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UNITED NATIONS HANDS OVER DHUSAMAREB FACILITY TO GALMUDUG AUTHORITIES

United Nations support for Somalia's development received a boost in November, with the handover of a facility and equipment to one of the country's Federal Member States, Galmudug.

"While usually the President is welcoming us, let me this time also welcome the President and his team, on behalf of the United Nations, to premises that were constructed and equipped by the United Nations, and which today we will hand over to the Government of Galmudug State," the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, said.

The top UN official for Somalia was speaking at a handover ceremony for premises in Galmudug's capital, and which was

attended by the Federal Member State's President Ahmed Abdi Karie 'Qoor Qoor' and senior members of his administration, as well as the Acting Head of the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), Quratul-Ain Sadozai.

The facility, located in the city's Hero Drogo area, was originally intended as a compound and a platform for UN operations in Dhusamareb, and across Galmudug.

"But we have had to change plans due to the United Nations' financial situation and the projected closure of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) in October 2026 at the request of the Federal Government of Somalia," Mr. Swan said.



“So,” he continued, “while the United Nations will continue its engagement and programming in Galmudug based on available resources, this facility will now be transferred to the Government of the State of Galmudug for its use.”

Globally, the United Nations has been mired in a worsening cash crisis for many months, with the situation affecting its ability to carry out vital work. A growing shortfall in contributions from UN Member States has led to the Organisation cutting spending, freezing hiring, and scaling back some services.

Succeeding its predecessor operation, the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia

(UNSOM), UNTMIS, which Mr. Swan also heads, began operations in November 2024, in line with its establishment by the UN Security Council’s adoption of resolution 2753.

In the resolution, the Security Council established that UNTMIS will undertake a phased transition of functions to Somali institutions, the UN Country Team, and other stakeholders, before closing at the end of October 2026.

Operational capacity

The Hero Drogo facility has full operational capacity. It includes office space and accommodation for approximately 50 people, with room for expansion. It also has all necessary physical infrastructure in place, and these include security features, generators, water purification plants, and a helicopter landing pad.

In addition, UNSOS will provide dedicated training for Galmudug State technicians on all systems until the end of 2025.

In his remarks, the UN Special Representative underlined the commitment of the world body to Galmudug.

“Let me assure you that the spirit of UN solidarity and support for the people of Galmudug are as much foundation stones

for this facility as are the bricks used to construct it – and we hope that this spirit of solidarity and support continues with its new occupants,” Mr. Swan said.

“The United Nations’ support for Galmudug is not centred solely on a physical location,” he added. “Let me reaffirm that the United Nations will remain a partner to Galmudug through UNTMIS until its closure next year, and through UN agencies, funds, and programmes operating in Somalia. We will continue our engagement and support to the people and Government of Galmudug State as they pursue peace, stability, security and development.





16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM: UN CALLS FOR CONCERTED ACTION TO END ONLINE ABUSE AND HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SOMALIA

At the start of the annual global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, the United Nations in Somalia called for concerted action to address the growing issue of online abuse and harassment.

“Creating a safe and respectful digital environment for all women and girls requires collaboration between the government, tech companies, donors, and civil society,” the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, said.

“The United Nations urges the adoption of laws to close critical gaps in the legal framework, which currently lacks explicit provisions addressing online and gender-based offences. It is essential that legislation be harmonized to reflect digital realities, and that judicial and law enforcement institutions are strengthened to handle online violence,” Mr. Swan added.

The theme for this year’s campaign – “UNiTe to End Digital Violence against All Women and Girls” – highlights the rise in online abuse and the urgent need to come together and create safer digital spaces for everyone, especially women and girls.

During the 16-day campaign, the UN will join hands with the Federal Government of Somalia, its Federal

Member State counterparts, and civil society organisations to highlight the need to end digital gender-based violence. This will include advocacy and awareness-raising activities against harmful online behaviors, fostering personal responsibility to prevent abuse, supporting victims, and encouraging people to speak out against online violence.

This year, the 16 Days campaign is part of global initiatives marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – two landmark commitments that advanced gender equality, women’s empowerment, and their participation in peace and security.

The annual 16 Days of Activism campaign begins on 25 November, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and runs through 10 December, Human Rights Day.



