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Freedom in the World - Somalia (2006)

Polity: No polity available

Political Rights: 6

Civil Liberties: 7

Status: Not Free

Population:
8,600,000

GNI/Capita: na

Life Expectancy:
na

Religious Groups:
Sunni Muslim ,
majority

Ethnic Groups:
Somali (85
percent), other
[including Bantu
and Arab] (15
percent)

Capital: Mogadishu

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Overview

Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in June 2005 moved from Kenya, where it had been created eight months earlier, to Somalia. However, divisions quickly widened as the president and the prime minister moved to a town north of Mogadishu, citing security concerns. The United Nations expressed concern over violations of Somalia's arms embargo and said that tensions between the country's leaders were preventing federal institutions from functioning.

Somalia, a Horn of Africa nation, gained independence in July 1960 with the union of British Somaliland and territories to the south that had been an Italian colony. Other ethnic Somali-inhabited lands are now part of Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya. General Siad Barre seized power in 1969 and increasingly employed divisive clan politics to maintain power. While flood, drought, and famine racked the nation, the struggle to topple Barre caused civil war, starvation, banditry, and brutality since the late 1980s. When Barre was deposed in January 1991, power was claimed and contested by heavily armed guerrilla movements and militias divided by traditional ethnic and clan loyalties.

Extensive television coverage of famine and civil strife that took approximately 300,000 lives in 1991 and 1992 prompted a U.S.-led international (UN) intervention. The armed humanitarian mission in late 1992 quelled clan combat long enough to stop the famine but ended in urban guerrilla warfare against Somali militias. The last international forces withdrew in March 1995 after the combined casualty count reached into the thousands. Approximately 100 peacekeepers, including 18 U.S. soldiers, were killed. The \$4 billion UN intervention effort had little lasting impact.

The Djibouti-hosted Conference for National Peace and Reconciliation in Somalia adopted a charter in 2000 for a three-year transition, established the Transitional National Government (TNG), and selected a 245-member Transitional National Assembly (TNA). The TNA elected Abdiqassim Salad Hassan as transitional president in August 2000. The TNG and more than 20 rival groups signed a ceasefire in October 2002 in Kenya as a first step toward establishing a federal system of government. However, over the next year, the talks deadlocked when some faction leaders dropped out to form their own parallel talks in Mogadishu.

The faltering peace process was revitalized at a national reconciliation conference in Nairobi in 2004. Under the guidance of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a group of seven Horn of Africa countries acting as mediators,

Somali delegates concluded the contentious process of forming a 275-member parliament, the Transitional Federal Assembly (TFA), in August 2004 as part of the new transitional government. In October 2004, legislators elected Abdullahi Yusuf, an Ethiopian-backed career soldier and leader of the breakaway enclave of Puntland, to a five-year term as president of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The choice of Yusuf as president was divisive and controversial, according to the Brussels-based think tank International Crisis Group (ICG), which called Yusuf the "archetypal Somali warlord."

Despite substantial progress in realizing the goals of the peace talks, intermittent clashes continued to erupt between various rival factions throughout the country, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians. In August 2004, the new TFG, consisting of the 275-member TFA, replaced the TNG. The country's four largest clans were each given 61 seats, and an alliance of minority clans took the remaining 31.

Under the Somali National Charter adopted in 2003 and amended in early 2004, Yusuf appointed Ali Muhammad Gedi, a prominent member of the political arm of the United Somali Congress, as his prime minister in November 2004. Under the interim charter, Gedi will lead a five-year central government. That government faces the daunting tasks of enforcing a ceasefire among warring clan-based militias, forming a new police force and army, and rebuilding the economic infrastructure.

In June 2005, some members of the newly formed TFG moved to Mogadishu from Kenya. However, other TFG members, including the president and prime minister, moved to the town of Jowhar, about 55 miles north of the capital, citing security concerns. Divided both literally and figuratively, with some members seated in Mogadishu and others in Jowhar, the government has barely been able to function. At issue are

where the government should be located and whether a peacekeeping force should be deployed to the country.

In October, UN secretary-general Kofi Annan said that friction among Somalia's leaders was preventing the country's federal institutions from functioning effectively. He expressed concern that the political tensions had prompted "military preparations" on both sides. The United Nations said that there was an increase in the flow of arms and ammunition into Somalia in violation of the arms embargo imposed 13 years ago. The government has denied violating the embargo. In November, IGAD called for the lifting of the arms embargo, saying that the transitional government would then be able to establish security institutions, and also recommended the deployment of military observers.

Several key cabinet ministers and legislators strongly oppose any moves to include soldiers from countries bordering Somalia in the peacekeeping force proposed by President Yusuf. The proposed mandate of the force would include "peace enforcement," and it would be seen as partisan, according to the ICG. It said that for peacekeepers to become embroiled in the Somali conflict would undermine both the prospects for peace and the development of the African Union's peacekeeping capacity. No deployment will succeed, it said, without broad consensus on the force. Many Somalis do not believe that frontline states would be impartial participants in a peacekeeping force.

