



## THE ARTA PEACE PROCESS

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October 21, 2015

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**Editor's note's :** *This is an excerpt from an upcoming book titled Somalia failing due to bad leadership by Asha Ahmed Abdalla, a political activist and former parliamentarian and Assistant Minister.*

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The Arta Peace Process brought together an amalgamation of people of mystifying characters and fashions' representing the multicultural mix of the global fashion trend. There were men clad in the modern Western wear known as the three-piece suit and fitting Italian shoes; some wore traditional Somali fashion such as the skirt-like *Macawis* common among local Somali men; others came in Pakistani and Indian outfits; while others came in with the long robes common among Arab men and the headgear known as *Egal*. The Bravanese hat common among Somali men and known as *Koofiya Barawaani* was the most visibly prominent head covering worn by Somali male delegates.

Some wore beach style sandals and open shoes, a fashion style that was not conducive to an international gathering of such nature regardless of Djibouti's scorching sun and extremely hot temperatures. Among the men, there were the bald-headed, the moustached, and the bearded and the clean-shaven; some had dyed their hair with Henna, a solution extracted from the leaves of the *Lawsonia inermis*, a tropical plant that leaves the head



and beards reddish in color. Then there were the toothless men, who laughed boisterously without feeling any sense of shame or trepidation. The loss of dental structures or the visibly annoying dental decays displayed by some of the men may have been the result of years of chewing *Catha edulis*, the very chewable cathonine-inducing herb that [I mentioned in my earlier posting](#). While the delegates attending the peace process numbered over a thousand, women representatives numbered only one-

hundred, outrageously the number one explicit sign of gender imbalance, male chauvinism and elevated male superiority that continues to cripple Somali politics to this day.

In terms of fashion, Somali women delegates came in exotic and exciting colors of all shapes and designs. While few women wore the newly-introduced Arabian Abaya, many wore African dresses and the so-called *Dirac*-a very soft, shoulder-to-heels length dress, and a see-me-through fashion that is commonly worn and shared by Somali and Yemeni women. The mix of colors worn by the women delegates resembled the seven colors of the rainbow: Violet, Indigo, Blue, Green, Yellow, Orange and Red (VIBGYOR). Few women wore Western-style fashion. Women delegates displayed good leadership qualities and delightful etiquettes, were more organized, accessible and politically approachable than the gullible, loquacious, nondescript, bickering, and inhospitable men folks who fought over a foreign-mediated, questionable political proposal devoid of light at the end of the tunnel and showing not a single, reliable sign of glimmer of hope.

The jostling for power by men through verbal talks continued for almost the entire day. Some held in hand their favorite walking sticks that included the *Bakoora*, *Hangool*, and *Saalimoow*-a mystically unique implement used to keep balance when walking and mainly carried by Sufis, spiritual leaders and men who have renounced the glitter and splendor of the world. *Saalimoow*, though identical to the two-pronged *Hangool*, prior to attaining spiritual maturity, undergoes thorough polishing and massaging, such that, by the time it comes out of the nurturing process, it resembles an industrial product that has just been released from the finishing line. It glitters and shines like a wooden tool that has undergone lavish vanish. Carriers of *Saalimoow* are highly regarded in their communities, and there is a popular belief that, if offended or insulted, they swear by their Saalimoows in such a manner that their imprecations can cause their victims to suffer deformities such as scoliosis, kyphosis and even lordosis and other debilitating mental retardations that can only be overturned or cured by beseeching the offended Saalimoow carrier.

News reaching me years later after the Arta Peace Process revealed startling information such as the deaths of several elderly men and women who suddenly departed the world bitterly angry because their preferred candidates, especially their sons and daughters, were not included in the list of their clan delegations or failed to garner political slots in the newly-created government. Some succumbed to old age and failing health, others kissed the dust or kicked the bucket without fulfilling their political desires. The Arta Peace Process affected many greedy and selfish individuals because they failed to accomplish their dubious agendas. However, due to political connections and their adeptness at the use of deceptions and manipulations, and their aggressive involvement in the world of dirty politics, some benefited materially from their irrational benefactors.

For sure, among the delegates, there were people of good character, including faithful men and women who were exceedingly resilient and very much determined to steer Somalia to the right course, and had they been selected or elected to take the lead, assumingly, they would have left remarkable and beneficial footprints worth emulating for generations. Some had come from Somalia or from nations bordering Somalia, while others had traveled long distances with the ultimate aim of injecting political wisdom to the peace process. They brought with them blessings and unblemished faith without expecting anything in return. They cherished to see Somalia return to the international community of nations.