UN SUPPORT FOR PUNTLAND BOOK FAIR

In early December, UNTMIS was one of the supporters of the fourth annual Puntland Book Fair, which brought together hundreds of participants from across Somalia to focus on the power and impact of reading and literature in Somalia.

Held in the Federal Member State’s capital, Garowe, and opened by Puntland’s President Said Abdullahi Deni, the theme of this year’s event was ‘Security, Peacebuilding, and State-Building in Somalia.’ It tied into the UN perspective that literacy and reading are crucial for peace and development as they help create informed societies and individuals, empowering them to become agents of change.

In addition to the focus on peacebuilding initiatives and Somalia’s broader state-building processes, and showcasing Somali writing, the event celebrated newly-published books and encouraged dialogue among authors, scholars, political leaders and social activists via panel discussions. The latter included discussions on ‘Local Governments as Frontline Institutions for Peacebuilding, State-Building, and Development’ and ‘The Role of Youth and Women in Peacebuilding and State-Building.’

In addition, UNTMIS donated 23 copies of two books authored by an UNTMIS staff member, which were distributed to participants through a raffle. The donated books focused on digital literacy, online safety and cybersecurity.



KEY ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOMALIA'S DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTED AT YOUTH DIALOGUE

The important contribution that Somali youth can make to their country's future was highlighted in November at a gathering of young people from civil society and representatives from the Somali government and the United Nations.

"When we talk about what Somalis want, what the people want, what the future holds, it's very much a conversation that involves the youth. You are the most significant demographic cohort in the country," the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, told the gathering in the Somali capital.

"For the United Nations, in virtually all of our programming across the education sector, across the development sector, humanitarian response, there is always an emphasis and a concern on what this will mean for youth and how it will impact youth," he added.



Held under the theme of 'World Programme of Action for Youth at 30: Accelerating Global Progress Through Intergenerational Collaboration,' Youth Dialogue was organised by the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS), with support from the United Nations in Somalia.

“When we talk about what Somalis want, what the people want, what the future holds, it's very much a conversation that involves the youth.”

It brought together more than 40 young people from youth-related civil society groups, as well as representatives from the United Nations and Federal Government of Somalia. The latter included the Minister of Youth and Sports, Mohamed Abdulkadir Ali, and the MYS' Director of Policy and Planning, Hamza Abdiwahab.

The first in a series, the event was aimed at facilitating direct dialogue between young people, the government and the UN system in Somalia in order to identify actions to strengthen youth engagement, in addition to exploring key issues that

resonate with young people's priorities and aspirations for Somalia.

Youth bulge

In a population of close to 20 million, nearly eight in every ten Somalis are under the age of 35. The UN system's support for the country's youth is wide-ranging, carried out through a comprehensive range of programmes and initiatives aimed at tackling key challenges such as unemployment, climate resilience, peacebuilding, and political participation, aligned with Somalia's national priorities and the UN Youth Strategy.

Somalia's achievements in the youth field include the adoption of a National Youth Policy for 2023–2030 which provides a comprehensive framework for youth development, focusing on inclusion, economic empowerment, and civic participation.

More recently, the Federal Government of Somalia has developed a National Action



Plan for Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) which builds on the policy and recognizes the crucial role of young people in peace-building and development.

In his remarks, Minister Ali underlined the priority the government gives to Somali youth.

“To the youth of Somalia: You are the foundation of peace, progress, and prosperity. Your voices, dreams, and ideas will shape the Somalia we all envision – one that is united, strong, and full of promise,” he told the gathering.

“We are working to expand access to education, create employment opportunities, promote health and well-being, and strengthen youth participation in governance,” he continued. “Initiatives such as the youth employment skills programme, sports for peace activities, and entrepreneurship projects are empowering thousands of young Somalis to shape a brighter future.”

Following the opening of the Youth Dialogue, participants took part in a panel discussion before breaking down into smaller groups to explore strategies on fostering youth participation across Somalia.

Key outcomes from the dialogue will be presented to the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports and United Nations for consideration on strengthening youth engagement by government, non-government organisations, and youth-led organisations.

The event also marked the 30th anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth, a framework adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1995 to enhance the well-being and opportunities of youth in education, employment, health and governance.



