

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Freedom in the World - ↓ Somalia (2008)

Capital:
Mogadishu

Population:
9,100,000

Political Rights Score: 7
Civil Liberties Score: 7
Status: Not Free

Trend Arrow

Somalia received a downward trend arrow as a result of increased restrictions on media freedom, an upsurge in corruption, and the return of widespread chaos and violence following the ouster of the Islamic Courts Union in early 2007.

Overview

War continued to ravage Somalia in 2007, as insurgents—some of them supported by Eritrea—battled Ethiopian and Ethiopian-backed transitional government forces in the streets of Mogadishu. Thousands of civilians were killed, hundreds of thousands fled their homes, and all sides in the conflict were accused of committing war crimes. Meanwhile, corruption increased and media outlets suffered amid the total breakdown of law and order.

Somalia gained independence in 1960 as an amalgam of former British and Italian colonies populated largely by ethnic Somalis. A 1969 coup by an army general, Siad Barre, led to two decades of instability, brutal civil strife, and the manipulation of clan loyalties for political purposes. Somalia was also plagued by natural disasters including floods, drought, and famine. When Barre's government was toppled in 1991, the clan-based militias began fighting one another, and Somalia has lacked an effective central government ever since.

Extensive television coverage of famine and civil strife that took some 300,000 lives in 1991 and 1992 prompted a UN humanitarian mission led by U.S. forces. The intervention soon deteriorated into urban guerrilla warfare with the Somali militias, and over 100 UN peacekeepers, including 18 U.S. soldiers, were killed. The \$4 billion operation was eventually terminated, and international forces had departed by March 1995. Civil conflict continued over the subsequent decade with varying degrees of intensity.

In 2000, many of the faction leaders agreed to participate in a Transitional National Government established at the Conference for National Peace and Reconciliation, hosted by neighboring Djibouti. The conference charter called for a three-year transitional government with a 245-seat Transitional National Assembly. In August, the Assembly elected Abdiqassim Salad Hassan as transitional president. The government and more than 20 rival factions signed a ceasefire in Kenya in October 2002, an initial step toward establishing a lasting federal system. Serious fissures in the process developed over the next year, as some factions launched their own power-sharing negotiations in Mogadishu.

The political process was revitalized in 2004 at another conference in Kenya, which

resulted in the establishment of a 275-seat parliament, the Transitional Federal Assembly (TFA), and a new Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The country's four largest clans were each given 61 TFA seats, and an alliance of minor clans took the remaining 31. The members in October elected controversial Ethiopian-backed warlord Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed to serve a five-year term as the first transitional president. Yusuf had previously been the leader of the breakaway region of Puntland. A month later, he appointed Ali Muhammad Gedi as his prime minister.

Despite the political process, clashes between rival factions continued and hundreds of civilians were killed. The TFG moved from its base in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2005 and established itself by early 2006 in Baidoa, a town about 155 miles north of Mogadishu.

In 2006, a fierce battle for control of Mogadishu broke out between an alliance of warlords and the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a local Islamist group. Critics of the ICU, including Ethiopia and the United States, accused it of links to the terrorist network al-Qaeda. The ICU alleged that the United States was violating a UN weapons embargo by supplying arms to the anti-ICU warlords. By June 2006, the ICU had taken control of Mogadishu and much of southern Somalia, gaining a popular following for its promise to deliver law and order. The TFG in Baidoa feared that it would lose any claims on control of the country and called for the intervention of East African peacekeeping troops, a move bitterly opposed by the ICU.

Meanwhile, the ICU had taken control of the southern city of Kismayo in September 2006 and appeared poised to move on the small territory left to the TFG. By November, peace talks between the TFG and ICU had broken down. Ethiopia said it was obliged to repel the ICU threat, and in December Ethiopian troops were openly deployed in Somalia. A major Ethiopian and TFG offensive ensued late that month, and by year's end the ICU had been driven from Mogadishu and forced to retreat to the extreme south of the country.

While some international observers hailed the expulsion of the ICU as a new beginning, the following year proved much bloodier for Somalia, as insurgent groups backed by Eritrea—Ethiopia's bitter rival in the region—began fighting the TFG and Ethiopian troops. In March and April 2007, combat intensified in Mogadishu, and about 400,000 people fled from their homes. According to human rights groups, all sides in the conflict were guilty of war crimes, including attacks on civilian populations. Fighting flared again in November, as UN officials declared that the situation was currently Africa's worst humanitarian crisis. Also that month, the TFA approved Nur Adde Hassan Hussein as the new prime minister; the increasingly unpopular Gedi had resigned weeks earlier.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Somalia is not an electoral democracy. The Somali state has in many respects ceased to exist. Technically, the country is governed by an internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG), led by President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed and Prime Minister Nur Adde Hassan Hussein. A 275-member Transitional Federal Assembly convened in 2004 and elected Yusuf to a five-year term as president. However, the TFG's actual control over the country, including the capital—is minimal. Over the course of 2007, Mogadishu was the scene of intense fighting between various groups of Islamist and clan-based insurgents,

some of them supported by Eritrea, and the Ethiopian-backed TFG. The country has no effective political parties, and the political process is driven largely by clan loyalty.

