

Key points:

- Governments of Ireland & the United Kingdom to take the lead in promoting a new, people-centred international engagement with Somalia
- Sustainable peace in Somalia must be built on an inclusive process that involves community representatives
- It is essential that the culture of impunity that the international community has contributed to in the country be combated

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Somalia: The Missing Peace

Issue at a glance:

Somalia is one of the world's most neglected and long-running crises. For 18 years the country has experienced repeated breakdowns of social, economic and political structures. Clan violence, social upheaval and displacement are widespread.

In the last two years alone, violence in Somalia has claimed the lives of more than 16,000 civilians and displaced at least 870,000.¹ A staggering 3.2 million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance. This figure represents a 77% increase over the past twelve months, and accounts for approximately 43% of Somalia's total population.² Over one million people have been displaced within the country, and ongoing violence both prevents their return home and obstructs attempts to provide humanitarian relief.

Recent History:

An understanding of the troubled country's recent history is critical if the mistakes of the past are not to be repeated. Somalia has been without an effective central government since President Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991. Over the past 18 years the country has experienced chronic lawlessness, extreme violence, clan warfare, and an almost total breakdown of its social, economic and political structures. Somalia's internal civil strife has been exacerbated by the country's increasing geo-political importance in the global 'war on terror', and in regional political

dynamics. The humanitarian situation is now catastrophic, while the level of insecurity and the unpredictable nature of the conflict make it one of the most dangerous place for aid agencies to operate in the world.³

The road to catastrophe has been marked by near constant violence and ineffective international engagement. In the months following the fall of President Barre, the loose coalition of armed opposition groups and militias opposing his rule disintegrated. Rival factions clashed as they fought to fill the vacuum created by the erstwhile president's departure. Armed conflict raged until a United Nations (UN) brokered ceasefire in March 1992 brought a (temporary) degree of security and paved the way for the arrival of United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) troops in July of the same year.⁴ The destruction of the country as a result of the war and the severe drought that occurred at the same time had left food aid as the only liquid asset. Fighting over food supplies became intense during the course of 1992,⁵ and the resultant humanitarian disaster led to the arrival of UN mandated peace enforcement troops in December of that year.

United States led United Task Force (UNITAF)⁶ troops were to be in the country only a matter of weeks before large scale confrontations took place with Somali militias. In spite of an internationally sponsored reconciliation conference and a peace agreement signed by warring factions in Ethiopia in

¹ Human Rights Watch, 'So Much to Fear: War Crimes and the Devastation of Somalia', HRW, December 2008

² United Nations, 'OCHA Fact Sheet - October 2008', Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Activities Somalia 09/10/2008

³ "Somalia now world's most dangerous place for aid workers, says UN official", UN News Centre, 24 April, 2007.

⁴ Duyvesteyn, I. - *Clausewitz and African War: Politics and Strategy in Liberia and Somalia*, Routledge, New York, 2004 pg. 47

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ UNITAF's mandate was to protect the delivery of humanitarian aid. The force handed over operations to the more broadly mandated UNOSOM II on 4 May 1993.

March 1993, fighting continued and the humanitarian situation worsened. Attacks on and hostility toward foreign troops (including the much documented 'Black Hawk Down' incident of October 1993) led to the eventual withdrawal of UNOSOM in March 1995, and the effective surrender of Somalia to warring factions at the expense of ordinary civilians.

In all, there have been 13 failed attempts since 1991 at brokering peace and re-establishing functioning governance structures in Somalia. The 14th attempt resulted in the formation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. Subject to endemic internal power struggles, the TFG has failed to exert any degree of effective control over much of the country, and has struggled to rebuild the structures of governance. In real terms its writ has never extended much beyond the southern town of Baidoa, and it remains largely under siege in the rest of the country.⁷

In mid-2006 an opposition group, the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) took control of Mogadishu and other parts of the South/Central region of Somalia. This control was to last only until December of the same year when Ethiopian forces, responding to a request for assistance from the TFG, defeated the UIC in a lightning military offensive. However, Ethiopia's military victory dismantled only the most visible parts of the UIC: the regional administrative authority in the South/Central region of Somalia. Other armed elements, including the more radical al Shabaab grouping, emerged largely intact and dispersed throughout the country.⁸ Since then, Somalia has been thrown even deeper into this complex and multifaceted insurgency.

The appalling human rights abuses and complete disregard for civilian life shown in counter-terrorist operations have galvanised support for, and radicalised, extremist elements, the very groups such military action seeks to suppress. However, all parties to the conflict have been accused of serious human rights violations. Human Rights Watch alleges that armed groups in the country have subjected Somali citizens to murder, rape, assault, and looting.⁹

Over the past year, the level of violence has further increased. All parties to the conflict have disregarded the protected status of civilians in conflict.¹⁰ Indiscriminate shelling of entire Mogadishu neighbourhoods, where insurgents are hidden amongst civilian communities, arbitrary killing of innocent civilians, and other human rights violations are commonplace. Piracy off the coast of Somalia is further evidence of the breakdown of social, economic and political structures in country. A symptom of the wider problem, and an issue which pales into insignificance in comparison with the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the country.

