Great Britain established local courts, planning committees, and the Protectorate Advisory Council to prepare British Somaliland for self-governance.

During the late 1950s, leaders held constitutional meetings in Hargeisa, Burao and Erigavo, the Protectorate's major population centers, to find a balance of power between regions and clans. At the same time, political parties began to emerge and coalesce geographically throughout the Protectorate.

Before the decade ended, Great Britain instituted universal suffrage and transferred the majority of its executive power to local authorities.

In February 1960, British Somaliland held Legislative Assembly elections. In April 1960, in its first act, the Assembly voted unanimously for Somaliland's independence from Great Britain. On June 26, 1960, Great Britain granted independence to the Protectorate, officially ending 80 years of colonial rule. Some 38 nations officially recognized Somaliland's independence.

Five days later, on July 1, 1960, Italian Somaliland achieved independence from Italy and immediately joined the formerly British Somaliland in the north to form the Somali Republic.

Political and clan leaders appointed Dr. Aden Abdullah Osman the new republic's first president. Dr. Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, a member of the Darod clan's Somali Youth League (SYL) and advocate for a single nation that would encompass all Somali-populated areas—including Djibouti, the Ethiopian Ogaden, and northeast Kenya—was appointed prime minister.

According to Somaliland experts, Somaliland

agreed to a union with the rest of Somalia because cultural influence from the nearby Gulf States convinced many Somaliland leaders that a unified Muslim Somalia could better neutralize and protect itself from predominately Christian Ethiopia. Experts also agree that central and southern Somalis convinced Somaliland leaders that unity was the best option for realizing economic self-sufficiency.

The Somali Republic quickly experienced growing pains.

In June 1961, political leaders adopted a national constitution under a cloud of controversy.

Leaders in northern Somalia could not find common ground on an official "Act of Union" with political leaders in the south. The young nation's leaders did not carry through on plans to conduct a nationwide referendum to confirm reunification prior to a referendum on the constitution.

Much to the chagrin of the north, political leaders in the south offered a combined referendum instead. The Somali National League (SNL), the Isaaq clan-based party in the north, boycotted the referendum. Fewer than 100,000 out of 650,000 northern citizens voted. Although opposed by 65 percent of northern Somalis, the referendum passed nationwide.

In 1964, divisions within the leadership of the ruling SYL resulted in the appointment of Abd ar-Razak Hussein as Somalia's new prime minister. He was a Darod clan member. In June 1967, with the SYL still divided, the National Assembly elected the republic's first prime minister, Dr. Shermarke, to the presidency.

In August 1967, the National Assembly confirmed President Shermarke's nominee for prime minister, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal. Egal was a member of the northern Isaaq clan and former prime minister of British Somaliland.

In October 1969, all endeavors to build a party-based constitutional democracy in the Somali Republic shattered. That month, a bodyguard assassinated President Shermarke.

Prime Minister Egal nominated a member of the Darod clan to replace Shermarke. Adamantly opposed to Egal's choice for president, the army, led by Major General Siad Mohamed Barre, seized control of the government in a bloodless coup d'état on October 21, 1969. The country's police backed Barre, a member of the Darod clan, in his seizure of power.

The new governing authority, the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC), immediately installed Siad Barre as president, suspended the constitution, abolished the National Assembly, banned all political



“The Red Shoes”

Sixteen-year-old Abdi Siyad Yousuf (left) is a typical Somaliland teenage boy. He works hard in school, loves to play soccer, has experienced the atrocities of war, and knows little of his homeland after more than a decade as a refugee in eastern Ethiopia.

In May 1988, the outbreak of civil war in northwest Somalia uprooted his family to Daror, Ethiopia, a tiny village in the harsh, wind-swept Ogaden Desert. Within days, nearly 30,000 hungry, exhausted, and terrified fellow Isaaq clan members populated the area. A few weeks later, the Daror refugee camp emerged out of the red sand.

UNHCR has provided humanitarian assistance to Abdi, his family, and thousands of other refugees in Daror for the past 13 years. Because of peace and stability in Somaliland, UNHCR is scheduled to close the camp in December 2001.

To an extent, this is good news for Abdi. Although he is ready to go home after living most of his young life in Daror, he feels unprepared.

“I think I have made the best of a not-so-good life as a refugee in Daror,” Abdi says. “My family is registered with UNHCR to return to Hargeisa (the Somaliland capital), and I am excited. I am also a bit nervous.”

During his thirteen years in Daror, Abdi received only two years of formal education. In 1998, when Save the Children opened a primary school in the camp, Abdi was one of the first to enroll. Two years later, he graduated in the top fourth of his class.

“The excitement I felt when graduating did not last long,” he recalls. “Daror has no secondary school. So at age 15, my options for continuing my education were zero. This is true for my schoolmates, too. When we return to Hargeisa as refugees with little education, we are way behind other kids our age.”

Overcoming a limited education is one of many obstacles Abdi is expected to encounter upon his return and reintegration to Somaliland. If he is unable to enroll



in a secondary school, he will have to find work in a stagnant economy where jobs for unskilled laborers are scarce.

“When I arrive to Hargeisa, my main concern is going back to school,” Abdi declares. “If I cannot find a free education like I had in Daror, then it is up to my father to pay for private school. But he does not work. If there is no money for school, then it is up to me to find a job.”

Fitting in socially is also a concern.

After a recent “fact-finding” mission to Hargeisa, a common journey undertaken by refugees about to repatriate, Abdi returned to Daror feeling beleaguered. The pace of life in the Somaliland capital is much faster than what he is used to in the Ogaden Desert. Food and clothes are very expensive. And, to his surprise, people, particularly girls his age, knew he was a refugee.

“Girls wear make-up and nice clothes in Hargeisa,” Abdi observes. “The few I talked to knew right away that I live in Daror. Because the sand from the desert covers everything we wear, they call me and other refugees ‘the red shoes.’ I have more to learn than I thought.”

The challenges before Abdi, and thousands of similar young refugee boys and girls who are repatriating, highlight the need for education programs in Somaliland. Many of Somaliland’s youths are eager to improve themselves and their homeland, if they can only gain the skills to do so.



organizations, and arrested and detained leaders of the former government, including Prime Minister Egal.

Barre harbored deep malevolence toward the Isaaq clan and sub-clans, whom he often referred to as “his Jews.” According to Somaliland experts, Barre, as a child, was present when an Isaaq person killed his father during an inter-clan battle.

During the ensuing two decades of Barre’s oppressive rule, the country suffered widespread human rights abuses. Somaliland, more than 65 percent Isaaq, bore the brunt of Barre’s violence.

IV. REFUGEES THROUGH THE TURNSTILE

ETHNIC SOMALIS FLEE ETHIOPIA

Ethnic Somali refugees have been a constant presence in the Horn of Africa for the past quarter-century.

The 1977-78 Ogaden War, instigated by Somali dictator Siad Barre’s 1977 military invasion of eastern Ethiopia, produced the first ethnic Somali refugees. In 1978, following the defeat of Somalia’s army at the hands of the Soviet- and Cuban-backed Ethiopian army, hundreds of thousands of ethnic Somalis and Ethiopian Oromos living in the long-disputed Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia fled to northwest and southern Somalia.

The government of Somalia, maintaining its centuries-old claim that the Ogaden region was part of Somalia, initially received the uprooted Somalis and defined them as internally displaced persons rather than as refugees. One of Africa’s poorest nations, Somalia lacked the basic physical and social infrastructures necessary to assist the massive influx, and the government’s efforts quickly failed.

In September 1979, the Somali government reclassified the uprooted population as Ethiopian refugees and appealed to UNHCR for international assistance. Conflicting estimates of the number of refugees in the camps in northwest and southwest Somalia delayed the arrival of much-needed humanitarian aid.

Persistent drought and Ethiopian government “villagization” programs continued to push additional ethnic Somalis from the Ogaden region into Somalia. Most of the refugees who entered Somalia after those who fled the aftermath of the Ogaden War were nomads of the Somali Ogadeni clan. During 1980, as the influx to Somalia continued, tens of thousands of

refugees also began returning spontaneously from Somalia to Ethiopia.

In early 1981, the steady stream of refugees flowing in and out of Somalia ceased.

How many refugees fled to Somalia and how many returned to Ethiopia during 1978-81 remains under dispute and plays an integral role in today’s efforts to repatriate refugees to Somaliland.

(See *Seeing Double: The Numbers Game* page 12).

During 1984-86, a combination of drought, famine, continued villagization, and armed fighting between Somali and ethnic-Oromo insurgents in Ethiopia’s Ogaden region caused two new flows of refugees from eastern Ethiopia to northwest Somalia, totaling about 100,000 people.

The first influx crowded into Gannet, a makeshift camp on the outskirts of Hargeisa, the provincial capital of northwest Somalia, during 1984-85. Unsanitary and overcrowded conditions eventually forced the Somali government to close the camp and transfer the refugees to a newly established reception center in Togwajale, one mile (two km) from the Ethiopian border.

During 1985-86, a second influx of refugees soon overcrowded Togwajale. Mounting international pressure concerning the center’s proximity to the border and worsening conditions prompted the Somali government to relocate most of the refugees to a new camp in nearby Daawaali.

In 1988, a decade after emerging as one of Africa’s major refugee-hosting nations, Somalia itself began to fracture and produce refugees on a large scale.

