

## Review

# Somalia conflict: An African indigenous approach towards a peaceful resolution

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Generally, Africa has been characterized by chronic conflicts which are largely attributed to colonial legacies, repressive regimes, disastrous economic and political policies, systematic disregard of human liberties, institutionalized corruption and on-going civil wars. The causes of the lingering crises in Somalia are not far-fetched from those enumerated above. The complete breakdown of law and order in Somalia stem largely from economic and political problems inherent in most sub-Saharan African states. The resultant consequence of the anarchy in Somalia is largely manifested in the increasing rates of criminality, flagrant disregard for human rights, increased death tolls, dire humanitarian conditions, refugee crises and security tensions in the horn of Africa and Eastern Africa. The paper suggested among others that African indigenous initiatives should be used with a view to addressing the situation in Somalia. Africa should be allowed to chart its own course for its destiny. It may be an uphill task, but presents the best option towards ensuring its freedom.

**Key words:** Conflicts, religious war, Suicide Bombings, conflict resolution.

## INTRODUCTION

*“Traditional societies in Africa and elsewhere are reputed to hold secrets of peacemaking locked in their ways, formed from centuries of custom before the disruption of colonization. In places and practices that modernization has passed by, these traditions are often claimed to still be in use, keeping the heart of society in harmony while imported overlays such as states and currencies are collapsing in conflict around them. Some of these smacks of the ‘noble savage’ of romantic literature, and other aspects may merely be the invention of a current conflict management fad that ignores the pervasiveness and creativity of conflict. But some of Africa’s reputation in conflict management has historic and even contemporary footnotes.”* (Zartman, 2005)

Somalia, situated on the horn of Africa lies along the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean. It is bordered by Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. Generally arid and barren, it has 2 major rivers – the Shebelle and the Juba rivers. It has a total area of 637,657 square kilometers. Its population is estimated to be 9,832,017 ([www.factmonster.com/ipka](http://www.factmonster.com/ipka)) and the languages spoken are Somali (official), Arabic, English and Italian. Somalia as with most East African states exhibits the strong influence of Arab traders and European colonization. The religion is Islam while the

Somali ethnic group which is one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa makes up 85% of the population, Bantu and other groups including Arabs make up 15%. The natural resources are uranium, largely unexploited reserves of iron ore, tin, gypsum, bauxite, copper, salt, natural gas and likely oil reserves ([www.search.com/reference/British\\_Somaliland](http://www.search.com/reference/British_Somaliland)).

The British Somaliland was a British protectorate in the northern part of the horn of Africa; and later part of Somalia and presently the unrecognized republic of Somaliland. Egypt dominated the area in the 1870's but withdrew in 1884 upon which the British established a protectorate and garrisoned it from Aden. The protectorate was administered from British India until 1898, then by the foreign office and after 1905 by the colonial office. During the East African campaign, the protectorate was occupied by Italy in August 1940, but recaptured by the British in March 1941 ([www.bbcnews/somalia\\_country\\_profile](http://www.bbcnews/somalia_country_profile)).

The protectorate gained independence as the state of Somaliland on June 26, 1960. Days later, as a referendum indicated support for unification with Italian Somaliland, it joined with that territory to form a new Somali Republic (Somalia) on July 1, 1960 ([www.bbcnews/somalia\\_country\\_profile](http://www.bbcnews/somalia_country_profile)).

Somalia has had no effective government since 1991. This is because Siad Baare the socialist head of state was overthrown by armed groups from opposing clans who then turned on each other. The opposing clan armed groups failed to arrive at a consensus over who would replace Siad Barre and from then, the country was thrown into utter lawlessness and clan warfare. In their attempts to reconcile the warring clans, Abdulkassim Salat Hassan was appointed as head of state in 2000 by some senior clan elders and some other notable personalities. The appointment came after a conference held in Djibouti on the issue. The intention of setting up the transitional government headed by Abdulkassim Salat to reconcile the various warring clans was not achieved when the mandate of the transition government came to an end ([www.solarnavigator.net/geography/somalia](http://www.solarnavigator.net/geography/somalia)).

