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U.S. Committee for Refugees World Refugee Survey 2002 – Somalia

June 2002

Some 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia lived in about two dozen countries at the end of 2001, including some 160,000 in Kenya, at least 67,000 in Yemen, about 30,000 in Ethiopia, 20,000 in Djibouti, some 5,000 in South Africa, about 4,000 in Egypt, more than 3,000 in Tanzania, about 3,000 in Libya, nearly 1,000 in Uganda, some 1,000 in Eritrea, about 1,000 in Zambia, and nearly 8,000 new Somali asylum seekers in various European countries and the United States.

An estimated 400,000 Somalis were internally displaced.

Approximately 40,000 Somali refugees repatriated during the year, primarily to northern Somalia.

Pre-2001 Events

Civil war and factional fighting have besieged Somalia for the past decade, causing more than a half-million deaths. Conditions were particularly severe during 1991-92, when war and massive population upheaval produced famine.

In 1992, during the worst turmoil, an estimated 800,000 Somalis were refugees in neighboring countries, and 2 million were internally displaced. Large numbers gradually returned to their home areas during 1992-98, amid continued violence and population upheavals.

Political leaders in northern Somalia maintained their autonomy from the rest of the country. Leaders in the northwest, largely of the Issaq clan, continued to rule their territory of "Somaliland," formed in 1991.

Leaders in the northeast, dominated by the Darod clan, maintained control of their territory of "Puntland," formed in 1998. While no foreign government officially recognized either autonomous region, both regions – particularly Somaliland – pursued modest reconstruction efforts and population reintegration.

In 2000, a fragile new national government formed in Mogadishu, the Somali capital, for the first time in a decade. The new governing body, known as the Transitional National Government (TNG), immediately encountered armed opposition from local warlords, some of whom continued to control large parts of Mogadishu, as well as significant territory outside the capital.

Violence in 2001

Security conditions varied enormously throughout Somalia during the year. While the TNG struggled to exert its authority and ward off attacks by armed factions, anarchy and violence worsened, compounding persistent drought and food insecurity throughout southern and central Somalia. Puntland suffered an internal power struggle and its worst violence in six years. Somaliland remained relatively peaceful, although it, too, experienced isolated demonstrations and political violence in mid-

2001.

Clan-related attacks and factional rivalries caused hundreds of fatalities and casualties, mostly civilian. Mogadishu and other areas of southern Somalia continued to experience high levels of both criminal and political violence. Gunfights between newly deployed TNG security forces and various warlords, primarily in Mogadishu and the town of Jilib, in southern Middle Juba region, left hundreds dead and wounded. In June, peace negotiations between the TNG and opposing factions produced no results.

Humanitarian agencies also continued to experience targeted attacks. In March, nine expatriate relief workers and one Somali national were kidnapped and 12 Somalis were killed during an attack on a Médecins Sans Frontières compound in Mogadishu. Factions held the relief workers hostage for one week before releasing them unharmed.

In late-September, the United States charged that a Somalia-based extremist group had links with the terrorist network of Osama Bin Laden.

The 300-mile (500 km) Somalia border with Kenya officially reopened in November after a three-month closure – the second closure by Kenyan authorities in two years – aimed at curbing the flow of small arms into Kenya.

"The security situation in Somalia remains tenuous," the UN Secretary General reported in October.

Uprooted Somalis

An upsurge in factional conflict and the worst drought in seven years displaced an estimated 25,000 people from their homes during the year. Continued instability impeded hopes of widespread reintegration, and an estimated 400,000 Somalis remained internally displaced at year's end.

The total number of new and previously displaced Somalis remained uncertain because poor security continued to hamper thorough assessments in most regions of Somalia. Recurring violence in central and southern Somalia during 2001 pushed about 25,000 Somalis into Kenya, other neighboring countries, Europe, and the United States. Thousands of other Somali's left their homes in central and southern rural areas because of crop failures.

In March, approximately 15,000 Somalis fled to northeastern Kenya to escape inter-clan fighting, which reportedly killed more than 80 combatants and 50 civilians, and injured hundreds more in the town of Bula Hawa, in Somalia's southern Gedo region.

In May, at least 80 refugees fleeing political violence in Puntland died at sea when their boat capsized in the Gulf of Aden.

In September, clashes between rival armed factions killed more than 200 people and uprooted hundreds of families in the towns of Jilib and Buale, Middle Juba region.

Somalis affected by drought in the southwest Somalia regions of Gedo, Bay, and Bakool migrated toward water sources and urban areas earlier than normal in 2001. Thousands remained displaced and continued to search for alternative means of survival at year's end. In the Bari region

of Puntland, poor security impeded humanitarian needs assessments and relief deliveries to drought-displaced populations.

