



**1. Please provide as much information as possible about the boon caste in Somalia.**

Somalia's caste system is complicated.<sup>1</sup> Its minorities are diverse and are not simply delineated by ethnic, religious or linguistic differences but also by social and historical distinctions between minorities and pastoralist majorities.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) notes that the position of a Somali in relation to the clan system of the "dominant" ethnicity associated with the *Samaal*, the northern pastoralist groups, is the main defining factor in a person's social relations, access to justice and other civil and political rights.<sup>3</sup> In Somalia the term *boon* refers to a person of low status (a derogatory name)<sup>4</sup>, a commoner (as opposed to *bilis* or nobles)<sup>5</sup> or a low-caste person<sup>6</sup>.

Sources have identified the *boon* caste not only as a separate *sab* group, or occupational grouping, of Somalia but also report that they are composed of a variety of different groups, such as the *Yibir*, *Midgaan*, *Madiban*, *Tumal*, *Yahar* and *Yihir* clans, as well as being another name for the *Midgan*.

Traditionally, the occupational groups could not own land or livestock and work opportunities were mainly limited to menial jobs or specific trades. Inter-marriage is not permitted or accepted between *sab* minorities and the "noble" nomadic clans. In respect of language, the *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* notes that the *Boon* language is nearly extinct.<sup>7</sup>

According to 1997 Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board information, people who are generally referred to as *boon* are those members of clans who, over a period of time,

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan, Mohammed Olad 2006, 'Marrying across Somalia's caste lines', *BBC News, Mogadishu*, 12 December <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6168807.stm> – Accessed 21 December 2006 – Attachment 1.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.8 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, 5 May, p.45 – Attachment 3.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, 5 May, p.45 – Attachment 3.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, I. M. 1998, 'Doing Violence to Ethnography: A Response to Catherine Besteman's "Representing Violence and 'Othering' Somalia"', *Cultural Anthropology*, February, Vol. 13, No. 1, p.104

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/656690.pdf?acceptTC=true> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 4.

<sup>6</sup> 'Boon: A language of Somalia' in Lewis, M. Paul (ed.) 2009, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed., Dallas, Texas [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bnl](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bnl) – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 5.

<sup>7</sup> 'Boon: A language of Somalia' in Lewis, M. Paul (ed.) 2009, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed., Dallas, Texas [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bnl](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bnl) – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 5.

were adopted into another clan and are seen to be members proper of that clan but remain despised because of their lowly or unknown origins.<sup>8</sup> Although in much of the inter-riverine area of Somalia<sup>9</sup> the *boon* are treated as a uniform category of people, they are in fact composed of a broad range of different groups.<sup>10</sup> *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* notes that the *boon* included the *Yibir, Midgaan, Madiban, Tumul, Yahar* and *Yihir* clans.<sup>11</sup> The UNHCR notes that the *Midgan* are also collectively referred to as *Mahdiban, Boon* or *Gaboye*, depending on the location.<sup>12</sup> In an Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) report the *Boon* were identified as a separate *sab* minority present in the south of Somalia.<sup>13</sup> In addition, a minority which may have an ethnic origin distinct from *samaal*, such as a slavery heritage, are called various derogatory names, such as *boon* (person of low status) or *addoon* (slave), by other Somali clans.<sup>14</sup>

The term *sab* refers collectively to “outcaste” groups (bondsmen) and is often used to refer to minority groups identified in occupational terms.<sup>15</sup> According to the Minority Rights Group (MRG) “outcaste” groups are now known as “occupational groups”.<sup>16</sup> The MRG states that occupational groups historically comprise three main minorities: the *Midgan* (now commonly known as *Gaboye, Madhiban* and *Musse Deriyo*), *Tumul* and *Yibro*.<sup>17</sup> These occupational groups are scattered throughout Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), Ethiopia and Djibouti.<sup>18</sup>

On the *sab* minority, ACCORD states that they are traditionally bondsmen of the pastoralist clan groups; relations with the Somali can only be through an *abbaan* (Somali

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<sup>8</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1997, SOM27623.E – *Somalia: Information on the “Boon” tribe*, 23 September – Attachment 6.

<sup>9</sup> The inter-riverine area is between the Juba and Shabelle rivers in southern Somalia. Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) p.13 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7. For a map which includes the Jubba and Shabelle rivers as well as the town of Afgooye, some 50kms. to the west of Mogdishu see: ‘Somalia’ 2002, Perry-Castaneda Map Collection, University of Texas [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/somalia\\_pol\\_2002.pdf](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/somalia_pol_2002.pdf) – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 8.

<sup>10</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1997, SOM27623.E – *Somalia: Information on the “Boon” tribe*, 23 September – Attachment 6.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Boon: A language of Somalia’ in Lewis, M. Paul (ed.) 2009, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed., Dallas, Texas [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bnl](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bnl) – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 5.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, 5 May, p.46 – Attachment 3.

<sup>13</sup> Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) pp.15-16 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>14</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, 5 May, p.45 – Attachment 3.

