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A ONE-CLAN ENCLAVE IN SOMALIA CANNOT BE A NATION: THE CASE AGAINST SOMALILAND'S RECOGNITION

I am the President of SSC-Khatumo, a federal member State of Somalia in northern Somalia (formerly British Somaliland Protectorate). This is the first time I have addressed the media since assuming office over a year and a half ago. What prompted me to do so is the need to draw the attention of the world to the conflict raging in our northern regions of Somalia (aka Somaliland) since 1991. It started when one clan declared the secession of the north from the rest of Somalia, taking advantage of the collapse of the Somali State in that year. What it did was treason. But having seized the arsenal of the disintegrated Somali national army based in their region, they forced the secession and their rule on all the other four defenseless unionist clans in northern Somalia. Their rationale is that they would be better off being the masters in their “Somaliland” than remain in Somalia and be equal to all others.

Needless to say, a resourceless one clan, only over a million in population, would not have been able on its own to maintain the secession for over 33 years. What helped them to do so was first the absence of government in Somalia, or an effective one to deal with them. But more than anything else, what has sustained their secession throughout this period is the material and moral support they have been getting from some western countries, above all former European colonial powers. Their reaction was different to previous secessions in Africa, as Biafra in Nigeria or Katanga in Congo. These countries officially profess to support Somalia's unity and territorial integrity but in practice undermine it for their own ends.

Somalia's unity has been the first casualty of this external support for secession. However, we, the unionist northern clans, have also suffered as secondary victims. The backing of the secessionist clan has enabled them to occupy our regions and commit continuous, widespread human rights violations and atrocities, including crimes against humanity. That is painful enough. But if any of these countries - or others - was to go beyond that threshold and recognize the secessionist clan - as one sovereign over all northern Somalia, and hence over us and other unionist clans – that would add fuel to the fire and therefore a red line for Somalia.

Let there be no doubt: any recognition of this clan would be entirely unacceptable on two fundamental grounds. First, because we would not accept to be forced to betray our oath of loyalty to our Union Act and to Somalia's constitution to which we are party to it and **sworn to it**. Second, because of our deep-seated well-founded fear that once this clan becomes recognized as a country independent of Somalia, it would be accountable to no one and hence would have no qualms to treat us worse than they hitherto did. For all these reasons, we would not bow meekly to foreign hatched treachery against our country and people. We would respond to these challenges with the same resolve and tenacity as we did with British colonial occupation for 21 years in the early 20th Century or resisted and finally defeated the secessionist clan's occupation of our regions.

My plea, therefore, is for no country to support the one-clan secession, let alone recognize it. Instead, we call on those backing the secessionist clan to respect Somalia's unity and territorial integrity in conformity with the Charters of the United Nations and the African Union.

It is imperative that the international community acts now to prevent further escalation of the conflict and to uphold Somalia's unity and territorial integrity. Recognizing the secessionist clan would be a grave injustice—not only to the Somali people as a whole but especially to the people of SSC-Khatumo, who have endured years of oppression under their rule. We urge countries to cease all forms of support to the secessionist clan and instead support efforts to promote peace and stability in Somalia. Failure to address this issue will not only perpetuate human rights violations but also risk destabilizing the entire region.

As the President of SSC-Khatumo state of Somalia, I implore the international community to stand with us in our fight for justice and unity.

The Colonial Somaliland(s) and their features

It is important to bear in mind some of the key features about the European conquest of Somali lands:

- That their subjects in the colonies were the same people Somalis who happen to be the most homogenous in Africa, having the same language, religion, culture and ethnicity.
- That it was because of that common Somali identity everywhere that each colonizer called their part Somaliland.
- That while the Somalis share common Somali identity, they also trace their ancestral genealogy to different clans.
- That the arbitrary European partition of the Somali homeland separated clans against their will into their different colonial territorial conquests. This was truer of British Somaliland whose heterogenous clans were closer to those outside the colony than to themselves.
- That no distinct polity existed anywhere in the Somaliland homeland in the Horn until independence.
- That, far from sharing political affiliation or aspirations, the clans in British Somaliland were perpetually at war and for that reason sought (with the exception of our people – the Dhulbahante) protection treaties from Britain against each other.
- That none of the European possessions of Somali lands constituted a political entity or nation based on the will of its people. They were simply temporary artificial colonial creations and possessions.
- And for British Somaliland, the binding colonial rule among the clans is gone - unless Britain was to reconquer northern Somaliland once again- which is, speaking crudely, over our dead bodies.