TARGETED DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

Distrusted and despised in many quarters, President Siad Barre’s popularity shrank considerably after Somalia was defeated in Barre’s war against Ethiopia and he failed to annex the Ogaden. Barre responded by tightening his repressive grip.

During the late 1980s, in an attempt to eliminate growing armed domestic resistance to his dictatorship, Barre increased his government’s atrocities against Somali citizens. The Red Berets, a dreaded elite unit handpicked from Barre’s Merehan sub-clan, was enlisted to exact a reign of brutality against the Hawiye and Isaaq clans, as well as against the Majeerteen, a Darod sub-clan.

In 1981, Somalis living in Saudi Arabia, primarily from the Isaaq clan, established the Somalia National Movement (SNM). The SNM emerged in the



Seeing Double: The Numbers Game

How many refugees have fled Somaliland during the past 12 years? How many refugees have repatriated to Somaliland since 1991? How many Somaliland people remain refugees in late 2001?

Accurate answers to these basic questions remain in dispute and complicate efforts to assess refugee repatriation and reintegration in current-day Somaliland.

During the past dozen years, internal and external armed conflicts have uprooted people from Somaliland. Some were citizens of Somalia, while some were Ethiopian refugees who had fled to Somalia during the 1980s.

When hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children fled Somaliland to seek safety in Ethiopia, humanitarian relief officials found it impossible to distinguish a Somali refugee from an Ethiopian returnee because of shared ethnicity. Ten years later, officials in Ethiopia were still unable or unwilling to sort out who was a refugee and who was not.

As a result, accurate census numbers for Somaliland refugees and returnees do not exist to this day.

Thousands of internally displaced Ethiopians, posing as Somali refugees, have over the years trickled in and out of refugee camps meant for Somalis, and many Ethiopians remain in those camps today. Many genuine Somaliland refugees repatriated spontaneously on their own without being properly counted or registered, and received no assistance from the international community. Many other refugees simply never returned to Somaliland and started new lives in Ethiopia or in a myriad of other foreign countries across the globe.

Complicating matters further, violence, drought, and economic hardship during the 1990s uprooted additional tens of thousands of people from Somaliland, including many of the same individuals who had returned home after fleeing years earlier. Because of fraud and double counting in refugee camps in neighboring Ethiopia, the number of genuine refugees has been exaggerated, and the number of genuine returnees

to Somaliland has been inflated in official records.

UNHCR and the Ethiopian government refugee agency, the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), rely on often-inaccurate registration records, random recounts, and the tabulation of refugee ration cards to estimate refugee camp populations.

Many refugees fraudulently possess multiple ration cards to obtain extra monthly food allotments and are often counted more than once as a result. Many ARRA officials reportedly exaggerate refugee populations to obtain additional food aid, which they allegedly use for personal consumption or sell for considerable profit.

Identifying who is and is not a Somaliland refugee is so difficult that the governments of

Somaliland and Ethiopia and their respective refugee agencies, as well as UNHCR, other UN agencies, and international NGOs regularly cite different refugee population figures when conducting programs for assistance, repatriation, and reintegration.

When refugees repatriate to Somaliland, ARRA officials in Ethiopia are commonly accused of masking their corruption by inflating official repatriation numbers. Extra repatriation packages, which include a nine-month supply of food for each returnee, are an additional windfall for corrupt officials and entrepreneurs. Some UNHCR workers have also fallen under suspicion.

In November 2001, UNHCR reported that the total number of Somali refugees who repatriated to Somaliland from Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps between February 1997 and October 2001 in the organized repatriation program surpassed 170,000. Some humanitarian aid workers estimate that the actual number of returnees assisted during that time frame was probably less than 60,000.

How many Somali refugees remained in Ethiopia in November 2001? The official UNHCR number was approximately 80,000. USCR and some humanitarian aid organizations estimated that the actual number was 30,000 to 60,000.



late 1980s as a prominent and determined insurgency group opposed to Barre's tyrannical rule and his government's political and economic discrimination against northwest Somalia. Operating from bases in Ethiopia, the SNM initiated a guerilla war to protect Isaaq clan interests and, ultimately, oust Barre.

In May 1988, when clashes between the SNM and Barre's government forces escalated into a full-scale civil war, virtually all inhabitants of Hargeisa, Borama, Berbera, and Burao, northwest Somalia's major population centers, fled their homes. Farms, rural areas, and nomadic pasturelands were also abandoned. The conflict soon broadened when other insurgent groups began attacking government forces throughout the rest of Somalia.

During the ensuing two years of intense fighting, steady government air and artillery bombardments and systematic Red Beret attacks targeted innocent Isaaq clan members and killed an estimated 100,000 people, reducing northwest Somalia to rubble. The civil war, fought almost exclusively in northwest Somalia, imposed an additional layer of misery in a region already suffering from national neglect.

Siad Barre's sustained military offensive crippled agricultural production, destroyed nearly all of the region's livestock, decimated northwest Somalia's businesses, places of worship, and water infrastructure, and uprooted almost the entire population of approximately 2.5 million people.

Fleeing war, mass executions, and torture, approximately 400,000 residents of northwest Somalia sought refuge in other countries. Approximately 350,000 fled to Ethiopia, while thousands fled to Europe and North America. Tens of thousands of others fled to Djibouti, where they were allowed to enter the country but were denied refugee status by the government. An estimated 1.5 million additional people were displaced within northwest Somalia.

UNHCR established eight camps in eastern Ethiopia to accommodate the influx of refugees. The camps, including six that still exist today, were located along the Ethiopia-Somalia border and were organized according to clan demographics. In Djibouti, UNHCR eventually established two camps near the borders with Ethiopia and Somalia. Both camps exist today.

Many internally displaced Somalis subsisted in SNM strongholds, while tens of thousands of others struggled in remote areas for interminable months with no humanitarian assistance.

In January 1991, guerrilla offensives coordinated by the loosely allied SNM, the southern-based Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM), and the central-

based United Somali Congress (USC) dislodged government troops throughout Somalia and brought the Siad Barre dictatorship to an end.

The flight of Barre, the collapse of his regime, and the capture of Mogadishu by forces loyal to the USC immediately led to two significant population shifts in central and southern Somalia.

The first involved Somali civilians and Ethiopian refugees fleeing Somalia. UNHCR estimated that approximately 250,000 central and southern Somalia members of the Darod clan fled revenge killings carried out by the rival Hawiye and other anti-Barre clans, and sought refuge in camps in Kenya. Some 150,000 fled to the North Eastern and Rift Valley provinces, while an estimated 50,000 fled to the southeast Kenyan port city of Mombassa. Tens of thousands of other civilians, representing numerous clans and sub-clans, as well as Ethiopian refugees living in camps throughout Somalia fled to eastern Ethiopia and Djibouti.

The second population movement involved Somali civilians and Ethiopian refugees who were unable to flee Somalia. Trapped in conflict areas, tens of thousands of uprooted central and southern Somalis fled their homes and relied on an informal clan-based food distribution system for their survival. An additional 35,000 Ethiopian refugees living in Qoryoley and other refugee camps in southern Somalia fled to Mogadishu. Continued poor security prevented humanitarian agencies from providing the displaced Ethiopian refugees with emergency relief for several months.

In February 1991, while anarchy and violent clan and sub-clan power struggles raged throughout central and southern Somalia, citizens in the northwest began to pursue a different future.

1991 - 2000: SOMALILAND RE-EMERGES AND REFUGEES RETURN

In early 1991, after a horrific three-year civil war, political leaders in northwest Somalia emerged and began to pursue a peaceful transition toward civilian rule.

In February 1991, while central and southern Somalia plunged into disarray, the Isaaq clans convened a local *shir* (traditional council) in the northwest port city of Berbera. The Dolbahante, Gadabursi and Warsangali clans, even though they had allied with President Barre and had fought against the Isaaq, reached a critical amnesty with the SNM. Clan elders and SNM leaders, determined to prevent rogue military commanders from developing into faction lead-



Somaliland: Independent or Not?

Does the Republic of Somaliland—a remote place hidden in the far reaches of the Horn of Africa, where nomads and their camels laden with frankincense and myrrh share desert roads with Mercedes-Benz trucks hauling state-of-the-art televisions—truly exist?

Not according to the international community.

On May 18, 1991, Somaliland unilaterally declared independence from the rest of Somalia. Somaliland's leaders claim that their territorial borders derive from the borders drawn by Great Britain more than a century earlier, when the British ruled northwest Somalia and called it the British Somaliland Protectorate.

Today, most of Somaliland's estimated 3.5 million population considers itself to be politically independent from the anarchy that prevails in southern and central Somalia. The world's other nations, however, have chosen to withhold diplomatic recognition of Somaliland and continue to regard it merely as one region of a unified Somalia.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) refuses to recognize Somaliland independence in part because the OAU has a long history of holding existing national borders sacrosanct. Some Somaliland experts speculate that Egypt, a powerful OAU member, insists on maintaining a politically unified Somalia in order to check neighboring Ethiopia's political and economic power in the region.

Wealthy Saudi Arabia, the largest financial supporter to the League of Arab States, also refuses to endorse fragmentation of a League member country.