Subsequently in 2004, another attempt was made by main warlords from the various clans who signed a peace deal after protracted talks were held in Kenya. In the deal, a new parliament was set up and the parliament later appointed a new president. The government tried albeit unsuccessfully to bring the conflict to an end. Its legitimacy was further compromised by the rise in Islamic militancy in 2006. The militants gained control of much of Southern Somalia including the capital Mogadishu. The rise of the Islamic insurgents led to the demise of the control of the warlords hold on power which they had hitherto held on to for about 15 years. Ethiopia then came to the rescue of the interim government and helped to retrieve power from the Islamic insurgents at the end of 2006.

Intense fighting has continued since then between the interim government and the Islamic insurgents. In 2008, the interim government regained control of most parts of Southern Somalia. With Ethiopia's withdrawal of its troops in early 2009, the Al-Shabbab Islamic militants took control of Baidoa town, a former key stronghold of government. This prompted the parliament to extend the mandate of the interim government. Also, 149 new members of parliament were sworn in Djibouti to be part of Somalia's new interim government and Sheikh Sharif Ahmad, a moderate Islamist acceptable to the west was appointed as the president. In spite of his introduction of Sharia law into the country, he is not acceptable to the Islamic insurgents who want to enforce a strict Islamic rule in Somalia ([www.inthewallsoferyx.blogspot.com](http://www.inthewallsoferyx.blogspot.com)). He is regarded as a stooge of the west by the militants and his government has been further weakened by the activities of the Islamic insurgents especially the Al-Shabaab which is loyal to Al-Qaeda.

The conflict between the militants and the government forces, as well as between the different militant camps intensifies on a daily basis. The impunity, criminality, dire humanitarian conditions and death toll have also witnessed an upward spiral since May 2009 to date.

In the Northwest and Northeast, there are breakaway regions namely Somaliland (Somaliland declared independence in May 1991 as the Republic of Somaliland

which regards itself as a successor to the briefly independent state of Somaliland. Somaliland is not recognized as an independent nation by the international community) and PuntLand. In the rest of the country, there are various warlords and many political organizations some of which are clan based, with others seeking a Somalia free from clan based politics (Ayittey, 1994).

In writing the paper, secondary sources of information such as books, journals and the world- wide web were used.

### **Indigenous African Political Setting**

The indigenous political setting in most of Africa was organized in such a way that, a council of elders most times in conjunction with the queen mother appoints a chief to be at the helm of affairs in the community. This was the era of chiefdoms. The chief was expected to rule well and abide by the tenets of his office. Failure to do so would amount to removal or dethronement. He may either be forcefully removed or sent into exile. In extreme cases, a faction may decide to move out and form a new community.

In addition to the chief, in each African village, a village head is chosen by every extended family to represent and direct the affairs of that particular extended family.

These heads are the ones that constitute the council of elders. Membership into the council of elders was hereditary and so, they could not be appointed or removed by the chief; this was a kind of check and balance on the powers of the chief. Thus, the council of elders attained an independent status as an organ of government (Ayittey, 1994).

Most meetings between the chief and his council of elders were conducted at village squares or in special designated places like the palace of the chief. Before decisions were taken on important matters, there was unanimity. This ensured openness and transparency. One did not have to belong to a political party or clique, or family to be present at such meetings.

In the same vein, in terms of the economic activities in the indigenous African setting, the land belonged to the ancestors and not the chief. The means of production were mostly and generally owned by the people. The chiefs acted as custodians or care takers over the land on behalf of the people. The farmers who cultivated crops owned their produce and people were at liberty to choose the kind of trade or vocation to engage in (Ayittey, 1994).

Thus pre-colonial Africa witnessed a lot of migration as people and goods moved freely. Trans Saharan Africa had a web of trade routes used to carry out economic activities involving the exchange of goods. The Africans have a long history of trading that was devoid of tax, state regulations and controls. The implication is that the free enterprise was the order of the day. Women were also deeply involved in market activities and dominated it to a large extent ([www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325](http://www.peacewomen.org/un/sc/1325)). This

means that women are important in building the society and any attempt to solve even the crises in Somalia will require engaging women the more. In the traditional Somalia setting, women played an indirect part in dispute resolution. They were used as peace envoys or messengers to initiate peace between warring clans. If they played such important roles before and it worked, it can be employed again since the conflict seems to defying all attempts aimed at its resolution.