More than 200,000 displaced persons continued to live in some 200 Mogadishu-area camps and squatter settlements at year's end. Thousands of others remained internally displaced in relatively peaceful Somaliland, including newly uprooted civilians who had fled violence in southern Somalia.

Repatriation of Somali Refugees

Some 40,000 Somali refugees repatriated during 2001, primarily from Ethiopia and Kenya. Of these, and estimated 25,000 voluntarily repatriated from Ethiopia. Although the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) officially reported that nearly 55,000 refugees returned home from Ethiopia, the actual number of returnees was likely less than half that many because of massive fraud in Somali refugee camps in Ethiopia that inflated refugee and repatriation lists. Most refugees repatriated to the Somaliland cities of Hargeisa, Boorama, and Burao in UNHCR-organized convoys.

Some 14,000 Somali refugees who fled to Mandera, Kenya in March voluntarily repatriated to southern Somalia in June. About 4,000 of them returned with assistance from UNHCR.

Some 120 Somali refugees repatriated from Yemen to Mogadishu on a UNHCR-chartered plane in April. Many returnees on the plane claimed that they were forced to repatriate involuntarily, although UNHCR called the allegations baseless. An additional 350 refugees repatriated from Yemen to Mogadishu during the remainder of 2001.

Relatively few Somali refugees repatriated from Djibouti because of political tensions between Djibouti and Somaliland and the border's closure for part of the year.

Most returnees during 2001 received plastic sheeting, kitchen items, blankets, and a small cash transportation allowance to reach their homes from border transit centers. They also received reintegration grants from UNHCR and a nine-month food supply or cash equivalent from the World Food Program (WFP).

Tens of thousands of Somali refugees who have gradually repatriated to Somaliland in recent years continued to struggle to rebuild their lives amid bleak economic prospects and inadequate social services in 2001. Reintegration programs remained small, under funded, and difficult to sustain.

In July, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office donated \$1.3 million to bolster UNHCR's poorly funded repatriation program.

Following a site visit to Somaliland during 2001, the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), issued a report, *Welcome Home to Nothing: Refugees Repatriate to a Forgotten Somaliland*, which examined the repatriation of refugees to northern Somalia.

The USCR report noted that Somaliland remained a devastated and war-scarred country with needs well beyond refugee repatriation programs, and warned that most returnee areas lacked adequate housing, health-care services, water, and sanitation systems. USCR urged international

donors and humanitarian agencies to undertake fundamental rehabilitation and development programs in all Somaliland communities.

Humanitarian Conditions

A decade of civil war, massive population displacement, and renewed internal violence have worsened deplorable living conditions in an already impoverished country suffering annual cycles of droughts and floods. "Much of Somalia remains in a chronic state of emergency," a UN report asserted in November.

Serious food shortages loomed during 2001 because of widespread crop failures caused by poor rainfall and pest infestations. In August, TNG officials pleaded for 60,000 tons of food to assist "Somalis at risk of starving." Somalia's nationwide malnutrition rate of 23 percent was one of the highest in the world, and malnutrition rates as high as 40 percent were recorded in areas with high concentrations of displaced families.

In overcrowded returnee resettlement areas in Hargeisa, the Somaliland capital, 15 percent of repatriated children suffered from malnutrition, many of whom were "likely to die," according to a UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) report. An estimated 800,000 Somalis – more than 10 percent of the population – required some 70,000 tons of emergency food assistance.

UNICEF appealed to donor nations for \$23 million to support emergency operations in Somalia during 2001. By mid-July, donors had provided less than \$2 million, forcing UNICEF and other humanitarian agencies to eliminate or dramatically reduce health, education, water, and environmental sanitation programs for women, children, and repatriated refugees. By October, donor nations had provided WFP less than 40 percent of the funds needed for relief and recovery programs.

A sharp economic downturn in mid-2001 further deepened food problems. The entire country – particularly Somaliland – continued to suffer economic consequences from a ban on Somali livestock imposed in 2000 by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states for fear of diseased herds. The ban has cost the Somali economy \$120 million, according to one estimate.

In November, the United States froze the assets of Somalia's largest money transfer center because of its alleged links to international terrorist activities. The U.S. action curtailed remittances from the Somali diaspora, which normally contributed some \$500 million annually to the Somali economy. The financial restrictions put "Somalia on the precipice of potential and total economic collapse," the UN humanitarian coordinator for Somalia declared in December.