Absence of Political and National Conscience

Other than our people's Darwish liberation struggle (1901-1920) against the British occupation of our land, the absence of national political consciousness was the norm in the British colony for almost all the 80 years of British rule. Those protected clans were keener having British protection against other than turning against their protector. If Britain was to withdraw from the colony for one reason or other anytime in its 80 years colonial rule, there would have been no national glue to hold together. Each would have then reverted to their past separateness and there would have been no Somaliland. This debunks the secessionist's myth that there was a Somaliland nation at any time sharing what a nation is supposed to share.

Union with Italian Somalia

What eventually spawned political conciseness and acted as a catalyst for Pan-Somali nationalism and unity in the British colony, was resolution 289 (1V) of the UN General Assembly, adopted in November 1949, which called for the independence of Italian Somaliland within ten years and in this period under UN trusteeship.

But what spurred the momentum of the demand for independence and union with Italian Somaliland was again the announcement of the General Assembly in December 1959 that fixed 1st July 1960 as the date for the independence of Italian Somaliland. That created a demand among all the clans in the British colony for an immediate independence in order to unite with their brethren on the date of their independence. Responding to the demand of all the clans, the Protectorate Legislative Council adopted unanimously the following resolution on 6th April 1960 asking for immediate independence:

“THAT it is the opinion of this House that practical steps should be taken forthwith for the immediate unification of the Protectorate and Somalia, THAT prompt action is essential to achieve this most cherished aim, and can be fully justified by the special importance which popular feeling in this country attaches to its early achievement, THAT a bold and definite action be taken, and THAT the date of independence and unification with Somalia must be 1st July, 1960, the date when Somalia will attain its full freedom.”

Britain responded positively and the Protectorate became independent on 26 June 1960. And one day later, on 27 June 1960, the legislative council of independent Somaliland enacted the Act of Union. Most importantly, article 1(a) states:

“The State of Somaliland and the State of Somalia do hereby unite and shall forever remain united in a new, independent, democratic, unitary republic the name whereof shall be the Somali Republic”. And so, union took place as planned on 1st July 1960.

It is important to emphasize what underpins the independence and the Act of Union former British Somaliland, namely:

- That all the clans freely and collectively sought independence from Britain solely for the purpose of uniting with Italian Somaliland on the 1st of July 1960;

- That the Union Act represented the will of the people of all the clans of British Somaliland and therefore binds them to the union.
- That no clan forced another to demand the independence or unity with Italian Somaliland, and, conversely, no clan can force others to leave the union as the secessionist clan is doing to us.

Secession and One Clan Colonial-like Rule

The early euphoria following independence and union soon gave way to nostalgia and wish to a return to the times before the union, when Hargeisa and the clan were preeminent over others under favoring British rule. That wish was realized when the clan declared secession in 1991, taking advantage of the fall of the military regime and the ensuing collapse of the Somali State. Having seized the arsenal of the disintegrated Somali national army, they were able to occupy the rest of northern Somalia, calling it once again Somaliland, and imposed the secession on the four unionist clans at gun point. For us, their rule was back to colonial times and worse, this time by a fellow Somali clan.

It is not possible in this limited space to give a comprehensive account of the appalling oppression we suffered under their occupation. Suffice it to say, daily abuses of human rights—including disappearances, detentions without trial, targeted assassinations, and deliberate mass displacement—were, among other things, the order of the day. Add to this the massacres they committed in the Awdal region (1991) and at Kalshaale in the Buuhoodle district (2012).