In recognition of the importance of the role women in peace building, the United Nations Security Council on October 31, 2000 adopted resolution 1325 which recognizes: women's important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution (Lederach, 2003).

This was the first time ever that the importance of women's contribution to peace building was recognized and advocated for by the United Nations. In as much as this is a welcome and laudable move by the United Nations, it does not negate the fact that women in indigenous African political settings contributed their own quota towards ensuring that peace reigns in their communities. Such efforts by the women should be rekindled, supported and the women empowered and poised to participate more effectively in peace-building measures. Commitment on the part of the conflict actors is needed to adhere to the recommendations of UN resolution 1325. It can be further localized to suit the local customs of the Somalis.

Specifically in Somalia, a traditional peace and reconciliation mechanism known as the 'Xeer' was used as a democratic tactic to peacefully resolve disputes. With it, people were allowed to participate equally in the process of electing their leaders and establishing their administration. The Xeer is a precedent-based social code which is understood to apply to all Somalis and served as a necessary restraint and moderating guide in disagreements and feuds between individuals and groups. It emphasizes a decentralized political authority that is administered by political leaders. It is an institution to mediate political and social arrangements in contemporary Somalia in its anarchical state and situation of state collapse (Netabay 2007). The Xeer system is dynamic as new xeer rules are developed to address unforeseen circumstances. So the system is constantly evolving. However, because of the anarchical state of affairs in the country right now, it may be very difficult to use the Xeer mechanism. If warring parties can agree to a ceasefire first and foremost, then the Xeer can be resorted back to.

The Xeer system has been experimented on in Puntland and Somaliland breakaway regions of Somalia and has recorded tremendous success. The two regions

succeeded in creating institutions led by a council of elders that "have both mandates for and experience in conflict resolution and continuing responsibilities in establishing peace". In Somaliland, the council of elders succeeded not only in creating a constitution but in appointing the government (Netabay 2007). Somaliland was able to resolve its internal conflicts because they resorted to purely indigenous means of inviting parties to a conflict to a meeting where pressure was mounted on them to arrive at a consensus. The conflict resolution therefore was drawn from tried and tested tradition of local methods designed to defuse disputes between neighbouring communities.

While this success recorded in Puntland and Somalia might serve as stabilizing models, it can be inferred that the establishment of a truly federal state can be achieved in Somalia without much difficulty if they first succeed in establishing and upholding community-based administrative institutions ([www.usafricaonline.com/somalia\\_22\\_killed](http://www.usafricaonline.com/somalia_22_killed)).

The background of the conflict in Somalia which stems from colonialist legacies, repressive regimes and vested interests of clan warlords notwithstanding, lasting peace for Somalia can only come from the Somali people themselves, with the engagement of traditional and indigenous peace and reconciliation mechanisms that is devoid of international domination. If these indigenous practices worked before, they can be employed again to resolve the on-going crisis in Somalia. Africa needs to arise and wake up and take its own destinies in its hands. The arms and weapons that Africans use to fight and kill themselves are manufactured outside Africa. Africa uses its scarce resources that should be channeled towards development to acquire arms that it uses to foster conflicts. Thus while it keeps getting underdeveloped and impoverished, it is creating wealth for the arms producing nations. Africa needs to find out whose interests the conflicts that it is embroiled in serves.

The paper is of the view that a path to peace can be charted for Somalia based on African grown initiatives because after over 20 years, the nation is still embroiled in a bitter conflict and all the initiatives put in place have not achieved much. Furthermore, most of the initiatives were launched from outside Somalia by an international community with very divergent aims and interests. Various attempts to bring warring factions together took place outside the country in luxury hotels, demonstrating an apparent lack of a sense of urgency and pressure to arrive at a compromise, and robbing those whose peace was at stake of any leverage over the proceedings. Instead, participants delayed in reaching agreements and were more concerned with personal advantages conferred on them for taking part in such gatherings ([www.somalilandforeign.net/speech.aspx](http://www.somalilandforeign.net/speech.aspx)).

