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Immigration and  
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration  
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

## Somalia: The Tunni ethnic group, including regions where its members reside; treatment by society, authorities and Al Shabaab; relationship with other clans (2012-December 2014) [SOM105011.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

### 1. Clan Families

Sources report that there are four "noble" [also referred to as "majority" (MRG Oct. 2010, 7)] clan families in Somalia: Darod, Hawiye, Dir, and Isaaq (EASO Aug. 2014, 43; Denmark 2000, 5). These "noble" clan families claim to be descended from a common ancestor named Samaale [Somali, Samaal] (Denmark 2000, 56; EASO Aug. 2014, 43), a purported descendent of the Prophet Mohammed (ibid.).

The Digil-Mirifle/Rahanweyn is another clan family that is traced back to a different purported descendent of the Prophet Mohammed named Sab [Saab] (ibid., 44; Abbink 2009, 10).

In the 2009 working paper "The Total Somali Clan Genealogy," Dr. Jan Abbink, an anthropologist at the African Studies Centre (ASC) at Leiden University who researches the history and cultures of the Horn of Africa (Leiden University n.d.), writes that Saab groups such as the Digil-Mirifle and Rahanweyn who speak Af-May in the south are perceived as "different from the 'real Somali'," (those who are descended from Samaale) (Abbink 2009, 36). However, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) states in a 2010 report on minorities in Somalia that the Digil-Mirifle/Rahanweyn are an agriculturalist clan federation "now considered equivalent in status" to the majority pastoralist clans [Darod, Hawiye, Dir (which MRG indicates includes the Isaaq)] (MRG Oct. 2010, 7). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

### 2. Tunni [Tuni, Tueni] Ethnic Group

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of MRG indicated that, according to a Mogadishu-based NGO that MRG interviewed, the Tunni are an "independent minor clan" (MRG 9 Dec. 2014). Other sources describe the Tunni as a "minority" (Senior Professor 1 Dec. 2014), or as belonging to a minority group (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 17, 20).

Sources report that the Tunni are part of the Digil clan family (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014; Abbink 2009, 10-11; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 20). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an independent researcher of the cultural and intellectual history of southern Somalia, who has published works on Banadir culture [1] and a book on the history of southern Somalia in the 19th and 20th centuries, explained that

the Digil are divided into seven clan groups: Tunni (including the Gibil'ad of Brava), Geledi, Begedi, Garre, Jiiddo [Jiddo], Dabarre, and Shan 'Alemod (Independent Researcher Dec. 9 2014).

However, in a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a senior professor of African history at Rutgers University who specializes in Eastern and Southern Africa, including Somalia, explained that the Tunni are "not related to other groups in the region of the Lower Shabelle [the administrative region where the Tunni reside]" and are not part of the Digil-Mirifle/Rahanweyn clan "in a formal sense" [of calling on them for clan protection] but the Tunni have a "negotiated relationship" with the Digil related to sharing access to land and resources (Senior Professor 1 Dec. 2014). He explained that

The principle of association for the Digil-Mirifle is by settlement in the sense that they are the first-born clan around which others have settled. The Rahanweyn/Digil-Mirifle territory is contiguous with the Tunni, so it is sometimes possible that some Tunni might come under the Chieftaincy of the Digil-Mirifle, but it is not a formal part of this clan family. Depending on the territory and the season, the Tunni may have a negotiated relationship with the Digil-Mirifle. The group that controls the areas where it is rainy, for example, will negotiate deals between clans to allow access to the territory, but this is not a formal clan relationship ... (ibid.)

According to sources, the Tunni are grouped into five divisions [called "gamas" (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014) or Shan Gamas meaning "five shields" (Lewis 2008, 11)]: Da'farad [Daffarat], Hajuwe [Hajun, Hayo, Hajuwa Bidda Wali, Hafuwa], Dakhtira [Diktire, Daqtiro], Goigal [Goygal], and Werile [Wirri, Warile Hatimy] (MRG 9 Dec. 2014; Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014;). The Independent Researcher notes that the majority of Tunni clan leadership is drawn from the Arweri sub-clan [of the Da'farad (Abbink 2009, 14)] (ibid. 12 Dec. 2014). Abbink's "The Total Somali Clan Genealogy" provides a list of the Tunni sub-clans within the five gamas and is attached to this Response.