<sup>15</sup> Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), pp.13/footnote 16,14-15 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>16</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia’s forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.33/note 21 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>17</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia’s forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.8 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>18</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia’s forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.8 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

patron).<sup>19</sup> It notes that the *sab* keep their own affairs secret as a means of protection from the dominance of the Somali nomads.<sup>20</sup>

The MRG states that the occupational groups practice specific non-pastoralist occupations and trades which were essential to a nomadic economy.<sup>21</sup> The *Midgan* were originally hunters and leatherworkers with other ritual and craft tasks performed for the majorities. The *Tumal* were blacksmiths and the *Yibro*, ritual specialists.<sup>22</sup> The *boon* are said to be traditionally hunter-gatherers and leatherworkers.<sup>23</sup>

The occupational castes traditionally could not own cattle, horses or other “noble” possessions; their work opportunities were mainly limited to menial jobs or specific trades.<sup>24</sup> ACCORD also mentions that the *sab* are traditionally not allowed to own land or livestock, to participate in local businesses, market economy or politics.<sup>25</sup>

MRG reports that the few educated members of occupational groups, although they may work in any chosen field, mostly work in manual and service jobs.<sup>26</sup> Several members of the lower castes, such as the *Yahar*, *Midgan*, *Eyle* and *Boon*, have reportedly risen to prominent positions in society.<sup>27</sup> The MRG also noted that there are several well-known musicians and entertainers from the *Midgan* occupational group who have success and respect among the majority groups.<sup>28</sup>

According to ACCORD intermarriage is not permitted nor accepted between the *sab* minorities/sub-minorities and the “noble” nomadic clans. From the *sab* side there are no barriers to marriage with a nomadic clan member, however, the nomadic clan members would lose their protection by their own clan by marrying a *sab* person.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) p.15 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>20</sup> Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) p.15 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>21</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.12 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>22</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.8 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Boon: A language of Somalia’ in Lewis, M. Paul (ed.) 2009, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed., Dallas, Texas [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bnl](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bnl) – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 5.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, 5 May, p.46 – Attachment 3.

<sup>25</sup> Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) p.15 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.12 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>27</sup> Hassan, Mohammed Olad 2006, ‘Marrying across Somalia's caste lines’, *BBC News, Mogadishu*, 12 December <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6168807.stm> – Accessed 21 December 2006 – Attachment 1.

<sup>28</sup> Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November, p.12 <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 2.

<sup>29</sup> Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum

In respect of language, the *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* notes that the *Boon* language is nearly extinct.<sup>30</sup> Some groups, such as the *Eeyle*, *Madhibaan*, *Tumal* and *Yibir*, speak the Somali dialect of the clan to which they are attached, however, the *Midgan* and *Yibir* also have a special dialect that the major Somali clans do not understand.<sup>31</sup> ACCORD notes that the *sab* speak a language of their own although it is disappearing.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. Is a claim that a member of this caste would own a farm worth USD3000 in Afgoye consistent with what is known about the economic situation of the Boon?

Having regard to the situation of the *boon*, *sab* and occupational groups outlined in question 1, particularly in relation to their traditional occupations and trades and not being allowed to own land, as well as Somalia being one of the world's poorest countries, with an annual per capita Gross National Product (GNP) below \$110 in the early 2000s,<sup>33</sup> it appears, in general terms, inconsistent that a *Boon* would own a farm worth USD3,000 in Afgoye. Afgoye is located 50kms to the west of Mogdishu.<sup>34</sup>

### Attachments

1. Hassan, Mohammed Olad 2006, 'Marrying across Somalia's caste lines', *BBC News, Mogdishu*, 12 December <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/6168807.stm> – Accessed 21 December 2006. (CISNET Somalia CX167538)
2. Hill, Martin 2010, *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, Minority Rights Group International, November <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=4515> – Accessed 11 March 2011.
3. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, 5 May.
4. Lewis, I. M. 1998, 'Doing Violence to Ethnography: A Response to Catherine Besteman's "Representing Violence and 'Othering' Somalia"', *Cultural Anthropology*, February, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp.100-108 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/656690.pdf?acceptTC=true> – Accessed 14 March 2011.

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Research and Documentation (ACCORD) p.15 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>30</sup> 'Boon: A language of Somalia' in Lewis, M. Paul (ed.) 2009, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed., Dallas, Texas [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bnl](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bnl) – Accessed 11 March 2011 – Attachment 5.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2010, *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, 5 May, p.46 – Attachment 3.

<sup>32</sup> Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) p.15 <http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 7.

<sup>33</sup> Banks, Arthur S. et al. (eds.) 2010, 'Somalia', *Political Handbook of the World 2010*, CQ Press, Washington, D.C. [http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2010\\_Somalia&type=toc&num=167&action=print&time=1300080201844&](http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2010_Somalia&type=toc&num=167&action=print&time=1300080201844&) – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 9.

<sup>34</sup> 'Somalia' 2002, Perry-Castaneda Map Collection, University of Texas [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/somalia\\_pol\\_2002.pdf](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/somalia_pol_2002.pdf) – Accessed 14 March 2011 – Attachment 8.

5. 'Boon: A language of Somalia' in Lewis, M. Paul (ed.) 2009, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 16<sup>th</sup> ed., Dallas, Texas  
[http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=bnl](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=bnl) – Accessed 11 March 2011.
6. Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1997, *SOM27623.E – Somalia: Information on the "Boon" tribe*, 23 September. (REFINFO)
7. Yoshimura, Daisuke (ed.) 2009, *Clans in Somalia: Report on a Lecture by Joakim Gundel, COI Workshop Vienna, 15 May 2009 (Revised Edition)*, 15 December, Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD)  
<http://www.somraf.org/africa/Clans%20in%20Somalia.pdf> – Accessed 14 March 2011.
8. 'Somalia' 2002, Perry-Castaneda Map Collection, University of Texas  
[http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/somalia\\_pol\\_2002.pdf](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/somalia_pol_2002.pdf) – Accessed 14 March 2011.
9. Banks, Arthur S. et al. (eds.) 2010, 'Somalia', *Political Handbook of the World 2010*, CQ Press, Washington, D.C.  
[http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2010\\_Somalia&type=toc&num=167&action=print&time=1300080201844&](http://library.cqpress.com/phw/document.php?id=phw2010_Somalia&type=toc&num=167&action=print&time=1300080201844&) – Accessed 14 March 2011.