Specifically, most of the conflict resolution models presented for Somalia are western in orientation without adequately paying attention to the African cultural context

([www.somalilandforeign.net/speech.aspx](http://www.somalilandforeign.net/speech.aspx)) Africans should wake up and realize that their destinies lie in their hands, if the western models are a foolproof for the resolution of the conflict in Somalia and indeed many other African nations engulfed in intra-conflicts, how then is it that the conflict has not abated?

The transition federal government in Somalia with the backing of the United Nations was launched outside of Somalia, and as such, it is not a legitimate government as the parliament was not democratically elected. Moreover, due to heightened security tension in Somalia, most of these parliamentarians do not even attend the meetings where they are expected to participate in debates ([www.somalilandforeign.net/speech.aspx](http://www.somalilandforeign.net/speech.aspx)).

The best approach towards a peaceful resolution of Somalia's conflict therefore remains a bottom up approach with participation from the grassroots.

## **TRENDS IN THE SOMALI CONFLICT FROM MAY 2009 TO JUNE 2010**

### **Intense fighting between Pro-government forces and the Islamic militia**

There has been an upward spiral in the Somali conflict since early May 2009. The Islamist Al-shabaab militant faction lashed out at the TFG forces and took control of over two thirds of Mogadishu to add to large chunks of territories which they and their allies captured earlier on across Central and Southern Somalia and almost overthrew of the TFG. The Al-Shabaab advanced close to the presidential palace on many occasions and exchanged gunfire with pro-government forces. In a recent attack at the airport in Mogadishu during the 50<sup>th</sup> celebration of the national army of Somalia, fighting erupted when Al-Shabaab militants attacked. In counter attacks by the government forces and African Union peacekeepers, a lot of civilians were killed and others wounded ([www.asmarino.com/news](http://www.asmarino.com/news)).

As the battle raged on militant Islamic fighters have been capturing some towns. It has become a cycle of militants capturing a town and later having it recaptured by the government forces and vice versa. Attacks have also been targeted at the presidential palace at various times like that carried out by the insurgents on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2009 where mortars were fired at the presidential palace killing 7 civilians and 2 government soldiers ([www.english.aljazeera.net/nes/africa/2009/06](http://www.english.aljazeera.net/nes/africa/2009/06)). This shows the extent of the weakness and fragility of the transition government. The fragility of the transition government is further seen in the number of pro-government officials' death toll since May 2009. Notable ministers and officials like the security minister were killed. The security minister was killed in June 2009 in a suicide bomb attack that also killed Somalia's ambassador to South Africa and 9 others ([www.rain.org.za/us\\_death\\_squad-roam\\_the\\_globe](http://www.rain.org.za/us_death_squad-roam_the_globe)). The

insurgent's side has not been bereft of casualties as well. Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, a senior Al-Qaeda operative suspected to be behind the attacks on U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania well as being a major force brokering a merger between Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab, was killed in a raid by covert forces in Southern Somalia in September 2009.

Sheikh Hussein Ali Fidow who was a senior Shabaab leader was reportedly killed alongside Nabhan ([www.nytimes.com/2009/05/18/world/africa](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/18/world/africa)). Casualties have continued on all sides to the conflicts and yet, the conflict keeps intensifying on a daily basis.

### **Clashes between rival Islamist factions**

The conflict in Somalia also manifests in rivalry between the different Islamic factions. All the factions are battling for supremacy. This has led to intense gunfire exchanges between the various groups. Countless number of deaths has been witnessed as a result of the fighting. Any group that succeeds in a specific area and captures a city or town drives the other group away. This shows that the struggle is not just against the transition government or by various clans. It has descended into an all out war where the need to radically Islamize the nation seems to be the driving force for the continued struggle by the Al-Shabaab group. This may not be unconnected to their close ties with Al-Qaeda.

The rivalry between the factions also show some cracks within the walls of some factions. For instance, a former warlord and opposition leader Sheikh Yusuf Indahaadde defected to the government's side in apparent disarray among militant ranks ([www.wardheernews.com/articles\\_2010/jan/IAG](http://www.wardheernews.com/articles_2010/jan/IAG)). This is an advantage for the transition government as the information gathered from him will be of immense security advantage to them.