They were patriotic Somalis whose hearts were filled with love and affection, and because of their hidden wisdom, loftiness of spirit, and political firmness, one would conclude that, even though they may not have successfully witnessed what they wanted most for Somalia, their final departure from the peace process left a lot to be desired. However, the political absurdities that tainted Somalia at the birth of the new Millennium, could not entertain their positive thoughts and processes. At that time, power belonged to the violators of human rights, bigoted rascals and remorseless human predators.

The surge in International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) attending the peace process and funded by foreign entities and powerful governments hijacked the intended goals of the conference. Since the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia has been at the mercy of these INGOs serving the interests of foreign governments. They poured money in to Somalia leaving the entire country become dependent on foreign food aid, money and other necessary and unnecessary resources. They provided public and private goods and services and then set the stage for unwarranted political medleys and political obscurantisms; these organizations infiltrated every conceivable Somali political, social, and economic undertakings, and to be honest with you reader, the Arta Peace Process of 2000, was nothing but INGO administered and engineered.

Fortunately, a day came when a section of the women delegates were calling each other names and arguing though I did not recognize any one of them nor know anyone by name. I got closer to them to try to understand the concept and topic that was the cause of their bickering. On this material day, I was exhausted and feeling excruciating headache. Offended by the unending senseless clanish connotations, I requested to be handed the microphone so I could contribute something worthy to the conference. After introducing myself, I prudently turned my attention to the bickering ladies. I reminded them of the state of affairs of the Somali nation, the general living conditions of our suffering Somali refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who were looking up to us for a change in their lives after the conclusion of the ongoing conference, and what role the lady delegates could play to bring an everlasting peace and good governance.

On the other hand, I reminded them of the imminent ten-year U.N. Trusteeship and its ramifications if nothing tangible came out of the ongoing conference. I reminded them to reflect on the significance of President Gelleh's previous appeals to the Somali people and how they could forge ahead and create an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. I admonished them to take the lead and steer the Somali nation to the right course, or else, leaving everything concerning Somalia to the male delegates could be a recipe for disaster and recreate a cycle of violence. Though the speech was long, almost an hour, at last I got support from some male and female listeners who clapped hands and made emotional gestures everytime I made a captivating point. I reminded them of my admiration for the Somali people and admonished them to have sense and sensibility, and get ready to dispose the few ruthless men and women lacking leadership qualities who have been holding Somalia hostage for many years.

When the Somali government collapsed in 1991, Somali traditional elders were less than 45, but as years progressed, a new phenomenon emerged turning the already fragile political, social, and economic achievements upside down. The same soldiers who were behind the collapse of the central government, elevated their positions of influence and rule and promoted themselves to traditional elders so they could have complete control of their clans and create jobs and other opportunities for

their large followers. Other more dangerous groups sprouted up in different localities of the Somali nation such as warlords and their henchmen, lords of money, good for nothing, never-existing-before newly coronated traditional chieftains, INGOs, local NGOs, and corrupt business magnates who did not pay any form of taxation and who flooded the country with expired or adulterated products, dealt in extortion and money laundering and had no regard for the rule of law. People of such characters preferred lawlessness and continuous anarchy to good governance, peace and stability.

With the exception of a few peace-loving nationalists, one could sense the magnitude of delegates driven by horrifying tribal euphoria. In our midst were monstrously petrifying men with blood-stained hands representing regions they forcefully captured from poor, disadvantaged, and unarmed civilians. They cultivated grabbed agricultural lands they forcefully evicted from ethnic minority groups and replaced the previously existing cash crops that was the mainstay economy of the poor displaced farmers with mind-altering drugs such as marijuana and other restricted agricultural produce so they could get hefty financial gains. These merciless and absurd men resided in palatial homes evicted from their original owners; their wives were adorned in bracelets of gold, emeralds, and Lapis lazuli that was either looted from other Somalis or bought with stolen money; and their children lived in peace and tranquility overseas and attended prestigious schools without any worry of tuition payments or other financial constraints.

To label such blood-suckers delegates, and offer them lavish reception was tantamount to hypocrisy. Since that has a beginning has an end, there was no iota of doubt among many hopeful Somalis, that a day would come when these men and their women partners would become powerless, and live in sorrow and regret for the rest of their lives; or else, one day, when Somalia returns to normalcy, they will be apprehended to face international legal justice and be sentenced to life imprisonment, without the possibility of parole. Even as heated debates continued within the confines of the conference hall, a few members of the delegation had left hurriedly to partake in raging wars in their areas of influence or control. Reserving slots in the Arta Peace Process for people who were engaging in killing sprees or allowing deputation in their absences, is not commensurate with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and contravenes all protocols of international laws.