Following the December 2006 intervention by Ethiopian troops, the African Union mandated the deployment of peacekeeping troops under an African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM). However, the mission has been plagued with difficulties caused by a lack of resources and a very difficult operating environment. Only four battalions of Ugandan and Burundian troops have arrived in Somalia, totalling 3,400 of the mandated 8,000.¹¹ Access is limited, and in the absence of any peace to keep, their activities have only stretched to confidence building patrols and the provision of escorts to visitors and VIPs. Additionally, troops from both countries have suffered attacks from militia groups in Mogadishu. All this has meant that the mission has had little impact on improving the security situation for ordinary Somalis, while the cycle of violence continues to spiral out of control.

The final withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Mogadishu in January of this year, a process which began in November 2008, has created yet further uncertainty in this conflict riven country. It remains to be seen whether there will be a genuine engagement from the international community and an easing of the suffering of ordinary Somalis.

Humanitarian Situation

A web of interconnected problems, including increased violence and insecurity, recurrent drought and rising food prices are once more pushing Somalia to the brink of humanitarian

⁷ International Crisis Group, 'Somalia: To move beyond the failed state', Africa Report No. 147, ICG, December 2008

⁸ International Crisis Group, 'Somalia: The Tough Part is Ahead', Africa Briefing No. 45, ICG, January 2007

⁹ Human Rights Watch, 'So Much to Fear: War Crimes and the Devastation of Somalia', HRW, December 2008

¹⁰ Geneva Conventions, *Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*. Geneva, 12 August 1949

¹¹ United Nations, 'Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia', United Nations Security Council, 17/11/2008

catastrophe. There are now 3.2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in the country. Continuing violence, which at certain points during 2008 was forcing an additional 20,000 people from their homes each month, is severely limiting access for national and international aid agencies. A press statement by the UN Food Security Analysis Unit (FSAU) and partners released on 5 February reported that malnutrition rates in Somalia remain well above emergency thresholds of 15%, while in some parts of the South/Central region of Somalia, malnutrition rates are above 20%.¹² Approximately 200,000 children under the age of five years are acutely malnourished, including 60,000 who are severely malnourished and, in the absence of appropriate specialist care, are at an increased risk of death. In the 2009 Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) document, the Somalia Programme is seeking \$544,263,112 in food aid alone.¹³

Further hampering aid efforts is the fact that aid workers are increasingly the victims of assassination and kidnapping and are now seen as legitimate targets by armed groups. In the first 9 months of 2008, at least 24 humanitarian workers were killed while carrying out their work.¹⁴ The Somalia Programme's CAP for 2009 reports that "[B]y 27 October 2008, 30 aid-related workers had been killed, with another ten kidnapped and still in captivity. Access to parts of the South/Central region of Somalia, where the vast majority of humanitarian needs are found, became increasingly difficult due to conflict and the targeting and abduction of humanitarian workers....[P]iracy threatened the supply chain of humanitarian assistance and required the deployment of military naval escorts. This sometimes resulted in the humanitarian response occurring where it could, rather than where needs were highest".¹⁵

In addition, displacement in Somalia is putting huge strains on host communities, with over 80% of newly displaced people concentrated in regions that already faced severe problems in terms of food access, collapsing livelihoods, and deteriorating nutritional status.¹⁶

Trócaire's Response

Trócaire has provided humanitarian and livelihood assistance in the Gedo region, in south-west Somalia since 1992.¹⁷ Programme activities include the provision of primary health care and education, and nutritional support for children through a school feeding intervention. Trócaire is the lead agency in a consortium with other international NGOs which seeks to improve the access to and quality of essential primary health care services in the region. Trócaire and its consortium partners have worked closely with local health structures to rehabilitate over 50 health posts, provide technical support and training to health staff and to ensure essential vaccinations for women and children in the area.

Trócaire complements this work with peace-building, education (we are supporting 15 primary schools with over 3,000 children) and livelihood support (restocking of goat herds affected by drought in recent years). This work is critical to ensure that as well as focussing on basic needs through our humanitarian assistance work, longer-term development goals in Somalia are also addressed. Significantly, **Somali civil society groups** and local communities play a pivotal role in the shaping and implementation of participatory peace-building and service provision.

More recently, in response to massive displacement out of Mogadishu, Trócaire, in partnership with local and international organisations, is providing emergency public health and livelihoods support in the heavily affected Lower Shabelle region to both displaced people and host communities. The intervention provides access to safe drinking water and sanitation for over 21,000 internally displaced people within 26 settlements to reduce the risk of water-borne diseases. A cash-for-work project for the most vulnerable households aims at increasing capacity to meet immediate food needs.