The conflict between the rival factions of which the Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam are the main groups intensified towards the end of 2009. However, it is not shocking as the two main groups were formed by a coalition of disparate clerics, clan groups, Islamists, criminal and militia networks with divided interests ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)). Till date, the two sides have been fighting against each other on one hand, and against the transition government on the other hand.

### **Influx of foreign mercenaries**

Reports claim that foreign presence and influence is propelling the conflict as some Pakistanis and Arabs were seen in the country, these foreigners are a source of encouragement to Al-shabaab militants (<http://blog.jaluo.com>). The AU in Somalia also corroborated assertions by President Ahmed that suspected mercenary fighters from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and

Afghanistan have joined the ranks of the rampaging insurgents in large numbers ([www.allvoices.com/event](http://www.allvoices.com/event)) and also accused neighboring Eritrea where many of the Islamist leaders are based of sending in forces to aid it to overthrow the government.

If this trend is not checked, it may be a spring board for other African nations in turmoil especially in the horn of Africa to copy for. The AU also reported that over a thousand mercenaries from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Sudan have joined the Islamic militants in a bid to topple the Transition government. Kenyan mercenaries are said to be in the majority ([www.allvoices.com/event](http://www.allvoices.com/event)). The presence of foreign mercenaries should serve as a warning alert that something urgent needs to be done as the Islamic militants links to Al-Qaeda keeps unfolding through the influx of foreigners. The war has become more than a clan thing but is clearly assuming terrorist dimensions because of the influence of the foreigners into the conflict. If this trend is not checked and curtailed urgently, it may make the resolution of the conflict to be an uphill task.

Some of the foreign mercenaries are claimed to be fugitives from other countries who are wanted for various offences that they committed and are therefore trying their best to see that the conflict in Somalia is not resolved so that they will keep having a hiding place there ([www.somaliswiss.wordpress.com](http://www.somaliswiss.wordpress.com)).

### **Suicide bombings**

The fighting also takes place in the form of suicide bombings, a strong indication that the country can degenerate into what is obtained mostly in the Middle East. The Al-Shabaab rebel group in Sudan claimed responsibility for most of the suicide bombing in the capital. In one such attack carried out by a teenager in Mogadishu on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2009, 6 soldiers and a civilian were killed. This prompted Somalia's interim president to ask for international help to stop foreigners fighting with the militants. Thousands of people keep fleeing the upsurge in Mogadishu. The death toll has been increasing as well since the beginning of May 2009 as Islamist insurgents tried to topple the fragile interim government Stedman in Kleh et al. (2002). It is baffling as to why the conflict in Somalia has degenerated to the extent that it has since the country is an Islamic country where all are Muslims. Most of the countries that have intra conflicts are as a result of differences in religion, ethnicity or political affiliations, since Somalia is largely mono-cultural, why is the conflict escalating? Differences like religion, ethnicity and language are usually used by the political elite in trying to achieve their political and economic aims at the expense of the masses.

The Eclectic theory states that civil conflicts are the products of a confluence of factors-cultural, economical, historical, political and social. That is, given the complexity of civil conflicts a single variable or factor is

insufficient to explain the causes of conflict. Stedman further asserts that:

*"Conflicts in Africa arise from problems basic to all populations: the tugs and pulls of different identities, the distribution of resources and access to power, and competing definitions of what is right, fair and just."*

Stedman in Kleh et al. (2002) In other words, he posits that there is a broad universe of ethnic, economic, political, social and moral factors that occasion conflicts in Africa. While the paper agrees with Stedman's position, it still does not fully explain the intricacies of the Somali conflict from ethnic and social standpoints since it is largely a heterogeneous society. One of the most devastating suicide killings took place when 3 Somali ministers were killed in December 2009 during a graduation ceremony. A suicide bomber disguised as a woman killed at least 19 people including 3 government ministers in Mogadishu. The attack was carried out in a hotel during a crowded graduation ceremony for medical students from a local university. The health minister was killed in the attack. Also killed were the education and higher education ministers. Most of the dead are believed to be students. 2 journalists also died in the attack. The Shamo hotel where the attack took place is often used by few foreigners like aid workers, journalists and diplomats who still visit Mogadishu. It is located in one part of the city controlled by the government. It is situated just 1 km from the k4 junction where AMISOM has a base. Security was said to have been light inside the ceremony with the ministers bodyguards all waiting outside the meeting hall ([www.edition.cnn.com/2009/world/africa/somalia.attacks/index.html](http://www.edition.cnn.com/2009/world/africa/somalia.attacks/index.html)).