UNTMIS PROVIDES WIDE RANGE OF CAPACITY-BUILDING

Throughout the last quarter of 2025, UNTMIS provided a wide range of capacity-building across Somalia in support of Somali development. They included:

In Mogadishu, collaborating with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime to train 36 women and men from the Federal Ministries of Fisheries and Blue Economy, and of Ports and Marine Transport, as well as their Federal Member State counterparts. The training covered economic planning, security preparedness, fisheries management, and gender inclusion within the maritime sector.

In Baidoa, providing training for 40 female police officers from Somalia's South West State. The capacity-building was centred on transformative leadership and was aimed at strengthening their resilience, stress management skills and emotional well-being, as well as fostering a supportive network of women officers committed to serving their communities with confidence and integrity.

In Mogadishu, providing training for the Somali Police Force's communications personnel. The three-day training focused on providing foundations for graphic design, photography and video production.

In Kismayo, conducting a three-day training for 30 staff members of the New Kismayo Central Prison – includ-

ing five women – focused on the Nelson Mandela Rules, human rights in prisons, and professional standards.

In Mogadishu, collaborating with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime's to hold a three-day technical workshop for members of the Federal Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Custodial Corps and civil society. The training focused on the development of training materials to be further consulted on and validated by both the Federal Government and Federal Member States.

In Mogadishu, holding a three day workshop for the communications personnel from the Federal Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. The training covered strategic communications, storytelling, media monitoring, video production, graphic design and photography, with the aim of boosting the ministry's capacity to engage the public and promote understanding of access to justice and the country's justice system.





SOMALIA AND PARTNERS REAFFIRM COMMITMENT TO WOMEN'S FULL INCLUSION IN PEACE PROCESSES

Somalia and international partners marked a milestone anniversary in October, for women's inclusion with a reaffirmation of their commitment to ensuring the meaningful inclusion of women and girls in all of the country's peace and security processes.

In a joint statement, representatives from the Federal government of Somalia, Finland, Denmark, civil society and the United Nations restated their "collective commitment to advancing women's leadership and participation in peacebuilding, security, and governance across Somalia."

The representatives had gathered in Mogadishu to mark the 25th anniversary of the UN Security Council's adoption of its landmark Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), on 31 October 2000.

The resolution reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stressed the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.

"The United Nations in Somalia remains fully committed to working alongside the Federal Government, Federal Member States, parliamentarians, civil society, women-led organisations, the private sector, and our international partners to accelerate the realisation of Somalia's Women, Peace, and Security commitments and ensure women's equal voice, participation, and leadership in shaping the nation's future," said the Acting UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, El-Khidr Daloum.

"As the world pauses to take stock of progress under the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, Somalia stands proud," he added.

The event, themed '25 Years of UNSCR: Delivering on the Promise of Women's Leadership for Peace and Security in Somalia,' was jointly organised by UN Women and the UN Transitional Assistance

Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), with support from the Finnish and Danish Embassies in Somalia, as well as the Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development. It also featured a panel discussion and interactive sessions for the attendees.

Progress and achievements

Other speakers included the Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development's Director General, Mohamed Bashir Omar; Finland's Deputy Head of Mission to Somalia, Nelli Mikkola; Denmark's Deputy Head of Mission, Gertrud Kummel Birk; and UN Women's Country Programme Manager, Rukaya Mohammed.

In their remarks, they highlighted Somalia's progress on the WPS agenda, as well as the rich and deep history of Somali women's leadership in peacebuilding.



“As the world pauses to take stock of progress under the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, Somalia stands proud”



They covered how, in 2000, Somali women peace activists – known as the “Sixth Clan” – demanded and won a seat at the historic Somali Peace and National Reconciliation Conference in Arta, Djibouti, and how their efforts helped lay the foundation for women’s ongoing participation in Somalia’s political and peace processes.

Achievements since then include the progressive securing of high-level positions at different levels across Somalia. These include in the Federal Cabinet and Parliament, Federal Member State assemblies and district councils, as well as leadership roles across public institutions. Other “firsts” that were cited include Somali women having reached posts such Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Chairperson of the National Independent Electoral Commission and Deputy Police Commissioner.

Other achievements cited include Somalia’s adoption in 2022 of a National Action Plan (NAP) on Resolution 1325 – a move that was widely seen as a milestone for gender-responsive peace and security policies and programming in the country.