For nine relentless months, our regional capital, Lasanod, was subjected to indiscriminate, systematic bombardment by Somaliland forces¹, reducing the city to rubble and obliterating its critical infrastructure². Hospitals, schools, mosques, and even the city's only water supply plant were deliberately targeted, leaving the population without essential services. The atrocities were staggering—724 innocent civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, were slaughtered, and thousands of others were maimed and wounded, many suffering life-altering injuries. Nearly 300,000 residents were forced to flee relentless shelling³, displaced into makeshift camps in drought-stricken regions or across the border into Ethiopia, where they faced starvation, disease, and unimaginable hardship. Among the countless atrocities, one of the most heart-wrenching was the obliteration of an entire family—a mother and her three young children—when their home was struck by a shell, wiping them from existence in an instant. Their deaths, like those of hundreds of others, were not collateral damage—they were intentional. Adding to this barbarity, Ms. Adna Aden, a former WHO official and an unapologetic secessionist, brazenly called for Lasanod to be razed to the ground, ensuring it would shelter no one—only to be rebuilt for their own settlers in a calculated act of ethnic cleansing.

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/somaliland-conflict/>

² <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15313.doc.htm>

³ <https://www.eurasiareview.com/21032023-conflict-in-lasanod-sool-somalia-somalilands-war-crimes-and-pathways-to-hold-it-accountable-analysis/>

These are not just statistics—they are the stories of innocent lives annihilated, homes turned to ash, and an entire community subjected to calculated, genocidal warfare. The perpetrators of these crimes against humanity must not be allowed to evade justice.

At last, the uprising that their harsh tyranny triggered defeated them in the end. And today, liberated SSC-Khatumo and its sisterly Makhir State in Sanaag – resided by the Warsangeli clan – is part of the federal system. The secessionist clan now controls only its enclave and the occupied Awdal region, which is expected to follow our example and reclaim its freedom. This significant demise of the secession does not mean they are giving it up. On the contrary, they are redoubling their efforts to recover liberated territories. If anything, the conflict goes on unabated.

What we suffer are two simultaneous pains. First, it is that from the clan's occupation and oppression, but secondly, and equally, it is the stand of the westerner supporters of the clan who have been all along turning a blind eye to what our nemesis were doing to us. Their recent attack on the multi-clan town of Erigabo, capital of Sanaag region, ethnic cleansing tens of thousands of our clan residents, looting and possessing their properties, did not draw a word of censure from Somalia's international partners. On the contrary, almost same time, western ambassadors went in their droves to Hargeisa to lavish praise on the enclave as beacon of peace and stability and paragon of democracy, all that for holding a long overdue election confined to the clan's enclave. We see all this support for the secession clan as fig leaf for their agenda to breakup Somalia.

WHY SOMALILAND SHOULD NOT BE RECOGNIZED.

1. Respect for the Charters of the UN and African Union

From the intranational perspective, “Somaliland” (if that means northern Somalia) should not be recognized by any country, least of all by permanent members of the UN Security Council. To do so would be a brazen attack on Somalia's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and so a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations which they are supposed to uphold and act as its guardian. It would also be flouting the Charter of the African Union. Beyond Somalia, its ripples would be felt in many fragile African countries also grappling with similar separatist clans. All in all, recognition of one separatist clan is an invitation to every country to do as they see fit and aggress against others' sovereignty and territorial integrity.

2. Does Not meet the Montevideo Convention for Recognition

Some in the West are advocating that the secessionist clan's enclave, as separate from the rest of Somaliland (northern Somalia) be recognized since, they claim, it fulfils the key conditions of the Montevideo Convention requirements, namely:

- a permanent population;
- a defined territory;
- government;
- capacity to enter relations with the other states.