For this to happen near the AMISOM base leaves much to be desired. If AMISOM is under-resourced both in terms of personnel, finances and logistics, how then can it effectively aid the government in keeping the peace in Somalia? It shows that even the base is vulnerable where security is concerned. Proper funding, training and having the desired number of troops in AMISOM may go a long way in helping with the situation.

For the attacker to have a leeway into the hotel which is located in Mogadishu where government forces are said to be on control also shows that even the government control is showing signs of vulnerability and that much still needs to be done to guarantee the security and safety of not just government officials but that of civilians in an area where the government is supposed to have a strong hold. It is also very disheartening that such attack took place in a gathering made up of students who are the youth and the hope of the future for Somalia.

### **Piracy**

Because of a lack of a central government, lawlessness became the order of the day in Somalia as can be seen

from the increasing cases of piracy committed by Somali's in the Gulf of Aden and in the Indian Ocean. About 20,000 cargo ships a year use the Gulf of Aden. An international naval force is currently patrolling the Gulf and has prevented a few attacks but it is impossible to effectively police the vast sea (<http://sundaytimes.lk.100328/international>). Many Somali pirates began their careers against foreign trawlers taking advantage of the civil war to illegally fish in Somali waters devastating the livelihoods of its fishermen and when the international community did nothing, the fishermen became pirates after discovering that hostage taking fetched in more money.

Somali officials warn that pirates may become warlords- piracy and ransom money got from it has enriched so many pirates who could become Somalia's new warlords. Piracy has emerged as the biggest threat to global merchant shipping. It is the biggest money maker in Somalia. About \$30 million was realized from piracy in 2008. About 1,000 Somali's are said to be engaged in piracy and the number is still growing ([www.insidesomalia.org](http://www.insidesomalia.org)). There are growing indications that wealthier pirates may become warlords and create extremist organizations that could further destabilize the war torn and lawless eastern African nation.

In a bid to combat the menace of Somali piracy, many foreign countries have their navies patrolling the Gulf of Aden. In May, 2009 Iran sent 2 warships to fight Somali Pirates in the Gulf of Aden as pirate attacks fuelled by ransoms have continued almost unabated despite the presence of an armada of foreign warships patrolling the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden (<http://in.reuters.com/home/news/world/2009/05/25>).

Local leaders in Somalia have been trying on their own to deal with the issue of piracy. They have been able to get some pirates promise to halt their activities. Other pirates have been urged to release captured ships in exchange for amnesty. Pirates have been under pressure from local leaders who accuse them of corrupting their communities.

### **Use of children as soldiers**

The use of children as soldiers in the Somali conflict is reported to be on the increase. All parties to the conflict are involved in this appalling war crime. Children as young as nine years have been recruited. Recent reports state that schools now serve as recruitment centres for child soldiers who are beaten or executed when captured. It is pertinent that these children who are the future of Somalia be demobilized from the armed groups.

As children, they are exposed to a lot of psychological and physical ordeals when conscripted as child soldiers; this in turn may instigate them to become perpetrators of violence and criminal acts when they grow up if they are not properly rehabilitated.

The practice of recruiting children as soldiers poses grave concerns for Somalia's future stability. Children make up a majority of Somalia's population and they deserve a childhood free from the terrors of armed conflict

([www.munafrink.nl/mainbodies/security\\_council/children](http://www.munafrink.nl/mainbodies/security_council/children))

A worrisome trend in the use of these children as child soldiers is that the children of the leaders of the various Islamist militant factions are not part of children kept in camps for training, while those of the masses are brainwashed into joining the 'jihad' with promises of making it to heaven if they die ([www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8173019.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8173019.stm)).