“The NAP’s six strategic pillars, from women’s political participation to protection from gender-based violence, access to

justice, and economic empowerment, reflect Somalia’s deep commitment to translating international norms into national action,” the Ministry’s Director General, Mohamed Bashir Omar, said in his remarks to the gathering, later adding that a second NAP was currently under development.

“The discussions and recommendations emerging today will inform Somalia’s second generation of the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security, and strengthen local, national, regional and global advocacy,” UN Women’s Ms. Rukaya told the attendees.

When noting challenges that remain in this area, speakers underlined how Somali women continue to face significant barriers such as insecurity, displacement, limited political participation and gender-based violence.

The discussions and recommendations emerging today will inform Somalia's second generation of the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security

Following the panel discussion and interactive sessions, the representatives signed the joint statement calling for action. In it, they also called upon “the Federal Government of Somalia, the United Nations, and all development and humanitarian partners to strengthen their efforts toward the meaningful inclusion of women and girls in all peace and security processes.”

In addition, they also called for:

- Expanded roles for women in political, peace and security processes at local, regional, and national levels to ensure that decision-making reflects the voices and priorities of women and communities.
- Increased investment in localizing the WPS agenda, ensuring that women in remote, conflict-affected, and marginalized areas directly benefit from peacebuilding, security, and recovery initiatives.
- Transparent, inclusive and accountable implementation of Somalia's National



Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, including regular public reporting and mechanisms for community and civil society feedback.

- Full inclusion of women in the security sector reform's decision-making processes, peace negotiations, and post-conflict reconstruction, recognising their vital contributions to building sustainable peace and security.
- Strengthened coordination and resource mobilization, led by the Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development in collaboration with relevant Somali authorities and local and international partners, to ensure coherent national implementation of the WPS agenda at all levels of government.
- Enhanced protection and support mechanisms for women human rights defenders, peace builders, and survivors off conflict-related violence, ensuring access to justice, sexual and reproductive health and rights and psychosocial services, and economic reintegration opportunities.

In addition to Mr. Omar, Ms. Nelli, Ms. Birk, Mr. Daloum signing the joint statement, Zahra Mohamed Ahmed signed it on behalf of a coalition of Somali civil society groups.





ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, UN WELCOMES SOMALIA'S PROGRESS IN SEVERAL KEY AREAS AND URGES CONTINUED COMMITMENT

On the occasion of Human Rights Day, the United Nations highlighted the critical role that fundamental rights play in the daily lives of all Somalis, noting the progress made in 2025 and urging continued national commitment for the promotion and protection of human rights.

"Human rights are an essential part of our daily lives, providing the basic security and freedom we need to live, grow, and participate fully in our communities," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

"We commend the Federal Government of Somalia for key steps taken in the past year in several important areas to advance the promotion and protection of these rights, notably the organization of the National Human Rights Summit and the commitment to establish the National Independent Human Rights Commission, a cornerstone for the promotion and protection of these fundamental human rights," he added.

Somalia has made meaningful progress, laying the foundation for even greater achievements in ensuring that all people

can fully enjoy their human rights. The United Nations family stands ready to continue supporting these national efforts, working side by side with Somali partners to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights, including the promotion and protection of the freedom of expression and the rights of women and children.

Another significant achievement this year is the delisting in the UN Secretary-General's Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict of the Somali National Army and Somali Police Force for the recruitment and use of children. This historic development reflects strong political will and years of sustained work by the Federal Government, communities, and partners to protect Somali children from violence and abuse.

At the same time, the United Nations remains deeply concerned that Al-Shabaab continues to be responsible for the majority of human rights violations and abuses in Somalia, including killings, abductions, and attacks targeting civilians, humanitarian workers, and government institutions.

United Nations support for the advance-

ment of human rights in Somalia includes assisting the Federal Government, Federal Member States and judiciary in fulfilling their human rights obligations by providing technical expertise and conducting capacity-building activities.

This theme of this year's observance, 'Human Rights, Our Everyday Essentials,' seeks to reaffirm the enduring relevance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and highlights that fundamental rights – such as safety, health, education, and freedom from discrimination – are not distant concepts, but the basic building blocks people depend on daily to live with dignity. It serves as a reminder that protecting these rights is essential for creating fair, resilient, and inclusive societies.