The region of Somaliland has exercised de facto independence from Somalia since May 1991, although it has failed to gain international recognition. A clan conference led to a peace accord among its clan factions in 1997, establishing a presidency and bicameral parliament with proportional clan representation. Somaliland is far more cohesive than the rest of the country, although reports of some human rights abuses persist. A referendum on independence and a new constitution were approved in Somaliland in May 2001, opening the way for a multiparty system. Dahir Riyale Kahin of the ruling Unity of Democrats party emerged as the winner of historic Somaliland presidential elections in 2003. International observers declared the voting to be free and fair. The United Nations has praised efforts by Somaliland to establish democracy and stability. The ruling Unity of Democrats won 33 of the 82 seats in parliamentary elections in October 2005, and the opposition Kulmiye (Solidarity) and Justice and Welfare parties took 28 and 21 seats, respectively. Nearly 250 candidates contested the polls. International observers said the elections fell short of several international standards but were conducted in a generally peaceful, free, and fair manner.

The region of Puntland established a regional government in 1998, with a presidency and a single-chamber quasi legislature known as the Council of Elders. Political parties are banned. The traditional elders chose Abdullahi Yusuf, now the new president of Somalia, as the region's first president for a three-year term. After Jama Ali Jama was elected to replace him in 2001, Yusuf refused to relinquish power, claiming that he was fighting terrorism. Yusuf seized power in 2002, reportedly with the help of Ethiopian forces. With the election of Yusuf as the transitional president of Somalia, the Puntland parliament elected General Adde Musse as president in January 2004.

Somalia is a poor country, where most people survive as pastoralists or subsistence farmers. A report by the United Nations in August 2005 said nearly a million people in Somalia were in need of immediate humanitarian assistance as a result of drought and conflict. More than a decade of conflict and a persistent drought have devastated the country's agricultural and livestock production.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Somalis cannot change their government democratically. The 2000 elections marked the first time Somalis had an opportunity to choose their government on a somewhat national basis since 1969. Some 3,000 representatives of civic and religious organizations, women's groups, and clans came together under the auspices of the IGAD, following Djibouti-hosted peace talks, to elect a transitional parliament in August 2000. In August 2004, the new 275-member parliament, the TFA, came into existence. Abdullahi Yusuf, leader of the breakaway enclave of Puntland, was elected to a five-year term as president.

Somalia was ranked 144 out of 159 countries surveyed by Transparency International in its 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Somalia's charter provides for press freedom, but journalists face threats and harassment. The country has about 20 privately owned newspapers, a dozen radio and television stations, and several internet websites. Most of the independent newspapers or newsletters that circulate in Mogadishu are linked to a specific faction. Although journalists face harassment, most receive the protection of the clan supporting their publication. The former transitional government launched its first radio station, Radio Mogadishu, in 2001. Press freedom is very limited in the country's two self-declared autonomous regions of Somaliland and Puntland.

The Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in September that Somali journalists were finding it more difficult to work. RSF expressed concern over alleged threats against the National Union of Somali Journalists by "warlords, Islamic courts, and businessmen." The killing of two reporters in Somalia in 2005 highlighted the dangers of practicing journalism in the country. In February, unknown gunmen shot dead BBC producer Kate Peyton outside her hotel in Mogadishu. In June, Duniya Muhyadin, a journalist for the

privately owned radio station HornAfrik, was shot dead in Mogadishu as she covered a demonstration. Another HornAfrik journalist, Abdallah Nurdin Ahmad, was shot and wounded by an unknown gunman in a separate incident.

Somalia is an Islamic state, and religious freedom is not guaranteed. The Sunni majority often views non-Sunni Muslims with suspicion. Members of the small Christian community face societal harassment if they proclaim their religion, but a number of international Christian aid groups operate without hindrance. Academic freedom faces some restrictions similar to those imposed on the media, and there is no organized higher education system in most of the country.

Several indigenous and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in Somalia with varying degrees of latitude. A number of international aid organizations, women's groups, and local human rights groups operate in the country. The charter provides workers with the right to form unions and assemble freely, but civil war and factional fighting led to the dissolution of the single labor confederation, the government-controlled General Federation of Somali Trade Unions. Wages are established largely by ad hoc bartering and the influence of clan affiliation.

Somalia's charter provides for an independent judiciary, although a formal judicial system has ceased to exist. In Mogadishu, Sharia (Islamic law) courts have been effective in bringing a semblance of law and order to the city. Efforts at judicial reform are proceeding slowly. The Sharia courts in Mogadishu are gradually coming under the control of the TFG. Most of the courts are aligned with various subclans. Prison conditions are harsh in some areas, but improvements are under way.

Human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killing, rape, torture, beating, and arbitrary detention by Somalia's various armed factions, remain a problem. Many violations are linked to banditry. The United Nations said in August that the government's failure to establish its authority in Somalia was partly behind the problem of continued rights abuses. Unidentified assailants shot and killed a prominent Somali peace activist in Mogadishu in July. Abdulkadir Yahya Ali was the co-founder and director of the Center for Research and Dialogue, which is affiliated with the War-torn Societies Project International.

Although more than 80 percent of Somalis share a common ethnic heritage, religion, and nomadic-influenced culture, discrimination is widespread. Clans exclude one another from participation in social and political life. Minority clans are harassed, intimidated, and abused by armed gunmen.

Travel throughout Somalia is restricted by poor security. Clans largely control business activity.

Women's groups were instrumental in galvanizing support for Somalia's peace process. The country's new charter prohibits sexual discrimination, but women experience intense discrimination under customary practices and variants of Sharia. UN agencies and NGOs are working to raise awareness about the health dangers of female genital mutilation. Various armed factions have recruited children into their militias.