The whole thing points to a calculated economic, political and psychological manipulation by the so called leaders of the various warring factions. If the so called 'heaven' that they promise the children is such a good place to go to, why are they not involving their own children?

Training for most of these child soldiers are said to be conducted by foreigners who speak English or Arabic. They make use of interpreters to conduct the training for the children ([www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8173019.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8173019.stm)).

Street children are the most vulnerable to being recruited as they have no one to fend or cater for them. The inadequacies of educational facilities and care centres for these children further make them vulnerable to being recruited. Also, peer pressure puts the kids at risk as they are easily influenced by their contemporaries.

### **Refugee situation**

As a consequence from the current trends in the conflict, the refugee situation of Somalis in other countries is a desperate one. Most of the living conditions in refugee camps are said to be appalling and harsh. This is because the camps are overcrowded and the facilities over stretched. The result is that the health of the refugees is compromised. Epidemics and diseases are common in such camps. It is not easy to be a refugee as they are faced with problems of discrimination, and unemployment. Even when they find jobs, it is usually unskilled and menial jobs. About 569,000 Somali refugees are said to be in East Africa and Yemen alone ([www.usaid.gov/our-work/humanitarian\\_assistance/countries/somalia](http://www.usaid.gov/our-work/humanitarian_assistance/countries/somalia)).

According to a recent United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) report, conditions in sprawling camps in Ethiopia, Yemen, Djibouti, Kenya and IDP camps in Somalia are overcrowded and under resourced. Intense fighting in Central Somalia has made Somalis flee from their country more than any other country of the world. The burden placed on the host countries is very enormous. Government officials of host countries have expressed growing concerns about their abilities to meet the basic needs of these refugees. Security concerns

were also identified by the officials ([www.hrea.org](http://www.hrea.org)).

Some of the security concerns include constant harassment by locals of their host communities, exploitation and resentment. There have been accounts of refugees being physically attacked by bandits inside the camps especially during the period of distribution of food items and other necessities. Also, women have been raped by people from their host communities who consider them as competitors for their scarce resources like water and firewood. In addition, the resentment meted out to them may stem from the fact that they are given more international attention than people in the communities. All these render the situation of refugees especially women doubly precarious.

### **Internally displaced people**

About 1.39 million Somalis are internally displaced ([www.reliefweb.int/rw/rub.nst](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rub.nst)). In a bid to escape the consequences of the conflict, many people fled their homes and are putting up at internally displaced persons' camps where they are still subject to further abuses like rape, forced child recruitment into armed conflict and armed banditry. They also face hunger as most of the aid workers who came to their aid are also under severe threats from the militants. Most of the aid workers had been kidnapped, killed or sent away from the country. The few ones left cannot effectively cater for the myriad of people that make up the IDP's ([www.reliefweb.int/rw/rub.nst](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rub.nst)).

The situation is so precarious that where civilians escape the scourge of death directly from the violent clashes, food insecurity, rape, human rights abuses and constant fear await them. The situation may also make donors to cut down on their financial and material support for the humanitarian cause in Somalia. This position will only further exacerbate the already dire humanitarian conditions.

### **Proliferation of arms and weapons**

The activities of the various warring factions have heightened security tensions not just in Somalia, but in the horn of Africa and entire East Africa region. This is further fuelled by the proliferation of arms and weapons. Some of Somalia's neighbouring states based on their own interests have been funding as well as supplying arms to Somalia.

The abundance of weapons has changed the trend of criminal activities in Somalia and neighbouring states as cattle rustlers, bandits and insurgent groups acquire arms.

Though the arms themselves do not cause conflicts but their presence in an environment helps to foster conflicts and criminal activities. It is a dangerous threat to public

safety, human security and development. It is sustaining a rise in cross border crimes including drugs trafficking thereby creating instability in the whole eastern region.

The proliferation is to such an extent that Pirates now use very sophisticated weapons to carry out their nefarious activities ([www.idamaritime.com/wordpress/?cat=12](http://www.idamaritime.com/wordpress/?cat=12)).