Western countries, including the United States, reportedly have been deliberately slow to endorse Somaliland independence because of doubts about Somaliland's long-term economic and political viability. Major powers are also uncertain whether Somaliland independence would dampen or inflame instability in the Horn of Africa. The future of Somaliland and the rest of Somalia has been a bottom-rung priority for American policy-makers, par-

ticularly after 18 U.S. soldiers were killed there in October 1993.

Somaliland's leaders justify their separation from a unified Somalia by citing the sharp contrast between their homeland's relative peace and the rest of Somalia's continued violence. They suggest that a politically unified Somalia was attempted for three decades and showed itself to be ungovernable. They point out that Somaliland has formed its own representative government and that 97 percent of Somaliland's voting population approved a new constitution in May 2001.

"The international community has disenfranchised Somaliland, but we haven't let this stop us," said Abdul Qadir Jirde, deputy speaker of the Somaliland parliament. "With our own muscle, blood, and very small wallets, we have established a government, and are beginning to rehabilitate our schools, health clinics and other important sectors of Somaliland society. We are slowly moving in the right direction. International recognition of our independence, and the multilateral financial support that goes with it, would help us move faster."

Official recognition would enable Somaliland to sign formal trade agreements with foreign governments and receive multilateral financial assistance from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the African Development Bank to address its massive development needs.

"Although standing alone in the Horn of Africa allows us to rebuild our homeland on our terms, it is not completely ideal," Jirde acknowledged. "While we welcome international recognition, it represents only one of so many other priority issues before Somaliland."

Somaliland independence is not a political or legal reality—at least not yet. But for Somaliland's people, independence has become a very real state of mind.

ers, agreed to exchange prisoners of war unconditionally, work together to rebuild the decimated northwest, and determine their collective future.

In May 1991, clan elders convened a "national" *shir* in the central northwest city of Burao. Clan elders and SNM leaders repealed the controversial "Act of Union" of 1960 and declared independence. Many

northwest Somalis considered the repeal to be an overly bold step to take so soon after the fall of Barre.

The SNM elected its chairman, Abdi Rahman Ahmed Ali Tour, as the first president of the Republic of Somaliland. The SNM also named an interim legislature and judiciary, and encouraged Somali refugees who fled in 1988 to return home.



Somaliland's declaration of independence encouraged most of the estimated 400,000 northern Somali refugees living in neighboring countries to consider repatriation. While more than 200,000 refugees repatriated to Somaliland during late 1991, two major deterrents hampered their reintegration and hindered the return home of the remaining 200,000 refugees.

First, unexploded ordnance and more than 1 million landmines, strategically planted throughout Somaliland by insurgent groups and forces loyal to Barre, endangered the safety and slowed the return of tens of thousands of refugees. The mines were prevalent in and around the cities of Hargeisa, Burao, and Berbera. Fears about the presence of unexploded ordnance and landmines reduced the amount of land available for livestock grazing and cultivation.

Secondly, UNHCR was slow to draft and implement a repatriation plan. Although various UN agencies maintained operations in Somaliland amidst security concerns, the estimated 200,000 refugees who spontaneously repatriated during 1991 received no coordinated humanitarian assistance. Facing an already difficult situation, refugees returned to a devastated Somaliland without basic food and non-food items, and without minimal cash grants.

Three years of civil war destroyed northwest Somalia's negligible water and transportation systems. Economic, political, and social structures—tremendously weakened under the Barre regime—had deteriorated to a state of disrepair. Rehabilitating and reconstructing all aspects of a nation in ruins presented President Tour and the military-minded SNM leadership, the transitional government until 1993, with formidable challenges.

The foremost challenge was restoring law and order and re-establishing normal trade and commerce. The government acknowledged the reintegration assistance needs of the hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced Somalis, but deemed them a lesser priority.

The government needed substantial funds to formulate and implement the multitude of programs vital to rebuilding a nation and sustaining the peace. Remnants of the ruined economy, consisting of airport, road, and seaport revenue, represented the only financial resources available to the government.

Unwilling to endorse any fragmentation of the Horn of Africa, the international community refused to recognize Somaliland's self-declared independence. Its unofficial status disqualified the impoverished territory from formal trade agreements with foreign governments and blocked Somaliland from receiving

multilateral assistance from international financial institutions.

During its first six months of self-declared independence, Somaliland achieved modest success in assembling a government and maintaining peace under seemingly insurmountable conditions. Although laden with problems that required human and financial resources beyond its means, the new Somaliland leaders put in place the cornerstone of a foundation for a stable government to grow.

Not all Somalis, however, appreciated the direction of the government's admittedly slow progress. The SNM leadership remained fragmented, and clan-based factions and armed militia groups from the war competed for political prominence.

In October 1991, Somaliland's first armed rebellion tested the political unity of Somaliland. The Habar Awal, a minority Isaaq sub-clan, controlled Somaliland's strategic port city of Berbera and refused to share port revenue with the government or other sub-clans. The Habar Gerhajis, the majority Isaaq sub-clan, acting "in the interest of the state," attacked Berbera.

By mid-1992, the attack had escalated into a civil war between the government and a coalition of clan-based militias led by the Red Flag faction of the SNM. Although intense clashes occurred in Berbera, Burao, and Hargeisa, they did not result in major population displacement.

Fatigued by war, clan elders reflected the views of the majority of Somaliland's citizenry and overwhelmingly condemned the attack and resulting violence. In September 1992, the *xir* (traditional conflict resolution system), resuscitated by clan elders at a *shir* in the town of Sheikh, averted potential anarchy by negotiating an end to the fighting.

Somaliland's leaders convened a national *shir* in Borama in January 1993 to build upon the peace restored in September 1992. Concluding in May 1993, the *shir* peacefully dissolved the SNM transitional government and transferred power to a community-based system that consisted of executive, legislative, and judicial bodies. The *shir* also elected Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, who had been the prime minister of British Somaliland and Somalia, the second president of Somaliland.

Discontent within the Habar Gerhajis sub-clan over the election of Egal, who was a member of the rival Habar Awal sub-clan, combined with continued factional discord within the SNM, soon shattered Somaliland's tenuous peace.

In November 1994, clan and sub-clan tension





A Somaliland soldier stands guard at military base in Burao. Unlike central and southern Somalia, Somaliland enjoys relative peace ensured by a citizenry fatigued by war, a small police force, and a 10,000-man military. Photo credit: USCR/J. Frushone

escalated into a full-scale civil war—Somaliland’s second internal war in a span of four years. The conflict began in the capital, Hargeisa, and by March 1995 spread west to Burao and to Somaliland’s central regions of Woqooyi Galbeed and Togdheer.

The war displaced the entire population of Burao and tens of thousands of civilians in and around Hargeisa. More than one year of fighting pushed an estimated 90,000 Somalis into refugee camps in neighboring Ethiopia and uprooted an additional 200,000 people within Somaliland.

The civil war destroyed the modest rehabilitation Somaliland had achieved during its first five years of self-declared independence and halted the favorable conditions that had encouraged the return of Somali refugees.

A third national *shir*, convened in Hargeisa in October 1996 and concluded in March 1997, again ushered official peace to Somaliland. The Hargeisa *shir* preserved Egal’s presidency and created a bicameral legislature, consisting of a house of parliament, elected by the populace, and the *Guutri* (traditional leaders), chosen by clan councils. Two-thirds of the *shir* representatives approved the new structure and ratified a provisional constitution requiring the gov-

ernment to hold a nationwide referendum in three years. Under Article 151, a vote in favor of the referendum equated approval of the provisional constitution and endorsement of the sovereignty of Somaliland.

The deep involvement of the two non-Isaaq clans, the Dolbahante and Warsangali, was the critical ingredient to the success of this peace agreement. In late-1996, Dolbahante and Warsangali leaders realized that Isaaq clans and sub-clans, their former arch-enemies, were serious about forging a sustainable peace and began to participate actively in the peace process.

In early 1997, UNHCR and Somaliland government officials updated their plans to repatriate more than 100,000 Somali refugees. Somaliland’s President Egal, however, warned against a rapid large-scale return. “We are not strong enough, our economy is not strong enough, and the country is not yet safe enough for these people to return,” he said in June 1997.

Heeding the president’s warning, Somaliland officials and UNHCR reached a compromise to allow for the repatriation of 50,000 Somalis in 1997. Fewer than 12,000 refugees voluntarily repatriated that year, however, including 10,000 as part of a pilot return



Eastern Ethiopia's Refugee Camps

During the past 12 years, Ethiopia has amicably hosted hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees. Today, most Somali refugees live in six camps under the care of the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), the Ethiopian government's refugee agency.

Many of Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps have evolved into major trading centers over the years. The camps' isolated locations in a culturally and economically homogenous region of Ethiopia, and their proximity to the extremely porous Ethiopia-Somaliland border, make them ideal for commerce.

The refugee camps overshadow most local villages and have grown into economic bases controlled by various ethnic-Somali clans. However, the camps also manage to benefit the local Ethiopian population, particularly by sharing scarce food and water. Refugees from Somaliland, returnees to Ethiopia, and local Ethiopian residents all benefit from the sharing of resources, although not always equally.

Ethiopia's and Somaliland's agro-pastoralists and nomads have incorporated the refugee camps into their seasonal migration patterns. Many commonly use the camps as a base where women and children remain year-round. Men and boys frequent the camps during the dry season, when water

and grazing lands are scarce, and after harvests.