Since the four unionist clans in northern Somaliland (aka Somaliland) do not want to secede from Somalia, nor consider themselves as part of what the secessionist call “Somaliland”, the invocation of the Convention can only apply to the rebel clan ‘enclave. On this understanding, the enclave does have a government but one only acceptable to its people and almost confined to its enclave (apart from occupied Awdal region). It has no permanent population since its mainly nomadic population are all the time on the move, crossing to other clans’ traditional lands in search of grazing and water. It has no defined territory since it has no demarcated border with unionist clans. It is not contiguous with southern Somalia, Djibouti and Ethiopia and hence cannot claim any borders with these neighbours. Finally, it has no capacity to enter into relations with others States as a renegade entity. Altogether, it fails to meet the requirements for a state set by the Montevideo Convention.

3. Longevity of the Secession Does Not Justify Recognition

Other western supporters call for the clan’s recognition on the ground that the clan has been “autonomous” from Somalia for over 30 years. That may be true, but such separation would not have lasted for long if Somalia has not been mired in civil war, or fighting another intransigent insurgents, Al Shabaab, or has not been under UN arms embargo until recently., That, and the material and covert political support they had some from the Western countries explain the longevity of the secession.

4. Supporting Terrorism

Somaliland has been implicated in supporting terrorism, particularly through its association with Al-Shabaab. Notably, several founders and leaders of Al-Shabaab have originated from Somaliland and belong to the Isaaq clan. Ahmed Abdi Godane, also known as Mukhtar Abu Zubair, hailed from the Arap subclan of the Isaaq and served as the Emir of Al-Shabaab until his death in 2014. Similarly, Ibrahim Haji Jama Mee'aad, known as Ibrahim al-Afghani, was from the Habr Awal subclan of the Isaaq and held a senior position within Al-Shabaab before his death in 2013.

Despite Al-Shabaab’s widespread terrorist activities across Somalia, the Isaaq-dominated region of Somaliland has been conspicuously spared from attacks for more than two decades since the group's formation. This glaring exemption suggests a deliberate arrangement rather than mere coincidence. Reports indicate that Somaliland actively supports Al-Shabaab operations in south-central Somalia while backing ISIS elements in the Galgala mountains of the northeastern Sanaag region. Additionally, key leaders of Al-Shabaab have family members residing in Burco and Hargeisa, further reinforcing Somaliland’s deep-rooted connections to terrorist networks.

Somaliland’s link to global extremist movements is further evidenced by the case of Hussein Faysal Ali Warabe, the son of Faysal Ali Warabe, leader of the Justice and Welfare Party (UCID) and a Finnish citizen. In 2013, Hussein traveled to Syria, where he fought alongside ISIS under the alias Abu Shuaib As-Somali. He was ultimately killed in an airstrike on December 29, 2017. Somaliland's role as a safe haven for violent extremists and its facilitation of terrorist activities in Somalia underscore its calculated strategy to destabilize the region for its own political gain.

Adding further insight into Somaliland's terrorist connections, Boqor Osman Aw Mohamoud, more commonly known as **Buurmadow**, is an outspoken Isaaq clan elder and an active presence in traditional and social media, where he advocates for Isaaq clan interests. In 2021, while attending a public Dir clan event in Mogadishu, he openly stated, "...there are two governments in Somalia. One is the Federal Government of Somalia, and the other is our government of Al-Shabaab, headed by leaders of my Isaaq subclan, which is part of the larger Dir clan."⁴ This statement, made by a respected traditional leader, further solidifies the undeniable connection between Somaliland and terrorist organizations.

Furthermore, Somaliland's connections to international terrorism extend beyond regional extremist networks. Individuals from Somaliland have been detained and subsequently released from the U.S. Guantanamo Bay detention facility. For instance, Mohamed Suleiman Barre, born in Burao, Somaliland, was held at Guantanamo Bay before his release in December 2009. Similarly, Ismael Arale, another individual from Somaliland, was transferred to Guantanamo in 2007 and released in 2009. These cases highlight Somaliland's concerning involvement in global terrorist activities.