Human Rights Day is observed every year on 10 December – the day the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It sets out a common standard of fundamental rights and freedoms for all people, and remains one of the most influential human rights documents in the world, forming the foundation for many national laws and international human rights treaties.



BAKAR NUUR FARAJ

CASTING A NET FOR BARAAWE'S FISHING TRADITIONS

On a Friday morning, as the sun rises over Lido Beach in the Somali capital, Bakar Nuur Faraj stands at the shoreline.

The 39-year-old gazes out to the turquoise waters, watching the ebb and flow of the waves and small fishing boats dotting the surface, drifting slowly with the current.

Almost silently, he recites a prayer for a good catch from the day's work at sea.

For nearly two decades, this has been Mr. Faraj's near-daily ritual, as taught to him by his father.

"Alhamdulillah, fishing is how I grew up – it is hereditary," he says.

Mr. Faraj's forefathers were fishermen. He himself has eight children, although he has no expectation that any of them will follow in his footsteps for a variety of reasons. He would rather they pursue careers in medicine and engineering.

This is a major development for Mr. Faraj as well as for Somalia's Baraawe community – of which he is a proud member. For them, fishing is not just a job; it is a marker of culture and identity.

Mr. Faraj's family hails from Baraawe, a coastal town that is also home to the Bravanese community and located on Somalia's Benadir coastline, some 200 kilometres south of the Somali capital. Because of its strategic location, the town was chosen to be the capital city of Somalia's South West State.

"If you are from Baraawe, you are known for shoemaking, carpentry, hat-making – or fishing. These crafts define who we

are," he says, referring to the artisanal crafts which his community is known for across Somalia.

Seaside start

Mr. Faraj was born in Baraawe, the third son in a family with six children. He had hoped to one day become a farmer, but he came of age during the start of Somalia's civil war in the early 1990s, which caused immense devastation and suffering.

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"The country was destroyed, education was destroyed, and there was nowhere to work," Mr. Faraj recalls. "Everyone went where they could. Some migrated. Others searched for a livelihood."

His dream of becoming a farmer faded fast as opportunities came to an end amidst the violence and chaos of the war.

For Mr. Faraj, the choice was straightforward – fishing was the only way to sustain himself and his family. It would also be a return to his community's roots.

For Somalia's Bravanese, fishing is a

traditional occupation, carried on by its members for generations. Their trade is considered artisanal fishery as it involves households that use relatively small amounts of capital and energy, operate relatively small fishing vessels, make short fishing trips often close to shore, and fish mainly for local consumption.

"Some start young, collecting fish from the boats or cleaning the day's catch," he says. "They learn to mend nets or are sent to buy hooks and bait. Only later are they taken to sea."

Like his fellow Bravanese, Mr. Faraj is proud of his heritage. He sees it as an anchor that connects him to his roots, embodying their resilience and historic links to Somalia's coastline.

"Some set out at dawn, just after prayer, and spend six to eight hours at sea," Mr. Faraj says. "Others leave in the afternoon and stay all night. Sometimes the catch is good. Sometimes the nets are nearly empty. They face storms and waves. Other days, the sea is calm."

Philosophical musings only make up part of Mr. Faraj's reflections. The fishing





traditions may be romanticised for some, but there is also the cold, hard reality of trying to earn a living from the sea in a rapidly-changing environment – a reality he knows all too well.

“Boats run on fuel, and you must pay the suppliers. Sometimes you can afford it; sometimes you cannot. Some days you have good fortune. Others, you return empty-handed,” Mr. Faraj says.

The fishing carried out by the Baraawe community is a mixture of small-scale commercial and subsistence fishing, with its artisanal fishers operating on a day-to-day basis. They tend to use traditional methods of fishing, involving nets, traps, and lines and hooks. Once the day’s catch is brought in, it is taken to Mogadishu’s bustling Hamar Weyne fish market, located near the popular Lido Beach, for local sale.

However, the struggle does not end at the sea. The market has its own challenges, too.

Despite Somalia having the longest coastline on mainland Africa, its citizens are among the lowest consumers of fish. A 2013 report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), stated that annual fish consumption in the Horn of Africa country stands at just 3.3 kilograms per person, compared with an African average of 9.1 kilograms.

This is underpinned by the belief – in some quarters and especially among Somalis living far from the coastline – that seafood is not a regular part of a Somali diet.