Sources report that there are three categories of Tunni, including "town" or urban Tunni who live near Brava [Barawe]; "country" Tunni who live outside Brava and are associated with the Digil clan; and "Tunni Torre" (UK Oct. 2011, 8; Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014). According to the Independent Researcher, in addition to the five gamas, the Tunni also include the "Gibil'ad [Gibil Cad], of Brava [2]" and the "Tunni Torre" (Dec. 9 2014).

## 2.1 Urban Tunni

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, an associate professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania, who has served as the Chair of the university's African Studies Center and whose research is specialized in eastern and southern Africa, including Somalia, stated that "there is a difference between urban Tunnis who are Bravanese [Rer Brava or Barawani] and rural Tunnis who are not Bravanese" (Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014). The Independent Researcher indicated that urban Tunni, who live mainly in Brava, speak Bravanese Chimini, and "share the same cultural traits and occupations as the inhabitants of the urban towns of the southern coast of Somalia, such as Brava" (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014). Sources report that the inhabitants of Brava are speakers of Chimini, a Kiswahili dialect (Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014; MRG Oct. 2010, 11), as well as the Tunni sub-clan dialect of Af-Maymay (ibid.).

According to the Independent Researcher, Tunni located in Brava include the five gamas, and two clans of the Gibil'ad, who are collectively referred to as the "clan of seven," and who make up the "majority" of Brava's population (12 Dec. 2014). A 2014 report of the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), an agency of the European Union that acts as "a centre of expertise on asylum" and assists member states in meeting "European and international obligations to give protection to people in need" (n.d.), reports that a "part of the Barawani [Bravanese] [see note 1] considers itself as belonging to the Tunni clan of the Digil-Mirifle clan family" (EASO Aug. 2014, 46). The Associate Professor indicated that Tunni that are Bravanese (or part of the Rer Brava) are a Benadiri group, but "may not refer to themselves as 'Benadiri' [see note 1] as they may not want to be perceived as different due to their Arab ancestry" (26 Nov. 2014). He indicated that most of this population was targeted by invading clans and lost their social and economic status in the 1990s, leading many to flee to Kenya (ibid.).

According to the Senior Professor, there may also be individual families from the Tunni clan living in the city of Merka [in the Lower Shabelle] (1 Dec. 2014).

## 2.2 Rural Tunni

According to the Independent Researcher, the Tunni inhabit the town of Brava as well as a rural area surrounding the town of Brava (9 Dec. 2014). The same source stated that Tunni residing in rural areas are "agro-pastoral" (9 Dec. 2014). The Senior Professor similarly indicated that most Tunni live in the hinterlands above Brava and practice "a mixed economy of farming and herdsmanhip" (1 Dec. 2014). Likewise, the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, LandInfo, in a 2011 report on Somalia languages and dialects, reports that speakers of the Tunni dialects are "nomads" who herd cattle, sheep and goats, but not camels, and are located in the districts of Dhinsor, Brava, and Jilib (Norway 22 July 2011, 16).

The Associate Professor indicated that rural Tunni from outside Brava are "more distinctly 'Somali'" [in appearance] and will be likely to identify themselves as "Tunni" (26 Nov. 2014).

According to the LandInfo report, the Tunni dialect is part of the larger Digil dialect group and is influenced by the May [Maay] dialect (Norway 22 July 2011, 16). According to Abbink, the Af-May language is a variety of Somali "not readily understood elsewhere" such as in northern and eastern Somalia (Abbink 2009, 36). The LandInfo report states that there are two Tunni dialects: Af-Tunni Defaraat and Af-Tunni Torre (Norway 22 July 2011, 16).

According to the Independent Researcher, Tunni are distinguished by their Af-Tunni language, which is a "Somali Maay-related language with a unique sentence structure" (9 Dec. 2014). The Associate Professor indicated that the "difference between urban Tunnis and rural Tunnis is linguistic, with the rural Tunnis speaking the Tunni language, which is not comprehensible to the majority of urban Tunnis, who speak Chimini" (26 Nov. 2014).