As guests of the nation of Djibouti, some of these men dined on connoisseur of good food especially French gourmet, chewed on the softest and the most delicate branches of Qaad airlifted from Ethiopia, Yemen, and Kenya respectively, and reclined on modern, finely and intricately-designed Arabian sofas; they sipped sweetened tea containing cardamon, cinnamon, and cloves to energize their marqaan (intoxication) during Qaad chewing sessions while pompously designating themselves the celebrated and revered philosophical positions of the likes of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotles of ancient history. They barbequed on roasted goat ribs, ate fried camel, goat, or cattle liver for breakfast, and were served with Biryani and Pilau rice for lunch. At times they gormandized finely cooked Italian spaghetini pasta. They guzzled finely-distilled mountain water, drank juices of various kinds and colors, and shamelessly flossed their teeth in public while just south of the border where they came from, Somali children, women and the elderly died from acute hunger and minor preventable diseases.

The accomplishment of peace and stability was far from being achieved for war-torn Somalia. At that time, the crises in this war-ravaged nation was at an alarming and unprecedented level because of the involvement of so many state actors having various conflicting agendas. Brutal henchmen representing

the delegate warlords were wrecking havoc in Somalia, extorting money from innocent civilians while armed young men who were hired to kill, perilously continued with their onslaught leaving behind death and destruction. Such demoniacal actions by these gun toting young men, helped boost their subservience to their traditional leaders.

The soldiers of the warlords included the peripatetic, half-naked shoeless camel herders, who, in pursuit of territorial ambitions and clan superiority, left their hunger-stricken homesteads after making plightful strenuous journeys through forbidden terrains. Others included the previously glue-sniffing and haggardly homeless youth, and the jailbird who was released from an underground dungeon by sheer luck after the collapse of the central government. Eventually, their rise to power would be determined by their execution styles, how they brutally massacred perceived hostile clans and their leaders, and their precision and successes in assassination plots against individuals deemed hostile to their dreams and aspirations. They would be rewarded with looted money they called spoils of war, and with villas and cars; others were promoted to the ranks of generals or were given command in military structures. Some became regional or provincial commissioners and it was their responsibilities to collect taxation for the running of the newly-captured lands.

Burial ceremonies and the reciting of eulogies for those indiscriminately killed increased exponentially. Grave diggers minted money from the death of humans such that a day without a corpse meant economic stagnation for these men whose source of income revolved around the loss of a human life. Graveyards or cemeteries increased astronomically in size and numbers while the proliferation of small arms resulted in the increase of illegal gun ownership. With the absence of security and governance, drug abuse and drug peddling, human enslavement, child labor, child soldiers, and sex slaves became a common trend.

The same hostile traditional elders acted as judges and juries to negotiate with other clan elders to settle disputes. Strangely though, the same warlords and traditional leaders or elders took over more responsibilities and selected the Somali Members of Parliament. The selection of the MPs came with strings attached: Warlords and traditional elders attending the conference demanded money from potential parliamentary candidates. During the selection of MPs, the scene was reminiscent of a publicly and deliberately orchestrated Mafiosi Ponzi money laundering scheme. Buying of votes and money changing hands became the order of the day.

As the Arta Peace Process came to an end, traditional elders selected 245 parliamentarians. Then the parliamentarians unanimously selected Abdiqasim Salad Hassan as interim President with Professor Ali Khalif Galleydh becoming Prime Minister. The Arta Peace Process gave birth to the 4.5 formula where, in terms of power sharing, the four digit would be shared between the four most powerful clans (Darod, Hawiye, Dir and the Digil & Mirifle as one entity), and the point-five (.5) was reserved for all other minority tribes or clans. After the Arta Peace Process, which went down in history as the first round of the Somali peace process, the political influence and elevation of the warlords and traditional elders amounted to the creation of a new political precedent, especially the formulation of the January 25, 2003 Somali Reconciliation Conference which kicked off in Mbagathi, in Nairobi, Kenya.

Since the warlords and traditional leaders had become more powerful than ever before in terms of political lobbying, their influences in political engagements became a force to reckon with. They made

political agreements with political contenders or political heavyweights, fought for the interests of their clans, and in the end, lined up their pockets with dirty money-money that would consequently create unprecedented chaotic phenomenon. Foreign entities having political interests such as rich Arab sheikhdoms and INGOs serving the interests of Western Powers, played bigger roles in terms of dishing out money to their potential political contenders. These INGOs who collected huge sums of money from their foreign financiers with the pretext of serving the Somali people, gave out small percentages to the local NGOs, who in turn, and at the end of the day, dispensed a fraction of what they were awarded to aid the suffering Somali population.

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