Since May 1991, the northwestern region of Somaliland, roughly comprising the territory of the former British colony, has functioned with considerable stability as a de facto independent state, though it has not received international recognition. The region of Puntland, in the northeastern corner of the country, has also been relatively autonomous since 1998. However, unlike Somaliland, it has not sought full independence, declaring only a temporary secession until Somalia is stabilized.

Because of mounting civil unrest and the breakdown of the state, corruption in Somalia is rampant. The situation grew worse in 2007 as the modicum of law and order established by the ICU in 2006 broke down after its ouster. Somalia was ranked 179 in Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index, tying with Burma at the bottom of the list of 180 countries.

Somalia's charter provides for press freedom, but in practice the media operate under highly dangerous conditions, and the year 2007 proved particularly deadly for Somali journalists. Photocopied dailies and low-grade radio stations have proliferated in Mogadishu and elsewhere since 1991. However, a number of independent outlets ceased operations in 2007, and many of those that remain operate largely as public information sources for the factions they support in the fighting. According to the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ), which represents journalists in southern Somalia, the TFG shut down five private radio stations in Mogadishu as well as one in Baidoa in 2007. In December the TFA approved a media code that was criticized by press freedom groups for vague and severe restrictions, and it had yet to be signed into law at year's end. However, given the TFG's tenuous control over the country, the implementation of any such law would be uncertain. Also in 2007, the mayor of Mogadishu, former warlord Mohamed Omar Habeb, sought to restrict the media with a decree forbidding journalists from reporting on any TFG or Ethiopian military operations.

The NUSOJ reported that eight journalists were assassinated, 53 were arrested, and more than 55 fled the country during the year. Among those killed was Mahad Ahmed Elmi, head of the popular Mogadishu radio station Capital Voice, and two journalists from Horn Afrik radio, including the station's founder. Foreign journalists rarely venture into central and southern Somalia, and when they do it is at great risk. In December 2007 a French journalist was kidnapped in Puntland but later released. The Mogadishu bureau of Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television was closed by the TFG in March.

Somalia has a rich internet presence, maintained predominantly by the Somali diaspora in Europe, North America, and the Gulf states. Internet and mobile telephone services are widely available in large cities, and users enjoy a fast and inexpensive connection. Nevertheless, owing to pervasive poverty, and the internal displacement of Somalis from Mogadishu and elsewhere, the domestic population has limited access to these resources.

Nearly all Somalis are Sunni Muslims, but there is a very small Christian community. It is difficult to claim that the religious freedom has improved markedly since the ICU's ouster in late 2006 and early 2007, but the TFG is not as overtly Islamist as the ICU.

The educational system is severely degraded due to the breakdown of the state. As a result, the TFG has had little reason to restrict academic freedom to date.

Freedom of assembly is not respected amid the ongoing violence, and the largely informal economy is inhospitable to organized labor. According to New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW), the conflict has also had implications for local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other international agencies. The group found that aid workers have been targeted by the warring parties, and that a local human rights group was shuttered during 2007. HRW also reported that the TFG has prevented humanitarian organizations, including the UN World Food Program, from doing their work, affecting the food supply for tens of thousands of people.

There is no judicial system functioning effectively at the national level. In many regions, local authorities administer a mix of Sharia (Islamic law) and traditional Somali forms of justice and reconciliation. The courts of the ICU interpreted Sharia with varying degrees of severity, but some judges have been accused of supporting a radical Islamist style of leadership akin to al-Qaeda or Afghanistan's Taliban.

Over the course of 2007, the human rights situation in Somalia—which was dismal before the current phase of hostilities—grew even worse. Several international watchdog organizations reported on mass violations of human rights by the Ethiopian military, the TFG, and insurgent groups. According to HRW, thousands of people were killed in indiscriminate attacks on civilian population centers, and hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes.

Most Somalis share the same ethnicity and religion, but clan divisions have long fueled violence in the country. The larger, more powerful clans continue to dominate political life and are able to use their strength to harass the weaker clans.

Women in Somalia face a great deal of discrimination. Female genital mutilation is still practiced in some form on nearly all Somali girls. In its recent report on the conflict in Somalia, HRW recounted cases of women who had been subjected to sexual violence in the course of the war.