Compounding this alarming reality, Somaliland's outgoing intelligence director recently admitted that foreign terrorist fighters enter Somalia through various coastal areas in Somaliland before dispersing to other regions. This revelation underscores Somaliland's role as a conduit for terrorism. Ironically, Somaliland separatists, in their pursuit of international recognition, frequently question their association with Somalia by citing its struggles with terrorism—while conveniently ignoring their own active role in fostering terrorism to destabilize the country.

In summary, Somaliland's unwavering support for terrorism is evident through its historical and ongoing collaboration with Al-Shabaab and other extremist groups. Its calculated exemption from terrorist attacks, its harboring of terrorist families, and its role in facilitating global terrorist movements all point to a clear and troubling agenda. The involvement of individuals from Somaliland in international terrorism reinforces the urgent need for a firm stance against Somaliland's actions. Both its secessionist ambitions and its support for terrorism must be unequivocally condemned and not rewarded.

5. The Overriding Perspective

From our perspective, as northern unionist clans and the wider Somalia, recognition of the one clan calling itself Somaliland would amount to legitimizing the secession of the clan, and implicitly giving the stamp of approval to what the clan did to us- trampling over all our inalienable human rights, in particular our fundamental right to remain part of Somalia in line with the binding Union Act of 1960 and Somalia's constitution.

The current yet unrecognized clan in "Somaliland", though technically part of Somalia, has all the same shown no qualms to subject us to degrading and inhumane treatments since they declared the secession. It is able to do so unfettered because it feels it is unaccountable to no one and under

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=264358729058947>

no one's control, be it the Somali government or the international community. Many in the clan believe, rightly or wrongly, that they have tacit support for what they do to us, otherwise they would have been told off. As such, we, as their victims, are under no illusion that the clan, once recognized, would act as if they have carte blanche to treat us whatever way they deem fit. It would be naïve to expect us to meekly submit to such existential threat and destiny. Needless to say, would have more justification to resist and defeat the treachery of our nemesis.

Finally let me be clear: recognition of one clan in northern Somalia would be to add fuel to the fire and transform the already ongoing conflict between the rebel clan and the rest of Somalia, (north and south) into an open conflagration. Such challenge to the Somali nation will draw in the national government, sympathetic federal member States, and kindred clans inside Somalia and across borders in the Horn of Africa. Last but not least, it would also suck in Al Shabaab and other violent extremists under the justification that they too are responding to call for the defense of the motherland. What would unite all Somalis for the first time for a long while, irrespective of their clan, region or religious stripes, is what they would all see a call to defend Somalia, its unity and territorial integrity against foreign conspiracy. It need not come to this dire prospects if common sense and common interest prevail.

CONCLUSION

I conclude my article with a plea for peace, justice and stability in northern Somalia which are what matters most for us. Those aspirations are being undermined by two parties colluding hand in hand: first is the secessionist clan secondly their western backers who are providing the supports sustaining the secession. Our plea therefore is for these countries to stop such support and instead respect Somalia's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity in conformity with the Charters of the United Nations and the African Union. It is not enough to give lip service to these Charters. Action counts more for the sake of peace and stability.

We call upon these nations to act responsibly and play their rightful role in de-escalating this conflict before it spirals further. Recognizing a one-clan secession would not only deepen division within Somalia but also set a reckless precedent—one that would encourage every discontented faction to break away, plunging the nation into chaos. Such a betrayal of Somalia's sovereignty and unity would open Pandora's box, with devastating consequences for the region and beyond.

We demand an end to all support for this illegitimate secession and urge the international community to stand on the side of peace, the rule-based international system, and stability. The future of Somalia must be one of unity, not fragmentation. SSC-Khatumo remains resolute and ready to work alongside all nations and partners committed to upholding Somalia's territorial integrity, ensuring lasting peace, and preventing further suffering of our people. Now is the time to stand for sovereign rights and international law—not against them.



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