Until recent years, poor regional security endangered humanitarian aid workers and truck convoys traveling by road to and from the isolated refugee camps. Although security has improved in recent years, logistical challenges of delivering food and other supplies to the camps persist.

Many Somali refugees have lived under the care of the international community in Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps for more than ten years. The harsh camp conditions and minimal social services have left many refugees destitute and dependant on United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for basic life support.

Most refugees live in weathered shelters made of tattered plastic sheeting stretched over sticks, subsist on donated food, and rely on substandard education, health care, water, and sanitation assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP), and international NGOs. No longer self-reliant, most long-term refugees face uphill challenges upon repatriating to Somaliland.

In June 2001, UNHCR officially closed Ethiopia's eastern Teferiber and Darwanaji refugee camps. As of November 2001, six camps remained open.

Camaboker Camp

Established: August 1998
Current official population: 20,000
Major clan affiliation: Isaaq
Refugee areas of origin: Hargeisa & Burao

Daror Camp

Established: August 1988
Current official population: 13,000
Major clan affiliation: Isaaq
Refugee areas of origin: Hargeisa, Burao, Erigavo & Berbera

Kebribeyah Camp

Established: February 1991
Current official population: 12,000
Major clan affiliation: Merehan & Harti
Refugee areas of origin: Mogadishu & Galkayo

Aisha Camp

Established: November 1989
Current official population: 14,000
Major clan affiliation: Issa
Refugee areas of origin: Zeyla & Lughaya

Hartisheik Camp

Established: May 1988
Current official population: 12,000
Major clan affiliation: Isaaq
Refugee areas of origin: Hargeisa & Gabiley

Rabasso Camp

Established: August 1988
Current official population: 10,000
Major clan affiliation: Isaaq
Refugee areas of origin: Hargeisa & Burao



project. Many thousands of the returnees settled in Sheikh Nur, a newly designated resettlement area in Hargeisa.

UNHCR attributed the small refugee return in 1997 to several factors: the lack of humanitarian programs and basic social services in returnee areas; uncertainty over land distribution; and the presence of landmines in Somaliland. Many well-informed refugees, although eager to return home, knew about Somaliland's difficult conditions and decided to remain in camps in neighboring countries, where they received ready access to UNHCR assistance programs.

In 1998, as relative peace began to settle over Somaliland, the government turned its attention to formidable rehabilitation and development needs that had persisted since 1991. Refugee reintegration remained a prominent concern of the government, but received little attention and less support because of scant resources.

With the intention of obtaining financial development assistance, President Egal embarked on diplomatic missions to neighboring countries and Europe to present Somaliland's case for international recognition. While successful in securing informal agreements to exchange ambassadors with Eritrea and open a diplomatic mission in Ethiopia, Egal returned home as he had left: financially empty-handed.

Refugees, however, continued to repatriate. Despite limited services in exceedingly overcrowded returnee areas, some 50,000 Somalis voluntarily repatriated to Somaliland during 1998, according to UNHCR estimates.

During 1999, Somaliland remained relatively peaceful. More international NGOs began to operate in major population centers. International donors, however, provided minuscule financial support to a select few development projects, reflecting their continued disinterest in Somaliland.

President Egal confirmed Somaliland's frustra-

tions. "Heaven knows, we need help to rebuild this country," he affirmed in May 1999. "We have stabilized Somaliland, we have pacified Somaliland, and we have disarmed all the tribal militia in Somaliland without any assistance from anybody. But you cannot build a country with empty hands."

The continued influx of repatriating refugees from Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps during 1999 added to the anxieties of the Somaliland government. During 1999, more than 20,000 Somali refugees repatriated to locations across Somaliland, UNHCR estimated.

To accommodate refugees returning to Hargeisa, the government established another resettlement area, Mohamed Mooge. The estimated 5,000 returnees who resettled in Mohamed Mooge, however, found inadequate shelter and insufficient education and health care facilities.

The estimated 15,000 other returnees resettled throughout Somaliland, many in and around the cities of Borama and Burao, where they received even less reintegration assistance. The government and humanitarian agencies failed to persuade international agencies and foreign governments to contribute financial and human resources to refugee reintegration or for necessary development programs for Somaliland.

During 2000, while Somaliland began planning for a 2001 referendum on its constitution, a national government formed in southern and central Somalia for the first time since the ouster of dictator Siad Barre in 1991. Somaliland refused to endorse the new government. Many central and southern Somalia citizens, including some warlords and their militia, also refused to recognize the new Mogadishu-based government.

Refugees continued to repatriate to Somaliland throughout 2000, although in fewer numbers than in 1999.

By mid-2000, approximately 85,000 Somali refugees in Ethiopia's eastern refugee camps had registered with UNHCR for eventual repatriation. By year's end, UNHCR officially assisted with the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 45,000 refugees to Somaliland, primarily to Borama. The Somaliland government and UNHCR failed to establish a designated resettlement area or to make basic services available. Refugees repatriating to Hargeisa continued to crowd into expanding resettlement areas.

As 2001 began, repatriating refugees continued to flow into Somaliland. To their disappointment, most returnees found a war-scarred homeland nearly identical to the destruction they fled a decade earlier.

**For more information on Somaliland,
access the following websites:**

<http://www.somalilandgov.com>

<http://www.somalilandforum.com>

<http://www.somalilander.org>

<http://www.somalilandnet.com>





A Somali refugee walks in eastern Ethiopia's Ogaden desert, home to an estimated 80,000 Somali refugees, many of whom have lived in exile for more than a decade. Photo credit: USCR/J. Frushone

V. FORGOTTEN SOMALILAND

“In 1991, I was one of the first to return to Hargeisa after three years of war. I did not recognize the city, once home to nearly 500,000 people. I found no more than three families, two barely running vehicles, and a handful of wild dogs fighting over the carcasses of dead camels. The devastation was beyond belief. Things have changed since then, but not much.”

Ahmed Elmi, former refugee, and current reintegration program officer of Danish Refugee Council

The world has all but forgotten about Somaliland and its struggling people.

Among the poorest of the poor in Africa, most of today's estimated 3.5 million Somaliland citizens were refugees or internally displaced persons at

least once in their lives. The monumental and complex task of reintegrating Somaliland's uprooted population has spanned the past decade and continues today.

With negligible help from the international community, Somaliland continues during 2001 to absorb tens of thousands of Somali refugees repatriating from eastern Ethiopia's refugee camps, putting added stress on Somaliland's already fragile infrastructure.

From February 1997 to October 2001, UNHCR reports that it officially assisted in the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 170,000 Somali refugees to Somaliland. During the same period, as many as 350,000 others returned home without assistance. During 2002, UNHCR expects to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of an additional 60,000 refugees to Somaliland.

Many in the international humanitarian community and in the government of Somaliland agree that the repatriation of Somalis living in eastern Ethiopia's refugee camps is long overdue.

“It does not matter if refugees repatriate from as close as Ethiopia or as far away as Europe or



Scandinavia, we need them all to come home, and come home now,” observed Mohamoud Aden Dheri, the governor of Somaliland’s south-central region of Togdheer. “Somaliland is still in tatters, but full of peace. It is critical that all refugees return to help us physically and socially rebuild our homeland. We cannot do it without them.” Nor can the government and returnees do it alone.

The government of Somaliland lacks the institutional capacity and financial resources needed to address the physical, social, and economic needs of its own citizens, including repatriating refugees. A decade after declaring independence, Somaliland remains devastated and economically depressed, offering little incentive for Somali refugees to return and limited opportunities to enhance the self-sufficiency of its current citizens.

In fact, many refugees who repatriated to Somaliland ten years ago live in makeshift camps and slums in their homeland and are no better off than refugees repatriating today. Although most returnees express a strong desire to participate in rebuilding their homeland, they have limited education and few skills.

A closer look at the state of Somaliland today confirms that with proper support for refugee reintegration, the international community could play an integral role in the rehabilitation of Somaliland.

THE STATE OF EDUCATION

Somaliland’s education system is in a state of disrepair. All levels of formal education ceased during Somaliland’s war for independence and two subsequent civil wars during the early and mid-1990s. Each conflict killed large numbers of school administrators and teachers, destroyed schools and learning material, and disrupted the education of hundreds of thousands of children and adults in every region of Somaliland.

As of December 2001, fewer than 20 percent of Somaliland’s primary school-age children have returned to school, while nearly half of Somaliland’s primary schools remain damaged and unfit for use.

The majority of Somaliland’s limited number of secondary and professional technical schools also remain damaged, and few have reopened. While the newly constructed University of Hargeisa and the rehabilitated University of Somaliland are conducting classes, each is capable of enrolling only a small number of secondary school graduates.

“Nurturing our children through our primary

school system is not only difficult, it is only half the battle,” Somaliland’s minister of education, Ahmed Yousuf Duale, acknowledged to USCR. “The number of secondary schools available for our graduating children is tragically limited, and our government does not have the means to build the necessary schools, furnish them with desks and books, or hire qualified teachers that we know are needed. This puts the future of our children and Somaliland at risk.”

As a result, most of Somaliland’s school-age children, including many competent students, receive nothing more than a primary school education at best.

The condition of primary schools and lack of qualified school administrators and teachers throughout Somaliland further limits the government’s ability to properly educate its growing population of school-age children, including repatriating refugees.