### **Flagrant abuse of human rights**

The incessant and flagrant disregard for fundamental human rights in Somalia by the Islamic militants poses grave concerns. It has degenerated to the level that people especially women fear being out on the streets. Women have been flogged for wearing of brassieres. According to the militants, Islam abhors any form of deception; the wearing of bras by women is said to be a deception since it will give the impression that their breasts are firm when they are not. This makes them check women as they go out on the streets; forcing many to remove their bras or be flogged. In addition to this, they banned the playing of music at television and radio stations, weddings or any social gathering and having musical ringtones on telephone mobile handsets. Furthermore, they also placed a ban on the watching football ([www.express.co.uk](http://www.express.co.uk)).

This calls for concern because people under the United Nations declaration of human rights have a freedom of worship and religion. Agreed that the people of Somalia are Muslims, most of them are liberal and not extremist. Forcing them to obey the tenets of the Islamic militants is a serious abuse of their fundamental human rights.

Closely connected to the dehumanizing treatment given to women and girls on the issue of wearing bras is the stoning to death of a 20 year old divorcee woman in front of a crowd of about 200 people on grounds of adultery while her male counterpart received 100 lashes of the cane. This is thought to be the second time that the al-shabaab militia has stoned a woman to death on adultery charges ([www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/11/18](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/11/18)).

The strict interpretation of Islamic law is unpopular with many Somalis' and unless the crisis in the country is resolved and a functional government put in place, the horn of Africa nation may still have to grapple with a lot of these flagrant human rights abuses.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Somalia should borrow from the legacy of the late president of Nigeria –Shehu Musa Yar'adua in granting unconditional amnesty to the militants in Nigeria's oil rich Niger Delta and grant amnesty to its Islamic militants. In this way, it will be easy for all sides of the warring factions to come together, dialogue and arrive at a compromise on the way forward for Somalia.

If the amnesty is granted, it will lead to a lay down of arms by the militants. Based on this, and with availability of funds from members of the African Union and development partners, a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and re-integration programme should be embarked on to mop up the arms in proliferation as well as entrench the militants back into civilian life as well as give them a new lease of life economically.

More importantly, child soldiers should be treated as victims. Specific psychological, health, educational and vocational skill programmes should be focused on them to help them recover from the traumas they were exposed to as a result of their involvement in armed conflict.

It is a known fact that women and children mostly bear the brunt of armed conflicts. Most of them are made to become the bread winners of the family while the men are out warring. Some of them even lose their husbands in the course of the conflict. This being the case, it is important that women serve as a uniting force in the Somali crisis. They can be further empowered through direct capacity building and training to equip them to be at the forefront of any peace efforts in Somalia. This will enhance their participation in peace, reconciliation and decision making processes in Somalia.

It is also recommended that greater recognition be accorded to the traditional institutions in Somalia. Since the clan leaders have a lot of influence, it will be in the best interest of the government to carry them along in its governing efforts. This is further buttressed by the fact that there is a complete breakdown of state security structure in Somalia, thus the traditional institutions are closer to the grassroots and wield a lot of influence albeit negatively or positively.

The Islamic religious bodies and institutions have a greater role to play towards ensuring stability in Somalia. It is an added advantage that Somalia is an Islamic nation.

The various Islamic sects should find common grounds and uphold it towards ensuring lasting peace in Somalia.

The African Union should continue its sanction on states suspected of funding and fuelling the crises in Somalia. The establishment of the African Union standby force is a welcome development. However, the standby force should be used as a last measure if all other laudable African initiatives aimed at solving the problems in Somalia prove ineffective or counter-productive.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that conflict is universal, and that is an inevitable mainstay of human societies and their interactions. It is potentially endemic in all political systems.

However, conflicts can be transformed or managed. Africa has been tagged a hotbed of world conflicts. This is because most of the contemporary conflicts occur in

Africa with many of them intrastate in nature. Sadly, most of these conflicts like that of Somalia has continued unabated in spite of various attempts at resolving it.

On a daily basis, lives are being lost and the humanitarian conditions keep worsening. The war crimes are also on the increase. Children are being mopped up into the armed groups at alarming rates. If the children who are the future are all turned into mercenaries, then the future for Somalia is very bleak. Thus, African initiatives of home grown participatory government with a lot of input from the Somali's may prove effective as a measure towards resolving the conflict.

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