

To: **H.E. David Cameron**
Prime Minister of United Kingdom
United Nations Secretary General
President of the African Union
Member state representatives



Suggestions: to the British proposed peace Conference for Somalia

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Acknowledgement:

On behalf of the Somali Diaspora, I'm writing to you and the other member-state attendees of the conference, to express my at most gratitude to you, for your compassionate attempt to find lasting solution for the long suffering of the Somali people; and to give you an experiential insights of how to approach and what to avoid about the difficult task ahead.

Historical overview:

Your Excellencies, like many other nations in Africa, the Somalis people were separated into five mini-Somalilands during the colonial period (approximately 1891 to 1960), those were:- British Somaliland (north central); French Somaliland (east and southeast); Italian Somaliland (south); Ethiopian Somaliland (the Ogaden); and, what came to be called the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya. In 1960 with the willingness of the UK government, two of the five fiefdoms (Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland) were merged into a single independent state, the Somali Republic that later became a magnetic hub for all Somalis. After 31 years of a better but not perfect government, where tribes and the state have co-existed uneasily and the motto “rule or die”—either my tribe is in power or we’re dead—plunged the country back into tribal fiefdoms, resulting the longest period any country has gone through in modern history without a functioning government.

Conflict root causes:

Your Excellencies, it has been said that, “there was a dark before the dawn,” although other factors such as illiteracy and hardship of life contributed to the endless conflict in Somali, ‘tribalism’ indisputably ranks the top of the culprit’s list if one is to be mentioned. Hence, I’ll give you hints about the role of tribalism in the current mayhem, and its variation within the Somali society. To that end: basically, there are many countries (notably in middle east and Africa), that have a strong tribal legacy that still forms contemporary politics and societal relations to a certain extent, this system seems extremely influential in some countries, whereas most modern state were able to successfully contain tribes and integrate them into the state system.

But adjacent to Yemen in terms of tribal allegiance, there are two kinds of tribes in the Somali society: “tribes internally divided but externally united” with long histories in their territory and strong national identities that put nation before tribe and have enough mutual trust to come together when specific circumstances such as “unity” is on the line despite perpetual wars over resource throughout history. These includes most of the major tribes along with numerous minorities; and those that might be called “tribes with artificial banner” who are internally cohesive but nationally divisive, obsessed with an imaginary state based on boundaries drawn in sharp straight lines by pens of colonial powers that have trapped inside their border myriad tribes who not only never volunteered to live together but have never fully melded into a unified family of citizens. Those myriad tribes are allied with the first group in terms of the national unity. Consequently, this contrasting ideology led to countless disputes or even wars, and years of diplomatic wrangling between the opponents and proponents of whether the Northwestern regions they live together, best known as (Somaliland) remains part of Somalia or breaks away.

However, although tribalism lives and breathes in everyday life of the Somalis as whole, certainly, some tribes seems more energetic in that regard than the rest combined; and it is not coincident that, after half of a century this particular group is the only one still carries one of the abolished surnames (the above mini-Somalilands I outlined earlier in the historical recap) of the past “Somaliland”.

As for the claim of a specific group being a mob-victim by the rest of the Somalis. I believe, innocent victim is absolutely unacceptable in all its forms, so, it was wrong then, and it’s wrong now. But the question we have to ask ourselves is this: who among us is unscathed from the vicious cycle of the Somali civil war that started with SSDF (Somali Salvation Democratic Movement) back in April of 1978, followed by SNM (Somali National Movement) and continuous until present? To me, the answer is indisputably nobody! If that is the case, then the victimization claim doesn’t constitute grounds for secession. Furthermore, although the relative peace in parts of Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland) deserves endorsement, it cannot in anyway be a ladder for secession, because it’s obvious that many tribes in Somaliland who forged the peace deal in the first place, are not sold to what they called, the latecomer idea of the split of

Somalia nor will they be ever; so as the rest of Somali people. Therefore, any persuadable country to recognize any region of Somalia as a separate entity ought to learn more first about the reality on the ground.

Recommendations:

Your Excellencies, with all above facts in mind, in this issue and to all conferences pertinent to the Somali conflict, including the one convened by Prime Minister David Cameron on the 23rd of this month, we hereby solemnly recommend the following points to be the launching pad of the conference:

- ① National unity and territorial integrity of Somalia must be intact, inseparable, and inviolable. The secession of one region or tribe for that matter leads inescapably to the separation of countless others, thereby resulting insurmountable tribal rivalry and border disputes; and the most likely scenario that can deter this from happening is in a mutually satisfactory system of federalism with power truly divided between central government and its territorial subdivisions.
- ② Your Excellencies, since the collapse of Somalia's central administration in 1991, more than twelve national reconciliation conferences were held for Somalia in search of lasting peace. But because of poorly vetted representatives from the civil society, traditional leaders, tribal warlords, and ineffective international facilitators being in the driver seat; all of those conferences ended in vain. As a result, war created famine; transnational threat; clan warfare; and piracy are in record highs with no end in sight.

I'm invoking this brief history to remind, the hosting Prime Minister and the other dignitaries—those soon to attend the prospective peace conference in London at end of this month that, doing the same thing time and again won't produce different result. Therefore, in the absence of some sort of deterrent mechanism against the pathological peace hinders in Somalia, expectations of tangible outcome will be too slim. By that I mean, there are self-styled tribal politicians and/or presidents spreading out unfounded rumors in order to foil the conference. The deterrent mechanism however, could be in the form of reprimand from the international criminal court, the AMISOM force or economical leverage, when dealing with aid recipients.

- ③ Your Excellencies, it's been historically proven that, poor societies are at risk of falling into no-exit cycles of conflict in which ineffective governance, societal warfare, humanitarian crises, and the lack of development perpetually chase one another. Evidently, beside the historical context of tribal divisions, a major causative factor both past and present conflicts in Somalia is poverty, where the nature of almost every conflict turned out to be over scarce resource.

Therefore, in order to establish a durable peace and prevent transnational threat and recurrence of violence in Somalia; the UK government in conjunction with the international partners must address the root causes and effects of conflict through a broad base reconciliation, poverty alleviation, institution building and political as well as economic infrastructure.

④ Your Excellencies, aid reinforces and increases regional differences when it is improperly managed; this is particularly combustible when this coincides with tribal divisions. In Somalia for instance, it is argued, and it can rightly be so, that the eastern and western corner-regions of Sool, Sanaag, Ain, and Awdal in Somaliland receives a ‘drip feed’ of the humanitarian aid allotted to that part of Somalia, while the bulk of humanitarian and developmental assistances goes to the bias hands of the local administration in Hargiesa.

According to reports gained from independent sources, relief funds diverted from specific localities, formally in the donor list, were being used to support tribe militia, and to what is locally termed as a “recognition seeking mission,” and thus accentuating existing tribal tensions and prolonging the conflict.

Therefore, while there is a huge need for increased external assistance in Somalia, there is also need for an appropriate framework of delivery. Hence, it is imperative that the UK, the donor nations, and civil societies of targeted areas take initiative to promote accountability and transparency starting with simple follow-up of: is the frontline provider capable in terms of access to the intended beneficiaries? To whom a service is being delivered to? And to what extent the targets set has been met should be done.

In sum, while the recommendations may appear to be much more challenging because of the various obstacles that must be overcome, we remain optimistic that you’re honesty, dedication, and past experiences in which the UK government brought together the same ingredient in 1960 will lent you unprecedented success.

I wish you all the best as you move forward!

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