Only one primary school and no secondary school exist in Sheik Nur, a Hargeisa neighborhood with an estimated 6,500 families—Somaliland’s largest refugee resettlement area. Less than 5 percent of Sheik Nur’s school-age population is receiving a formal education.

Because of a lack of schools in the western Somaliland town of Borama, education officials are considering conducting classes outdoors to accommodate more than 1,000 newly repatriated students from eastern Ethiopia’s closed refugee camps. Many school-aged children who have returned from refugee camps are concerned that limited class space will marginalize them further and end their education.

“When my father died in Darwanaji refugee camp, I became the man of the house,” 15-year-old Abdi Unis Tukale told USCR. He repatriated with his mother and four younger siblings to Borama in June 2001 after 11 years as a refugee in eastern Ethiopia. “Now that we are back in Somaliland, my mother said that I can best help our family by staying in school, and I hope to do so. But she learned that the schools in Borama are already crowded and have little room for former refugees. If this is true, my education is over and I will have to find a job to support my family.”

Somaliland’s dilapidated education system is also hampering future development. During the past decade, many Somalis with the financial means have sought education services abroad and have never returned to Somaliland, where their expertise is desperately needed to rebuild their homeland. The resulting “brain drain” has further hindered Somaliland’s ability to rehabilitate its social services, economy, and government.



Taking Matters Into Her Own Hands

The one-room apartment on the third floor of the nearly completed hospital has no door. Exposed electrical wires hang from light fixtures dangling from the ceiling, and tattered sheets of plastic cover gaping holes in the whitewashed walls that have long awaited windows.

The woman who sleeps here is not a homeless construction worker. To many, she is Somaliland's Mother Teresa. To others, she is the former wife of Somaliland's current president, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, now obsessed with an unattainable dream.

To those who know her best, 62-year-old Edna Adan Ismail (right) is a remarkable woman who has sacrificed much to bring to life a maternity hospital on a former public execution field.

An expert in maternal health, Ismail knows how desperate people in Somaliland are for quality health care services.

"Simply put, we as a nation lack the technical expertise and resources needed to rebuild a health care infrastructure that two decades of war destroyed," says Ismail, a Hargeisa native. "Because of this, the health of the people of Somaliland, particularly women and children, is among the worst in Africa."

Every day in Somaliland, ten women die giving birth. One in eight infants do not live to see their first birthday, and one in five die before they reach the age of five. Ismail has taken matters into her own capable hands and maintains high hopes of reversing these trends.

In 1997, she conceived and completed the design of the 10,000 square-meter, three-story Edna Adan Maternity Hospital. Construction of the hospital began in Hargeisa one year later. She has invested her entire life savings and oversees every facet of the project.

"If people wish to view me as a role model for Somali women, that is fine," Ismail submits. "I would rather the world focus on the socially underprivileged people of Somaliland who greatly need basic medical services and the nurses and midwives we are training, however, than revere an old woman like me."

The hospital is located in Dumbuluq, a deprived

district of Hargeisa that is home to more than one-third of the city's population, yet has no health care facilities. The hospital is scheduled for completion by the end of 2001.

When fully functional, the 50-bed facility will accommodate 25 patients in the maternity ward and maintain an operating theater, x-ray and delivery rooms, a library, and lecture hall.

Today, masons, and carpenters share the hospital corridors with 32 nursing students hand-picked by Ismail from a pool of more than 300 applicants.

"These very dedicated students know full well that they represent the foundation upon which we will build quality health care in Somaliland," she smiles. "Our rigorous three-year program will produce superb registered nurses. The top 12 graduates I will retain to work and teach at the hospital. The remainder will work as

nurses and midwives in Hargeisa clinics."

The hospital also conducts evening adult literacy classes for laborers and employees who cannot read.

Ismail's financial contribution, and generous private donations of money and equipment from North America and Europe, have helped defray most of the initial expenses. While additional funding is still needed to complete the hospital, raising revenue to operate the facility is vital.

"Patients will pay what they can afford," Ismail acknowledges. "We hope that rent collected from a separate building constructed on the hospital grounds to house private medical-related businesses will provide us with another source of income. We truly have nowhere else to turn."

Unrecognized by the international community as an independent nation, Somaliland is barred access to multilateral development assistance. Lack of international aid for the past ten years has undermined Somaliland's modest nation-building and has forced private citizens, like Ismail, to develop public institutions.

"This is my second hospital," Ismail says. "My first is occupied by a person with a very big gun in Mogadishu. Tragically, this is the picture everybody has when a Somali word is spoken. But this is not who we are."



THE STATE OF HEALTH CARE

Somaliland's health care system is primitive. Somalilanders suffer unnecessarily and die daily from preventable and curable diseases.

Somaliland has always struggled to provide its citizens with basic health care services. The territory has not yet managed to develop a comprehensive health care system. During the Barre regime in the 1980s, government authorities in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, intentionally ignored the health care needs of citizens in northern regions. Well before Somaliland declared independence in 1991, most Somali medical professionals were based in Mogadishu, more than 700 miles from Hargeisa. The uneven health care system posed obvious access problems for most northern Somalis in need of immunization services and medical care.

Armed conflicts in Somaliland during the 1990s completely destroyed the token facilities constructed in the 1980s. The years of violence halted the sporadic training of medical professionals and disrupted deliveries of critically needed medicines. While Somaliland did achieve marginal health care improvements during the past decade, its semblance of a health care system remains incapable of providing Somalilanders with the most basic services.

"The health care situation in Somaliland is better today than it was ten years ago, but it is still very bad," said Edna Adan Ismail, former World Health Organization (WHO) representative in Djibouti and founder of the Edna Adan Maternity Hospital in Somaliland. "Somaliland's lack of quality medical professionals, at all levels, tops the long list of deficiencies that continue to impede our ability to develop a proper health care system needed to address the needs of all Somalilanders."

Infectious and communicable diseases pose the greatest health threats to Somaliland's population. Infant mortality remains high, with one in five children dying before the age of five. Life expectancy is only 48 years. Hepatitis, malaria, diarrhea, and tuberculosis are prevalent in most urban centers and among many rural populations, including refugee returnee areas, which are even more under-served.

Access to basic health care is a major concern in refugee returnee areas where repatriating populations are at a greater risk of succumbing to otherwise treatable diseases. Returnees live in close quarters with inadequate sanitation and are more susceptible to epidemics of infections and communicable diseases. They have no choice, however, but to rely on deteriorating health care facilities that

lack well-trained professionals, diagnostic services, and medicines.

In Hargeisa's seven returnee neighborhoods, 16 nurses support eight mother-and-child health care centers (MCH) that serve tens of thousands of returnees. In the western Somaliland town of Burao—a designated return area for thousands of former refugees—the hospital pharmacy cannot fill simple prescriptions even though it is supposed to supply medicines to MCH's in the immediate area.

"I am an old woman and rely on UNHCR for my monthly supply of medicine to regulate my high blood pressure," said Fatumo Nur Abocker, a refugee currently living in Ethiopia but preparing to repatriate to Somaliland's Burao area. "During my recent trip to Burao, I visited the hospital pharmacy to see if they could fill my prescription. They could not. Because of this, I am afraid to return and live in Burao."

While the Somaliland government recognizes its deficiencies, it lacks the financial resources and institutional knowledge to implement even rudimentary changes to Somaliland's health care system. The Somaliland population lacks qualified nurses, midwives, doctors, laboratory technicians, and professional hospital administrators needed to address pervasive health care needs.

Lack of accountability within the government has also hampered simple targeted improvements in health care.

"International humanitarian agencies will continue to rehabilitate and construct new buildings to provide health care services across Somaliland," an international humanitarian worker remarked to USCR. "However, we are hesitant to provide beds, medical instruments, and continual supplies of medicines. This is the responsibility of the government. While we want to help, it is hard for us to provide equipment and supplies without assurances that they will reach intended beneficiaries."

Although nearly all Somali refugees have experienced the atrocities of war, Somaliland's health care system also remains incapable of addressing the needs of returnees who suffer from psychological trauma associated with war. The only two psychiatric hospitals in Somaliland are extremely ill-equipped and lack well-trained psychiatrists and psychologists. Likewise, Somaliland's health care system cannot adequately care for returnees who suffer from war-related physical disabilities.

For many former refugees returning to Somaliland, the modest health care they received in refugee camps was superior to the medical care awaiting them in their homeland.



Where Water is More Precious than Gold

In the community of Sheikh Nur, water is more precious than gold.

Sheikh Nur is one of seven refugee returnee areas in Hargeisa, the Somaliland capital. Life in congested and growing Sheikh Nur, gated by a garbage dump where children compete with camels for discarded food, is a constant struggle. Employment opportunities are nonexistent. Food is scarce. The only health clinic has no doctor. It is common for as many as five families to share a 10-meter square plot of land and one pit latrine.

The community's paramount concern, however, is water. Hundreds of Sheikh Nur's estimated 6,000 residents rely on a single source, the Ismail family (below), for their daily water needs.

"That we survived more than a decade as refugees in Ethiopia and are now selling water to fellow returnees in Hargeisa astonishes me every day," Khadija A-Rahman, the Ismail family's eldest daughter, acknowledges. "We are thankful that we listened to the advice of our relatives and constructed a water tap."