### 2.3 Tunni Torre Sub-clan

Sources report that the Tunni Torre [Tunni Tor] are a Tunni sub-clan, and are not part of the five Tunni gamas (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014; Lewis 2008, 11). Sources variously describe the Tunni Torre as:

- "considered to have quasi-outcast status by the Tunni" (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014);
- "'a negroid group federated to the Tunni of Brava as vassals'" (UK Oct. 2011, 8);
- a "subordinate" division of the Tunni largely composed of "ex-slaves" (Lewis 2008, 11); and
- Tunni "of 'low' status" who are "associated with being descended from former 'slaves' or vassals of the Tunni;" Tunni Torre were historically contracted out by the Tunni to work as agriculturalists (Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014)

The MRG representative indicated that, according to a Mogadishu-based NGO that it interviewed, the Tunni Torre groups" include Gamele, Kumow, Garander, Megan, and Minyare" (MRG 9 Dec. 2014). According to the 2013 report by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Interior, the Tunni Torre are located around [Brava] in the coastal area of southern Somalia (Austria 2013, 67).

## 3. Relationships with Other Clans, including Treatment

A 2011 Operational Guidance Note on Somalia, published by the UK Border Agency, indicates that Tunni who live near Brava are "perceived as Bravanese" and they are "treated as such" (UK Oct. 2011, 8). Similarly, the Associate Professor indicated that "town Tunni" living in Brava have intermarried with the Bravanese, are treated similarly to the Bravanese, and "continue to be systematically harassed, persecuted, and discriminated against on the basis of their lack of protection provided by clan affiliations with major clans" (26 Nov. 2014). For further and corroborating information on the treatment of the Rer Brava [Bravanese] people, including locations and treatment by other clans please refer to Response to Information Request SOM104240.

According to the Independent Researcher, the Tunni have "historically worked in harmony" with the Digil, based on common interests in protecting trade routes connecting southern Ethiopia with Brava; an area "predominantly inhabited by the Digil clans" (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014). The Senior Professor noted that generally, the inter-riverine people [between the Shabelle and Juba rivers], such as the Tunni, "have been perceived and treated as 'second class' and have not enjoyed much political power at the national level" (1 Dec. 2014). The Associate Professor explained that the use of the term "minority" in Somali clan context is "complex," and that Digil-Mirifle/Rahanweyn descendants of the Saab, including the Tunni, are perceived to be associated with "occupational 'low-caste' categories of specialized skilled persons that did not own livestock (the marker of nobility)" (Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014). Similarly, the Senior Professor explained that, the Tunni are considered to be a "quasi-Somali" group (Senior Professor 1 Dec. 2014).

Sources report that the lands inhabited by the Tunni are a fertile and desirable region of the Lower Shabelle which has made them the target of invading clans (Independent Researcher 12 Dec. 2014; Senior Professor 1 Dec. 2014). The Independent Researcher indicated that the Tunni have "consistently been the target of both indiscriminate and targeted killings by the armed militia of the Hawiye and Darod clans" (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014). According to information from the MRG representative, the Hawiye clan, a "majority clan," are "mostly" the cause of violence against Tunni (MRG 9 Dec. 2014). The Senior Professor stated that during the 1990s, the Tunni were subjected to invasions by the Habar-Gidir, whom he described as "a war-like pastoral people that are a sub-clan of the Hawiye;" and the Tunni "remain vulnerable to attacks from invading clans today," as these clans are attempting to secure the fertile territory where the Tunni reside (1 Dec. 2014).

The Independent Researcher indicated that the Tunni has also experienced conflict with the Shikhal [Sheekhal], a Hawiye sub-clan that has attempted to expand into Tunni territories or disrupt trade (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014). Tunni have also been in conflict with neighbouring Bimal [Bimaal] clans over pasture and water resources (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014). Similarly, the Senior Professor indicated that the area between the port city of Kismayo and Brava, where some Tunni are located, is "disputed between the Habar-Gidir [Hawiye] "invaders" (to the East), the Marehan [Darod] (to the West), and the local indigenous clans, which includes the Tunni, the Bimaal, and the Geledi" (1 Dec. 2014).

### 3.1 Treatment by Al Shabaab

Sources report that Al Shabaab controls "large swaths" of Somalia (Freedom House 2014; Reuters 5 Oct. 2014). According to sources, Al Shabaab has been in control of Brava since approximately 2006 (ibid.; Independent Researcher 12 Dec. 2014). Reuters reports that Al Shabaab used the port-city of Brava to import arms and fighters "from abroad" (Reuters 5 Oct. 2014). The International Crisis Group described the Lower Shabelle, including Brava, Lower and Middle Juba as "Al-Shabaab safe havens and strongholds" (26 June 2014, 2). The Senior Professor indicated that Al Shabaab is "most active" in areas where the Tunni reside, and are in control of geographic areas inhabited by the Tunni (1 Dec. 2014). Similarly, the Independent Researcher indicated that Al Shabaab presently controls the regions inhabited by the Digil clans, including the Tunni (12 Dec. 2014).