This is on top of the usual challenges that arise in business.

“The middlemen want to buy everything

We need education, awareness campaigns, and community dialogue to reduce the discrimination that fisherman face

but refuse to pay fairly,” Mr. Faraj says. “Sometimes they even take it all on credit, promising to pay in two or three days. That is common!”

Societal stigma

The costs and even the dangers of fishing are known and somewhat expected for Mr. Faraj and his fellow fishermen.

There are other challenges and obstacles – some which can be tougher to solve than the operational and financial ones. These are centred on the views held by some members of Somali society that certain areas of work are somehow lesser than others.

“In Somalia, manual labour is often looked down upon,” Mr. Faraj says. “But the best way to live, the way most beloved by Allah, is through honest work.”

“Those who earn livelihoods through lawful means – such as kabotole (shoemakers), tumaal (blacksmiths) and jaajis (fishers) – are stigmatized. But tell me: who would eat if these jobs disappeared? If we fishermen are scorned, then who will catch the fish?”

“The carpenters, the blacksmiths, the fishermen – all of us are indispensable,” he adds. “Our work is needed. Yet too often, we are treated as though we do not matter.”

The dilemma is a difficult one for Mr. Faraj. For him, the sea is both gift and burden. It feeds him but tests him. It offers dignity through labour yet sets him in a society that undervalues the work.

Mr. Faraj does not have a solution for this, but he believes education is the starting point.

“We must educate people on human rights and equality – and on the importance of the division of labour,” he says.

“One person sells rice; another sells tomatoes. Fishing is a traditional Somali occupation, practised in every coastal region,” he continues. “It is essential not only to raise awareness of it but also to promote and market it, both domestically and internationally.”

Such views are not uncommon among today’s generation. They are echoed by Fuad Shoble Kafe, a human rights activist and founder of Radio Baraawe, a community station in the Lower Shabelle region.

“We need education, awareness campaigns, and community dialogue to reduce the discrimination that fishermen face,” Mr. Kafe says.

“Fishing is a vital source of livelihood for coastal communities,” he adds. “It is not only economic, but also cultural and part

Promoting respect for every occupation is essential to building a more equitable society

of community identity. But without government support, factors like insecurity, poor infrastructure and weak market regulation will remain serious barriers.”

UN angle

In Somalia, the United Nations works closely with civil society organisations, artisans and community groups to advance human rights. This includes promoting cultural rights and fostering respect for linguistic diversity and the dignity of all occupations and traditional crafts, which contribute to a more inclusive and peaceful society.

“Promoting respect for every occupation is essential to building a more equitable society – and that includes the fishing carried out by the Baraawe community. Fishing is a valued cultural heritage for them,” says the Chief of the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia’s (UNTMS) Human Rights and Protection Group, Kirsten Young.

“Fishing practices and local customs are interwoven with identities, making fishing an integral part of Somalia’s intangible heritage. Preserving and celebrating this way of life not only honours Somalia’s history, but also supports sustainable development, food security, and enjoyment of the cultural rights.”

“The Provisional Constitution of Somalia explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination, whether direct or indirect. Mr. Faraj is not wrong in saying that eliminating occupational stigma requires robust legal protections, inclusive educational efforts, and informed policymaking, in collaboration with all stakeholders,” adds Ms. Young, who also serves as the representative to Somalia of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).



ABDI WALI HASSAN HASHI

FROM SHINING SHOES TO SHINING A LIGHT ON SOMALIA'S REBUILDING

Abdi Wali Hassan Hashi is a well-known face on Finnish television.

Over a 25-year career, he has reported across the north European nation, as well as another 48 countries, for a range of Finnish broadcasters, and has won multiple awards for his work.

Over recent years, the 53-year-old, also widely known by the nickname "Wali-Hashi," has become a well-known face across another country – a place he fled from in the hope of a brighter future more than once.

Beginnings

Mr. Hashi was born in 1972 in Mirig, a small village north of Dhusamareb, a city that is now the capital of Somalia's Federal Member State of Galmudug. But, in the early 1970s, Dhusamareb was a sleepy, dusty town of little national significance.

His early years were marked by hardship. His parents could barely afford to feed

him or his three siblings, let alone send them to school. The experiences were hard although now, with the benefit of hindsight, Mr. Hashi sees how they helped forge his determination to make something of his life.