In 1988, Khadija A-Rahman was seven years old when her family fled a burning Hargeisa on foot. She vividly remembers but is reluctant to recount the terrifying 15-day walk to eastern Ethiopia. Her family eventually settled in Hartisheik refugee camp and remained there for 11 years.

The disheartening experience as a refugee is one that Khadija A-Rahman will not soon forget.

"We were always sick, medicine and water were in short supply, and my father could not find work," she recalls. "In the beginning, we sold portions of our monthly food ration and used the money to attend private school. When food ran short, we were faced with the choice of not eating or not attending school. Of course we had to eat."

In 1997, the family agreed that a degree of stability had returned to Somaliland and registered to repatriate with help from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

"Although we badly wanted to leave Hartisheik, officials with UNHCR told us that at the time they could not provide our family with any repatriation assistance," Khadija A-Rahman explains. "Having left Hargeisa empty-handed, we decided that it was best to wait until they could help us."

Two years later, the Ismail family registered for repatriation again and met success. UNHCR provided the family of seven with blankets, plastic sheeting, a

transportation allowance to help them travel within Somaliland, and a nine-month food supply. They happily sold what they could not carry and returned home.

"Before we departed Ethiopia, we made plans to sell our repatriation package and invest the money in a water tap," adds Abdi Ismail, Khadija A-Rahman's father. "We heard from friends and relatives already living in Sheikh Nur that access to water was a major problem. Spending all we had on a water tap at a time when we had nothing and needed everything was a risk worth taking."

Today, the Ismail family's water tap runs constantly. Early every morning, Sheikh Nur residents haul battered five-, ten-, and twenty-liter plastic containers to the Ismails' *tukul* (house) to collect water, for which they pay approximately 50 Somaliland shillings (1 cent) per liter. Tending to nearly 200 customers daily keeps the family busy.

An average weekly profit of 100,000 Somaliland shillings (approximately \$20) is the family's only source of income. Like the water the Ismails sell, not a shilling of what they earn is wasted.

"In addition to keeping my children fed, clothed, and in school with the profits we take in from our water tap, I am providing my neighbors a valuable service," Abdi says. "In a very important way we are contributing to rebuilding Somaliland."

The initial success realized by Khadija A-Rahman's family emphasizes how even rudimentary repatriation assistance can lay the groundwork for self-sufficiency for refugees finally returning home to Somaliland.



THE STATE OF WATER

Water is the most essential life-sustaining element in semi-arid Somaliland. Years of neglect and poor management, however, have left Somaliland's water infrastructure in a decrepit state.

Despite extensive repairs during the past decade to its war-damaged urban and rural water systems, Somaliland's marginally improved water infrastructure today remains incapable of providing the general population—and returning refugees in particular—with reliable sources of water for drinking and agriculture.



Men survey water wells dug manually three to five meters underneath the surface of a dry riverbed by refugee returnees near Borama. Many Somaliland citizens struggle daily to secure a fresh supply of water. Returnees digging beneath dry riverbeds to locate water are often crushed to death when the unstable wells collapse. Photo credit: USCR/J. Frushone

Somaliland's primitive urban water infrastructure, which consists of aged systems installed in the early 1900s during British colonial rule, constantly breaks down and barely meets the daily water needs of most Somalilanders living in and around major population centers. Equally neglected is Somaliland's rural water infrastructure, comprised mainly of poorly maintained boreholes and reservoirs that fail to deliver adequate water to rural residents, including farmers and pastoralists heavily dependent on water for their livelihoods.

Somaliland's universally unreliable water systems have forced most urban and rural Somalilanders to depend on river water, rainwater, hand-dug wells, water delivered by trucks and donkeys, and other unprotected and potentially contaminated water sources for cooking, drinking, washing clothes, and bathing. Most Somalilanders enjoyed better water systems in refugee camps.

"The water needs of repatriating refugees who are continually arriving present us with a growing challenge," Mohamed Sulbaan, Borama's water manager, told USCR. "In the first two weeks of July 2001, 200 families arrived from refugee camps in Ethiopia and settled in Borama. Every day during the third week of July, all of Borama's water was consumed by 10:00 a.m. Before the families resettled here, the system did not run dry until 11:30 a.m. Even though it is a struggle, we are able to replenish the system daily because our water supply is good. The system, however, can't handle much more of an increase."

Although Somaliland is prone to drought, its underground water table is relatively abundant, particularly in and around Hargeisa, Borama, and Burao—areas that are receiving large numbers of returnees. The main problem throughout most of Somaliland is not lack of water, but bringing the water to the surface in convenient locations and properly managing its distribution.

Urban and rural Somalilanders



A Livestock Livelihood Threatened

In Somaliland, where the camel is highly regarded as a national symbol and nomads still roam the land with their herds, raising animals pervades every aspect of society.

For more than a century, livestock has supplied the majority of Somaliland's export earnings and remains the lifeline and backbone of the Somaliland economy. Today, it is estimated that more than 70 percent of all Somalilanders depend directly or indirectly on the production and export of goats and sheep, cattle, and camels for their livelihood.

A majority of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists families rely on their livestock for daily subsistence. Milk, meat, and butter are staples in the diets of most Somalilanders.

Most livestock, however, are raised for economic purposes rather than for personal consumption. Sales of livestock and livestock byproducts are often the only incomes the majority of Somalilanders earn. The Somaliland *seylad* (livestock market) is the most dynamic spot in local villages. Setbacks to the local livestock industry are economically damaging to all of Somaliland.

In September 2000, Saudi Arabia imposed a ban on all livestock from Somaliland, alleging that more than 100 Saudi citizens died from Rift Valley Fever contracted from Somali goats and sheep. The livestock ban—the second in the past three years—has crippled the Somaliland economy.

Prior to the re-imposed ban, Somaliland exported up to 10,000 heads of sheep and goats per day, primarily to the Gulf States. Today, livestock exports are a miniscule fraction of that.

Cut off from their export market, Somaliland's herders have flooded local markets with meat and milk sold at dramatically reduced prices, hurting their already negligible profit margins. With diminished incomes, households dependent on livestock sales are struggling to purchase local grains and vegetables that have increased in price because of poor rains.

Returnees to Somaliland who had long dreamed of rebuilding their animal herds are, instead, slowly eating their herds to curb their economic losses. For many Somalilanders, it seems as if they are being forced to eat away their own future.

frequently live for days without a fresh supply of water. Years of improper planning have also limited the expansion of water systems and hampered development of new systems in returnee areas.

UNHCR and Somaliland government officials expect 10,000 to 20,000 refugees to repatriate to Burao during the remainder of 2001 and throughout 2002. Gudadheer, an area the government has designated for the majority of the returnees to resettle, however, is a semi-arid desert clearing with no identified reliable water source, two miles (three km) north of the center of Burao.

Because of crowded conditions in Borama, many recently repatriated families are resettling on the outskirts of town on fallow farmlands that have limited and primitively developed water resources. Most returnee women and young girls spend the majority of their day trekking to dry riverbeds where they dig, by hand, three to five meters underneath the surface to locate water.

"Every morning, my wife, two daughters and sister head to the dry river to dig for water," said 65-year-old Siad Hassan Barre, who sold his last female

camel to earn money to buy a plot of farmland to resettle his family near Borama. "Nobody seems to care that we struggle to collect an important necessity like water. I am very old and the process of returning home has been hard on me. Not knowing if my wife will return each day with enough water for the family—well, this makes for an even harder life."

"Collectively during the past eight years, international NGOs and UN agencies have provided tremendous technical support and have invested more than \$2 million in non-agriculture water programs in Somaliland," an NGO worker told USCR. "That major water problems persist throughout Somaliland today is not for lack of interest or support from the international community."

The sustained physical health of the population and the health of their economy depend on solving the water problem. International NGOs and UN agencies suggest that if the Somaliland government remains incapable of providing safe and reliable water to Somalilanders, officials should consider privatizing the water sector.



“Making Up for the Nine Years That Were Taken from Me”

One day after Dahar Jama Fahiye (right) crossed the border to return to his native Somaliland, the din of whining table saws and drill presses lured him to the Daldhis Furniture and Voluntary Training Workshop in the western town of Borama.

After sitting idle for nine long years in Teferiber refugee camp in eastern Ethiopia, 20-year-old Dahar sized up machines he had never seen before, submitted an application to the workshop’s manager, and walked to the neighborhood mosque to pray.

The next morning, an anxious Dahar returned to learn that he and 19 other former refugees had been accepted to the workshop’s six-month carpentry program. In a matter of 48 hours, Dahar’s decidedly uncertain future took a turn for the better.

“Without question, if I did not come across the Daldhis workshop, I would have quickly returned to Teferiber where I ate and slept for free,” a quick-witted Dahar admits. “Job opportunities in Somaliland are few and far between. This is even more so for a person like me with only a sixth-grade education and no marketable skill. I came home with nothing, to nothing, and have decided to stay because of Daldhis.”

Founded by Ismail Yassin Ahmed in 1995, the Daldhis workshop promotes social skills and provides technical carpentry and welding training to Somali teenage boys and young men. During the late 1990s, all of the workshop’s trainees originated from within Borama. Today, reflecting the area’s growing population, Mr. Ahmed’s classrooms are predominantly comprised of recently repatriated refugees like Dahar.