The Associate Professor indicated that, according to him, "Al Shabaab punishes perceived criminals severely but are not known for rape and indiscriminate violence against civilians" and the reason that those individuals remaining in Brava are "easily targeted" is due to their lack of clan protection (26 Nov. 2014). According to the Independent Researcher, Al Shabaab "have not usually targeted clans or sub-clans per se;" however, he explained that they will regard those that do not support their ideology as an "enemy" (9 Dec. 2014). Similarly, the Senior Professor indicated that "the targeting of Tunni by Al Shabaab is situational in the sense that those [who] do not accept Al Shabaab are marked for harassment" (Senior Professor 1 Dec. 2014).

#### 3.1.1 Sufism and Al Shabaab

According to the Senior Professor, like all Somali communities, some Tunni groups have elements of Sufism, but while "some Tunnis, like religious elders, may claim to be Sufis", the "majority of regular Tunnis are not Sufi" (ibid.). In contrast, according to the Independent Researcher, the Tunni, particularly those in Brava, have "traditionally practiced Sufism" (9 Dec. 2014). Similarly, the Associate Professor indicated that "most" Somalis in the central region, including the Tunni (if they are practicing) are likely to be followers of the Qadiriya Sufi order of Islam, which is "widespread" and continues to be practiced (Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014).

The same source reports that Al Shabaab is against Sufism and restricts Sufi practices in areas under its control (ibid.). The Independent Researcher explained that when Al Shabaab took over Brava [in 2006], "they targeted the residents of the town in a major campaign to cleanse the town and its environs of all aspects of Sufism" (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014). According to the same source, residents of Brava are regarded by Al Shabaab with "a lot of suspicion and mistrust" and have therefore been treated more harshly (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. For information on the treatment of Sufi practitioners by Al Shabaab in Mogadishu, please refer to Response to Information Request SOM104995.

#### 3.1.2 Tunni Relations with Al Shabaab

The Senior Professor explained that Tunni who inhabit regions occupied by Al Shabaab are sometimes "allied with Al Shabaab for opportunistic reasons" and this is "dependent on the situation that arises," while other Tunnis are opposed to Al Shabaab (1 Dec. 2014). The Independent Researcher stated that Al Shabaab has been "very astute in trying to promote 'minorities' in their group," and clans "may make overtures to [Al Shabaab] to show they are supportive or avoid problems" (12 Dec. 2014). He further indicated that the "majority of [Al Shabaab] fighters are recruited from the militias of dominant clans" (ibid.). Similarly, the Associate Professor indicated that Al Shabaab leadership, although mainly Hawiye, "can be said to be 'cross clan'," meaning that support for Al Shabaab in local areas that it occupies may be dependent on local leadership; for example, "a local leader who is Hawiye will be more likely to give support to [Al Shabaab] in a Hawiye area" (Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014). The same source explains that Tunni decisions to form alliances

are not necessarily ideological, but may be a matter of lack of recourse to other forms of protection, or a practical calculation based on particular security circumstances at a given time. Clan alliances and identities are fluid and can shift with the local circumstances and needs for protection and security" (ibid.).

According to Radio Al-Furqaan, described by the BBC as a "Somali pro-Al Shabaab" website (BBC 22 Oct. 2014), in April 2014, the Tunni clan in the town of Buulo Mareer [Bulo Marer, Bulo Barer] donated livestock of food items to the "Islamic administration of the Lower Shabelle Region," and was thanked by the Al Shabaab governor in the region, who stated that the Tunni had "participated in the fight against foreign invaders and in

providing emergency assistance to people displaced by foreign fighters" (Radio Al-Furqaan 8 Apr. 2014). One of the Tunni clan elders reportedly called on other Somali clans to participate similarly (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Buulo Mareer was "liberated" by Somali and African Union (AU) forces at the end of August 2014, according to an AU press release (AU 30 Aug. 2014).

### 3.1.3 2014 Offensive Against Al Shabaab in Brava

Sources report that in early October 2014, AU and Somali forces took control of Brava (Reuters 5 Oct. 2014; Independent Researcher 12 Dec. 2014). According to the Independent Researcher, as of December 2014, the situation in Brava is "extremely volatile" and Al Shabaab militants remain active within the town (ibid.). He added that in "government controlled" areas, Al Shabaab continues to collect money from small business owners and residents, who must pay fees to "avoid being targeted or killed by Al Shabaab" (ibid.). According to an October 2014 Reuters interview with a resident of Brava who was preparing to flee the city, Al Shabaab told residents the group would be leaving the town and warned residents not to assist the government (Reuters 5 Oct. 2014).