"I remember walking into restaurants to search for leftovers, just to keep hunger away. At the time, education was a luxury I could not even dream of."

At the age of nine, he left his village for Dhusamareb. His mother was not happy about her son's decision to leave, but she knew it was the right thing if it meant a better life than the one he had ahead of him in the village.

"My mother was not happy about me leaving," Mr. Hashi recalls. "But there was no reason for her to stop me. I told her I wanted to work, to change our lives, or at least put food on the table. She accepted it, though she doubted someone so young could really help. Still, she hoped I might find something better."

In the city, Mr. Hashi became a shoeshine boy.

"With no home to return to, the streets became my shelter. The little money I earned, I sent to my mother through travellers returning to the village," he says. "I remember walking into restaurants to search for leftovers, just to keep hunger away. At the time, education was a luxury I could not even dream of."

One day, in 1982, when he was 11 years old, he decided he had had enough – he saw no future for himself in Dhusamareb, but the bright lights of the country's capital appealed.

At the time, Mogadishu was peaceful and offered more job opportunities. And not having enough money to pay for the bus fare was not going to hold him back.

"I begged for lifts from cars heading to the city," Mr. Hashi says.

Capital start

The hustle and bustle of the capital provided Mr. Hashi with a sense of possibility,





and he was determined to make the most of any opportunities that came his way.

"Mogadishu offered better opportunities than Dhusamareb," he says. "In the city, I washed cars, slept at a relative's home, and later, with his help, after two years I enrolled in carpentry training at a wood-work shop."

The capital was widely considered one of Africa's most beautiful cities, with a thriving cultural and social scene, and the country's economic centre.

But it started to change. Civil war had yet to descend on the city, but tensions were growing as opposition voices started to be heard against the authoritarian regime of dictator President Siad Barre, both in the capital and across the country. As well, the country's economy was starting to falter.

None of this was known to the teenage Mr. Hashi – all he could tell was that his existence in the city was getting tougher by the day.

In 1987, at the age of fifteen, Mr. Hashi came to another decision: even Mogadishu could not promise him the future he sought.

He turned to 'tahriib' – as Somalis call the often-dangerous journeys using people smugglers to reach foreign shores – for a better life abroad. He smuggled himself on to a cargo ship bound for Saudi Arabia and, soon after arriving there, found a job repairing home appliances in the port city of Jeddah.

"It earned me good money, and I brought my mother from the countryside to live in Mogadishu," he says.

After two years, however, Mr. Hashi's

undocumented status led to his arrest and deportation back to Somalia.

Yet, he was not discouraged. He had been able to save some money and had had his eyes opened to opportunities.

He used his savings to buy land in Mogadishu. He tried to start a new life, again, but by this time the situation in the capital and across the country had deteriorated further. Somalia was on the brink of civil war as different armed groups vied for dominance.

The outlook worsened.

"It had already been difficult to imagine a future there, the economy was struggling, jobs had disappeared, and people were beginning to lose hope. Many Somalis were looking beyond the borders – towards Europe or the Gulf – in search of a better life. Those who remained lived between uncertainty and perseverance, holding on to the small hope that tomorrow might be different, and I was one of those who decided to leave, believing that somewhere else, life might finally offer a chance to start again."

Finnish start

In 1990, another opportunity for 'tahriib' arose. Mr. Hashi was able to secure a visa for Russia and, from there, some three days later, he eventually made his way to neighbouring Finland, seeking a fresh start.

Mr. Hashi started anew on 25 May 1990, as a 20-year-old refugee with no formal education and no contacts in a new country.

"I was immediately struck by the kindness and dignity with which I was received.

For the first time in my life, I saw people being provided with free housing and food, something I had never even imagined," he recalls. "It was a revelation that changed the way I saw the world."

Mr. Hashi's hunger for a better life continued unabated, and he threw himself into his new life, taking advantage of a wide range of classes provided by the Finnish authorities. Within three years, he was fluent in Finnish and English.

However, he kept a close eye on home, where his family remained in Mogadishu, and he worried as the country edged closer to civil war. In 1991, the rising tensions and breakdown in governance finally led to the eruption of all-out conflict.