¹² Food Security Analysis Unit Somalia, 'Press Release: Widespread Humanitarian Crisis Affecting 3.2 Million People or 43% of the Total Population', FSAU, 05/02/2009

¹³ The 2009 Consolidated Appeal for Somalia seeks a total of **\$918,844,549** for 213 projects from 14 UN agencies, 32 INGOs and 39 NNGOs; therefore, food aid alone represents 59% of the total ask.

¹⁴ '52 NGOs highlight devastating crisis in Somalia', Joint Press Release, 09/10/2008 <http://www.trocaire.org/en/news/5567/81/52-NGOs-highlight-devastating-crisis-in-Somalia>

¹⁵ United Nations, 'Somalia: Consolidated Appeal', UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2009

¹⁶ Trócaire briefing of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, 04/06/2008, transcript available at: <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/DDebate.aspx?F=FOJ20080604.XML&Ex=All&Page=2>

¹⁷ Gedo Region is situated in south western Somalia. It borders Kenya and Ethiopia in the west and north and Bakool, Bay and Middle Juba Regions in the east and south. With an estimated population of 380,000, Gedo is divided into seven administrative districts. The population is mainly pastoral with agriculture practised along the Juba and Dawa river valleys. The Gedo region has historically been one of most underdeveloped areas of Somalia, with minimal infrastructure, a weak economic base and only very basic health and education services available to the communities. Gedo is chronically insecure due to on-going inter and intra-clan conflicts largely related to control of resources. This insecurity has increased sharply as a result of the current, country-wide conflict.

The Way Forward?

2009 may well be a pivotal year for Somalia. The UN humanitarian coordinator has described the next twelve months as ‘make or break’ for the country.¹⁸

The proposed commitment of additional peacekeeping resources to Somalia is unlikely to impact significantly on security and the protection of civilians in the absence of a peace process that is truly inclusive and reflective of the desires and aspirations of ordinary Somalis. The internationally sponsored peace talks in Djibouti – which to date have had little success or impact on the ground – may be starting to yield results. The broadening of political representation in Somalia’s fledgling parliament and the appointment of a moderate Islamist leader as the TFG’s new president may contribute to political, and in turn security, stabilisation. It is critical that international engagement champion the interests of ordinary Somalis and demand accountability rather than simply protecting political investments made toward state-building.

Diplomatic engagement to date has failed to arrest violent conflict, to address the needs of ordinary Somalis, and has not reflected grassroots political will. The international community’s political response to the situation in Somalia has been characterised as ‘inadequate’, and the resources committed to dealing with maritime piracy will not impact on the suffering of Somalis significantly as they address a symptom, rather than the problem itself: lack of an inclusive, equitable, and comprehensive political solution to the conflict.¹⁹ Sustainable peace in Somalia must be built on **an inclusive process that involves community representatives**, rather than a top down approach involving individuals who do not have broad grassroots legitimacy.

It is also critical that financial and material resources pledged by the international community to bolster Somali state institutions not be given without clear commitments regarding international humanitarian and human rights law. Violations of these commitments should result in funding being frozen. It is essential that the culture of impunity that the international community has contributed to in the country be combated.

Trócaire is therefore calling on the Governments of Ireland & the United Kingdom to take the lead in promoting a new, people-centred international engagement with Somalia. Such engagement should champion the protection of civilians, promote sustainable peace, and to help facilitate humanitarian access. There should be greater attention drawn to the particular dangers facing women in conflict situations (as articulated in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325), and promotion of the key role both men and women can play in promoting peace in their communities. Also key is the adherence to international humanitarian & human rights law – a vital building block in attaining a secure and stable peace.

The Irish Government has a particular niche in playing the role of ‘honest broker’ in European Union engagement on Somalia. In practical terms the appointment of a Peace Advocate dedicated to Somalia would greatly enhance this process.

Given the political weight afforded by a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, the UK Government also has a key role to play in furthering peace in Somalia. The creation of a Peace Advocate role within the Foreign & Commonwealth Office mandated to champion the people of Somalia would ensure that the crisis is given the attention it deserves.

Trócaire is calling on Ireland’s Minister for Foreign Affairs & the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office to:

- **Appoint a Peace Advocate to Somalia**
- **Ensure that European Union diplomatic and financial engagement on Somalia employs a grassroots, people centred approach that is accountable, sustainable, and inclusive**
- **Use all channels available – diplomatic, political and public – to ensure that all actors to the conflict meet their obligations under International Humanitarian & Human Rights Law**

¹⁸ United Nations, ‘Press Conference by United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia’, UN Dept. of Public Information, 03/12/2008

¹⁹ ‘Somalia: To move beyond the failed state’, Africa Report No. 147, International Crisis Group.