## 4. Clan Protection

Sources report that the Tunni do not receive clan protection from other clans (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014; Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014; MRG 9 Dec. 2014) and they "rely on themselves in case of conflict with other communities" (ibid.). The Senior Professor indicated that the Tunni are "left to fend for themselves and can sometimes hold their ground, depending on how well organized and armed the adhoc groups [formed by elders] are" (1 Dec. 2014).

The Associate Professor explained that "some Digil-Mirifle [groups] ended up aligned with certain militias [following the invasion of nomadic groups in the 1990s] so some Tunni may have protection available by these alliances, while others resisted and were more easily targeted, or caught between Al Shabaab and militia groups" (26 Nov. 2014).

The MRG representative indicated that, according to staff from two Mogadishu-based NGOs that they interviewed, the Tunni clan is "not armed" (MRG 9 Dec. 2014). The Independent Researcher similarly stated that the Tunni "do not have any armed militia to protect them" (Independent Researcher 9 Dec. 2014).

The Independent Researcher expressed the opinion that the Digil are "militarily the weakest and one of the most vulnerable groups in southern Somalia" (9 Dec. 2014). According to the Senior Professor, the "Rahanweyn/Digil-Mirifle clan family is not a reliable source of protection for the Tunni" and the two groups do not have a "formal clan relationship whereby Tunni would call upon the Digil-Mirifle for protection when subjected to invasions" (1 Dec. 2014).

For information on the general security situation and availability of protection in Mogadishu, please refer to Response to Information Request SOM104995.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### Notes

[1] Banadir [Benadir] is the plural of an old Persian term meaning "port" or "haven" (Associate Professor 26 Nov. 2014). As a category of people, the term "Benadiri" refers to the people ("Rer") of the southern coastal cities of Mogadishu (Rer Hamar), Merka (Rer Merka), and Brava (Rer Brava [Bravanese, Barawani]) (ibid.). For information on the Rer Hamar and the Benadiri, including traditional homeland, affiliated clans and risks they face from other clanplease refer to Response to Information Request SOM104241.

[2] According to a 2013 report on Somali minorities produced by the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Gibil'ad are "'light-skinned"' groups of Arab origin living along the Benaadir coast, living mainly in port cities of Mogadishu, Merka, and Brava (Austria 2013, 68).

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Canadian Somali Congress; Center for Research and Dialogue Somalia; Elman Peace and Human Rights Centre; Heritage Institute for Policy Studies; Independent Researcher on Somalia affiliated with the University of London; Life & Peace Institute; Observatory of Violence and Conflict Prevention; Professor of African and Middle Eastern History, Savannah State University; Senior Researcher, African Studies Centre at Leiden; Somali Bravanese Association in London; Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum / Somalida Rafaadsan; Somalia Conflict Early Warning Early Response Unit.

The following were unable to provide information for this Response:

Associate Professor of Sociology, Iowa State University; Independent Research Consultant on Somalia; International Crisis Group – Horn of Africa Desk; Lecturer in Social Anthropology, University of Leipzig; Professor of History, Wellesley College; Professor in the Political Science Department, Davidson College; Senior Political Officer, Inter-Governmental Authority on Development; Senior Lecturer in Development Studies, University of London; Somalia analyst/consultant based in Kenya.

**Internet websites, including:** *Africa Confidential*; AllShabelle.com; Amnesty International; *Asharq Al-Awsat*; Baraawepost.com; Bartamaha.com; *Bildhaan International Journal of Somali Studies*; ecoi.net; Factiva; Garoweonline; Heritage Institute for Policy Studies; Hiraan Online; Human Rights Watch; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; Ishabaydhaba.com; *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*; Kismaayonews.com; Life & Peace Institute; Raxanreeb.com; Shabelle Media Network; Somalia Conflict Early Warning Early Response Unit; Somalia Public Radio; UN – Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld; ReliefWeb.

## Attachment

Abbink, J. 2009. Tunni sub-clans. "The Total Somali Clan Genealogy (Second Edition)."  
<<https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/14007/ASC-07072766X-231-01.pdf?sequence=2>>  
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