“Despite the fact that they received no training skills and a very limited education in the camps, my best students are former refugees,” Mr. Ahmed states. “They have lived a difficult life and are now working hard to make up for lost time. I just wish I had the additional space and means to help more of them.”

Mr. Ahmed personally oversees and finances all aspects of the workshop, including interviewing applicants, importing lumber from the United Arab Emirates, and modestly compensating the 13-member teaching staff, which includes several Daldhis graduates.

The current 25 trainees, who work six days a week in a rented building that doubles as a fully functional workshop and classroom, do not pay school fees. Mr. Ahmed absorbs the \$200 per student expense for six months of training.



“Each convoy that arrives from the emptying refugee camps in Ethiopia brings more young men who want and need the training skills we provide,” Mr. Ahmed says. “Because I cannot afford to expand, the 30 applications I have from recent returnees must wait until the current class graduates. Who will help them in the meantime? I do not have the answer.”

In June 2001, UNHCR closed Teferiber and Darwanaji refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia after an estimated 20,000 refugees repatriated to Somaliland. Most of the camps’ former residents originate from across western Somaliland. But they are returning in large numbers to Borama, the provincial capital, and to other urban centers, with the expectation of gaining access to government social services or securing jobs, which are in short supply.

Similar to hundreds before him, Dahar departed Teferiber refugee camp with no immediate desire to return to or live in his home village of Dilla, 12 miles (20 km) southeast of Borama.

“Returning to Dilla was never an option,” he concedes. “I figured that my chances for survival were better in Borama. Still, starting over, even with Daldhis, has not been easy.”

Upon graduation in January 2002, Dahar plans to relocate within Somaliland to a place where the opportunities to apply his new carpentry skills are greatest. He also plans to acquire accounting and computer skills in an effort to open his own furniture workshop.

“I did not enjoy one day of my refugee life,” Dahar says. “Finding Daldhis is a good start toward making up for the nine years that were taken from me. This is not the case for my friends and the thousands of others like them who have returned to Somaliland and are struggling to make ends meet.”



THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

Somaliland's war-scarred economy is gradually improving, but it continues to struggle to stimulate significant job growth for new returnees as well as those who returned years ago.

The economy remains overwhelmingly dependant on animal husbandry, and, to a lesser extent, on agriculture. Livestock is the backbone of Somaliland's economy, representing the majority of Somaliland's export earnings and a substantial portion of government revenue. It is estimated that more than 70 percent of all Somalilanders depend directly or indirectly on the production and export of goats and sheep, cattle, and camels for their livelihood. (See *A Livestock Livelihood Threatened*, page 25.)

While fewer Somalilanders derive their incomes from agriculture, the production and sales of cereals and maize account for approximately 30 percent of Somaliland's economy. The potential for increased productivity is substantial. An estimated 10 percent of Somaliland's land is arable, but only 3 percent is cultivated.

Many repatriating refugees are experienced farmers, but need additional training and support services. However, such services are rare. Throughout Somaliland, agricultural professionals, extension services, irrigation systems, equipment, tools, and seeds are in short supply. Enhanced agriculture development could produce more jobs, increase economic revenue, and safeguard the population's health and nutrition.

Somaliland's 600-mile (1,000 km) fish-rich coastline and Berbera port also remain underutilized. Strategically located on the Gulf of Aden, Somaliland has the potential to develop into a major international fishing and commercial center. The port is fairly inactive, however.

Many refugees repatriate to Somaliland hoping to find jobs in the livestock industry, primarily as livestock traders and milk wholesalers, but few find such work. A ban on Somali livestock by Saudi Arabia has left the economy reeling, and most returnees lack alternative job skills and have little education, leading to a grim economic future unless they find opportunities for skills training.



Young Somali men deliver Somaliland shillings to a hawala (money transfer center) in Burao. Somaliland has no central banking system. Nearly all of the millions of dollars transferred annually to Somaliland citizens from the Somali diaspora flow through the unregulated hawala system, which is based on trust and is widely utilized in many Muslim countries. Photo credit: USCR/J. Frushone



“This is the second, and by far the worst, livestock ban my family has suffered since we returned to Somaliland,” explained Ahmed Ayaanle, a 42-year-old subsistence farmer who cultivates a small plot of land in the rural village of Botor, 50 miles (80 kms) west of Hargeisa. “I can’t sell any of my animals without losing money and therefore have no income to replenish my herd or buy pasta or rice to feed my eight children. I tried to find work in Borama and Hargeisa, but came home unsuccessful. There are a lot of new small businesses, but no new jobs.”

Throughout Somaliland, private sector business activities are partially revitalizing the economy. The construction industry is relatively active with the new construction and repair of war-damaged businesses, government buildings, and homes, but new construction jobs are quickly filled. Similarly, while emerging private telecommunications companies and business technology centers are beginning to realize greater profits in Hargeisa, new technology jobs are also in short supply. Most of the limited new positions require computer skills and technical training that only a few Somalilanders possess.

“In six years, we have grown to a company with about 150 employees—75 in Hargeisa and 75 in Burao,” said Mohamed Abdi, president of the Somaliland Telecommunications Corporation (STC), one of Somaliland’s biggest employers and one of five telecommunications companies. “Although we take pride in knowing that we are providing greater access to the internet and more phone lines to Somalilanders, our profit margin is so thin that we cannot afford to hire any new employees. This is difficult because the majority of Somalilanders are without work, which is bad for our business and our economy.”

In addition, the majority of new smaller business, such as bakeries, restaurants, grocery stores, and tea and coffee shops, are family-owned and operated by a limited number of relatives.

Although local private businesses and the Somaliland diaspora annually contribute millions of dollars to the Somaliland economy, including many development projects, most refugee returnees do not receive remittances from abroad and grow poorer. Entrepreneurial by nature, many struggling refugee returnees could benefit substantially and contribute to the Somaliland economy if they had better access to business management skills training and venture capital to start micro-businesses.

Some NGOs implementing micro-enterprise programs in refugee returnee areas, primarily around Hargeisa, are realizing notable results. Targeted busi-



Photo credit: USCR/J. Frushone

ness training followed by the disbursement of loans and grants to women’s cooperatives, widow associations, and other groups benefit extended families, communities, and, ultimately, the overall economy. Current loans and training programs are small compared to the need, however.

“The [skills] capacity of returnees upon their arrival to Somaliland saddened the international community,” said David Murphy, Somaliland country director for the International Rescue Committee (IRC). “Most refugees repatriated without acquiring additional education or new marketable skills while living in the camps. Our program to provide small, organized groups with rudimentary business skills and cash grants is a step in the right direction down a long, long road.”

CONCLUSION

Like most areas of Africa, Somaliland has enormous development needs that will take decades to fulfill. Not all problems can be erased immediately. But Somaliland’s leaders, citizens, and aid workers agree that now is the key moment to enhance current efforts so that refugees returning to their homes will have reasons to stay.

Reintegration and development programs that unleash the Somali population’s aggressive entrepreneurial skills can lay the groundwork for economic and political stability so envisioned by the international community and Somalilanders themselves.

“If we do not collectively act soon, what we have done is in danger of collapsing,” a UN official concluded.



VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

TO RELIEF AGENCIES, DONORS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

- 1. UNHCR should avoid further budget cuts or personnel reductions in Somaliland or eastern Ethiopia until the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees is completed and planned reintegration projects are fully implemented.**

Funding cuts imposed on UNHCR programs in Somaliland and eastern Ethiopia during 2001 have hindered the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees to Somaliland.

The reduction of dedicated funding has resulted in the cancellation of road rehabilitation projects that were intended to facilitate repatriation logistics. Some water projects in drought-prone returnee areas of Somaliland have also been cancelled. Funding cuts have curtailed school construction and rehabilitation projects and will indefinitely delay the enrollment of thousands of repatriated school children. There is concern that some refugees who repatriate to Somaliland might choose to return to Ethiopia because Somaliland lacks critical repatriation services.

UNHCR has been unable to deploy an adequate number of professional staff on both sides of the Somaliland-Ethiopia border for this repatriation and reintegration.

- 2. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) should develop a more comprehensive and ambitious plan to facilitate the reintegration of Somaliland refugees.**

The current UNDP plan to facilitate the reintegration of Somali refugees in Somaliland is inadequate.

According to official plans, UNHCR expects to assist the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 50,000 Somali refugees to Somaliland during 2001 and an additional 60,000 during 2002. The UNDP reintegration plan however, is inadequate. While the plan presents “program strategies” and lists “proposed outcomes,” it does not include explicit rehabilitation or development projects.

UNDP should reformulate its current plan to adequately address the complex needs of the tens of thousands of underserved refugees who have repatriated to Somaliland, and the tens of thousands who are expected to soon follow. UNDP should seek adequate donor funding to make the plan work.

- 3. International donors and UN agencies should undertake fundamental rehabilitation and development programs in all Somaliland communities.**

Somaliland remains a devastated and war-scarred country with needs well beyond repatriation programs. In nearly every Somaliland community, Somalis who repatriated in 2001 and those who repatriated in 1991 have identical basic needs today. Many Somalilanders live in makeshift camps and slums in their own economically depressed homeland, forced to rely on a war-damaged infrastructure that still lies in a state of disrepair.

- 4. International donors should work to improve the competency and capacity of the Somaliland government.**

Improved political stability and increased security in Somaliland present the international community with an optimal opportunity to enhance the capability of Somaliland’s government, which is currently ill-equipped in financial and human resources to address the needs of its own people. Somaliland’s long-term stability will require a government capable of responding to the challenges facing the population.

- 5. International financial institutions should find creative ways to assist Somaliland financially.**

Somaliland’s inability to gain the status of independent nationhood prevents Somaliland from accessing multilateral development aid. Somaliland is effectively disqualified from obtaining millions of dollars of assistance and loans that would normally accompany such large-scale reconstruction.



International financial institutions, such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and African Development Bank should look for creative ways to provide Somaliland much-needed financial assistance to support development projects.

6. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) should immediately implement intensive feeding programs to aid malnourished repatriated refugee children.

Most impoverished refugee families sell the nine-month repatriation food supply provided by the World Food Program (WFP) to purchase other basic necessities needed for their reintegration in Somaliland’s returnee areas. Somaliland’s major population centers offer returnees inadequate shelter, poor health care, limited access to clean water, and poor sanitation facilities.

Unable to secure limited employment opportunities, returnee heads of households struggle to provide their children with proper nourishment. Malnutrition rates among children are 15 percent in returnee areas of Hargeisa. UNICEF should implement intensive feeding programs in Hargeisa’s returnee neighborhoods and monitor child nutrition in all other returnee areas.

7. International donors and UN agencies should work to rehabilitate and expand Somaliland’s education system.

All levels of formal education ceased during Somaliland’s war for independence and two subsequent civil wars. Each conflict killed large numbers of teachers and completely destroyed schools and learning material.

Nearly half of Somaliland’s primary and secondary schools remain damaged or destroyed, and fewer than 20 percent of school-aged children have returned to school. The education rehabilitation achieved during the past decade by UN humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF, and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), falls far short of meeting Somaliland’s current and growing education needs.

UN agencies should provide more technical expertise and financial support to international NGOs and Somaliland’s Ministry of Education to

revitalize and expand Somaliland’s educational system. Donors and UN agencies should also ensure that the special needs of the generation of refugee children repatriating to Somaliland—most of whom received little or no education in Ethiopia’s eastern refugee camps—are accommodated.

8. International donors and NGOs should enhance and expand income-generation projects that target women in refugee returnee areas.

Women are the sole breadwinners in most refugee returnee families in Somaliland, yet they cannot earn adequate incomes in an economy with limited job and business opportunities.

In an attempt to better equip returnee women in their struggle to support their families, some international NGOs provide returnee women with training in small-scale business skills and micro-credit loans. But many of these programs are small and reach relatively few women.

International donors should give NGOs the financial support needed to enhance and expand current programs to include more female participants.

9. International donors and NGOs should expand and enhance vocational training programs for male returnees and demobilized soldiers.

Somaliland can ill-afford to ignore the special needs of the increasing numbers of unskilled male returnees and demobilized soldiers. Somaliland needs a well-trained work force to rebuild.

The expansion of vocational training centers to provide male returnees and demobilized soldiers with carpentry, masonry, electrical, and other skills can boost Somaliland’s reconstruction efforts. International donors and NGOs should expand vocational training programs to help Somaliland rebuild its towns and lay the groundwork for economic stability.

10. International donors and NGOs should work to identify and provide treatment to refugee returnees who suffer from psychological trauma associated with war.



Nearly all Somali refugees have experienced the atrocities of war. Most refugees witnessed acts of brutality that resulted in the death of relatives and friends, and they still carry with them horrific memories of violence and bloodshed. Returning to Somaliland for the first time is often a traumatic experience for Somali refugees. The already-difficult process of resuming a normal life in Somaliland is compounded for many returnees who suffer, often unknowingly, from psychological trauma associated with war.

11. International donors and NGOs should bolster Somaliland’s veterinary services.

Somaliland’s economy relies overwhelmingly on animal husbandry. A prior ban imposed on Somali livestock during 1998-99 starved the Somaliland government of nearly 40 percent of its annual revenues. Although the health of the Somaliland economy is dependant on the health of its livestock, the government currently lacks the capacity to provide important veterinary services to pastoralists. International donors and NGOs should strengthen Somaliland’s veterinary services.

12. International donors and NGOs should work to ensure that refugee returnees who are dependent on international humanitarian agencies become self-reliant.

Many Somali refugees have lived under the care of the international community in Ethiopia’s eastern refugee camps for more than ten years. Many families have grown dependent on UN agencies and NGOs for basic life-support services.

No longer self-reliant, many long-term refugees expect to find similar support upon their return to Somaliland. Many humanitarian aid experts express concern about a “dependency syndrome” among returnees. Gradually, international donors and NGOs should work to ease returnees’ transition from complete dependency to complete self-reliance.

13. International donors and UNHCR should continue to work systematically to close refugee camps in eastern Ethiopia in order to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees.

During January to October 2001, UNHCR reports that it officially facilitated the voluntary repatriation of an estimated 40,000 Somali refugees and closed two of Ethiopia’s eight eastern refugee camps. The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) contributed \$1.3 million in July 2001 to assist the repatriation program and camp closures.

International donors should follow ECHO’s example to ensure that UNHCR has the financial resources needed to keep voluntary repatriation and camp closures on schedule.

TO THE SOMALILAND GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE BUSINESSES

14. The Somaliland government should provide refugee returnee areas with reliable water systems and should better manage or privatize its water sector.

Somaliland’s history is dotted with deadly conflicts over competition for its most precious resource: water. Repatriating refugees’ concern that they will not find clean and reliable sources of potable water in Somaliland is valid.

Much of Somaliland’s water infrastructure is in a chronic state of disrepair, including in designated refugee returnee areas. In potential returnee areas, critical water infrastructures do not exist. The government’s continued mismanagement of Somaliland’s water sector increases the likelihood that outbreak of deadly diarrheal diseases, typhoid fever, and cholera epidemics will occur, particularly among returnee populations.

If the Somaliland government is incapable of ensuring safe and reliable water for all its citizens, officials should consider privatizing the water sector.

15. Somaliland’s private business sector should establish a community-based association that supports repatriation and rehabilitation programs.

Despite pervasive poverty, some businesses have flourished in Somaliland, and some have donated to charitable causes. Somaliland’s wealthiest businesses should work with local communities to identify and fund refugee reintegration and community rehabilitation programs.



16. The Somaliland government should continue to provide sanctuary to Somalis fleeing factional fighting in central and southern Somalia.

The number of Somalis seeking safe haven in Somaliland from factional fighting and rampant violence in central and southern Somalia continues to grow. Currently an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 central and southern Somalia citizens reside in Somaliland.

Somalis who flee to Somaliland consider themselves to be refugees. International law, however, does not recognize them as refugees because they have not crossed an internationally recognized border.

The Somaliland government should continue to give sanctuary to this growing population, regardless of their unclear status or clan affiliation. UN agencies and international NGOs should provide this uprooted population assistance commensurate to aid received by Somaliland's own returnees.

17. The Somaliland government should bar Osama bin Laden and terrorist organizations from operating in Somaliland if they attempt to do so.

International media have speculated that Somalia is a possible alternative refuge for Osama bin Laden, the accused influence behind the September 11, 2001 terrorist acts on U.S. soil. International policymakers have expressed concern that Muslim extremist groups in Somalia might attempt to protect bin Laden or support future international acts of terrorism.

Somaliland should ensure that extremist groups do not establish bases of operation on Somaliland soil.

In return, the U.S. and other nations should recognize that support for development and stability in Somaliland is ultimately in the world's best interest.

TO ALL GOVERNMENTS

18. The international community should regularly assess the pros and cons of granting diplomatic recognition to Somaliland.

Much of Somaliland's population considers itself to be politically independent from the rest of Somalia. The international community, however, has refrained from recognizing Somaliland's self-declared independence.

There are many reasons why Somaliland might merit political independence. Somaliland has formed its own government and enjoys a state of peace that contrasts sharply with the rest of Somalia. Official independence would enable Somaliland to access much-needed multilateral development aid. Official independence would also enable Somaliland to play a potentially constructive diplomatic role in the political affairs of the Horn of Africa.

Conversely, there are many reasons why granting independence to Somaliland could be problematic. Official independence is highly controversial in Somalia and among African leaders. Granting nationhood to Somaliland might also encourage other disaffected regions of African nations to press for independence, compounding existing political instability in the struggling continent.

As events unfold in Somaliland and Somalia, the United States and other countries should regularly reassess the political situation and should not summarily dismiss the option of eventually granting recognition to Somaliland.

19. The U.S. government should look for opportunities in international circles to raise awareness about the needs of Somaliland.

In recent years, the U.S. government has attempted to encourage more interest in Somaliland among international donors. The U.S. government should lobby other governments, UN agencies, and financial institutions to contribute financial and human resources to Somaliland's refugee reintegration and development programs.

20. Saudi Arabia should lift its ban on Somali livestock.

In September 2000, Saudi Arabia imposed a ban on all Somali livestock for health reasons. The ban has crippled Somaliland's economy, and hampered refugee reintegration. Subsequent independent investigation has concluded that Somali livestock are healthy. Lacking scientific proof of a health hazard, Saudi Arabia should lift its livestock ban.