Mr. Hashi began closely following the coverage on international news channels like CNN, which reported extensively on his home country's war, famine and humanitarian crisis.

"The news coverage excited me. This shifted my perspective that news can change people's lives. I was influenced by the news coverage to do the same for my country. To share its stories with the world," he says.

Journalism career

This newfound interest soon converted into a passion. It led Mr. Hashi to study journalism at Turun Teknillinen Oppilaitos, a government-owned professional school in Turku, in 1996.

As part of his assessment for the journalism course, he had to produce an in-depth news report. For this, he chose to report on Somali refugees who had been seeking safety over the border in the sprawling Dadaab refugee complex in north-eastern Kenya.

At the time, the complex was home to more than 100,000 Somali refugees and asylum seekers, with that number continuing to grow as Somalia's civil war continued into the 2000s.

"I travelled to the Dadaab camp to report on a Somali girl who had been raped by four men. The story focused on my perspective as a refugee reporting on another refugee," Mr. Hashi says.

Mr. Hashi's report was published by a local Finnish newspaper. It fulfilled his graduation requirement, but it did something else: it got him noticed.

The piece also caught the attention of Finnish national media, leading to a documentary about his life titled 'Cross the Border,' produced by the Finland's national public broadcaster Yleisradio Oy – better known by the Finnish abbreviation Yle – and aired in February 2002.

This marked the start of his media career. He began working at a local TV station in Turku, becoming the presenter of one of the city's most popular programmes and the first Black journalist on Finnish television.

His career path included returning to Somalia in 2009 to produce a documentary – 'The Pirates' Coast' – which earned him the title of Finland's Best Reporter in 2010. He later joined Yle, for whom he reported on for 15 years and from 48 countries.

Sorted

At this point, Mr. Hashi had felt well-settled and integrated in Finland. His career was flourishing, and he was able to bring his family over as well as marry. On paper, it seemed like he could happily commit his life to his new home.

But a return to Somalia in 2011, to report on the civil war, changed that.

By that point, the conflict in Somalia was felt across society and sectors. Violence was widespread and basic institutions had collapsed. While in Mogadishu, Mr. Hashi heard about the then-Ministry of Information, Post and Telecommunication's efforts to re-open Somali National Television (SNTV), the country's main public broadcaster which had closed down due to the conflict.

With a very limited budget, the recently-re-established broadcaster lacked a range of items considered standard for a television station trying to produce news broadcasts.

"When I visited Somali National TV, I was deeply impressed by the dedication of the journalists and management, who were reporting live on the war against Al-Shabaab day and night, despite lacking the necessary equipment to carry out their work effectively," Mr. Hashi says. "Witnessing this situation motivated me to do everything I could to help."

"The state of the national media in terms of equipment was clearly very poor, and I felt a strong sense of personal responsibility. Coming from a modern media environment with advanced resources, I immediately

recognized the challenges Somali National TV was facing and knew I had to contribute to addressing them," he says. "I reached out to the Finnish Foundation for Media and Development (Vikes), asking them to facilitate the shipment. They agreed and, in 2012, I brought not only equipment but also my dedication and expertise to SNTV."

When I visited Somali National TV, I was deeply impressed by the dedication of the journalists and management, who were reporting live on the war

The experience was a transformative one for Mr. Hashi.

Enthused about the potential and recognizing the scale of the need in his former home country, he approached Vikes about any opportunities and changed to part-time work at Yle so he could dedicate more time to Somalia – his experience and language skills made him a perfect fit to be appointed project coordinator for Vikes' Somalia programme.

"For me, it was never just about sending equipment. It was about building the foundation of a more powerful press in Somalia, empowering journalists with skills, and giving local voices the strength to be heard," Mr. Hashi says.

Since then, Vikes, a development cooperation foundation specialized in freedom of expression and the media, has worked extensively in Somalia in support of the development of its media sector. Under Mr. Hashi's guidance, the Vikes' programme has trained more than 1,700 Somali journalists across the country.

"The support of the Wali-Hashi team and Vikes has been deeply meaningful to Somalia's national media," says Mohamed Kafi Sheikh Abukar, the Director of SNTV. "Their timely and dedicated support has been truly transformative, leaving a lasting impact on the growth and development of Somalia's state media."

Forgiveness

Mr. Hashi's work with Vikes sees him travel around Somalia to provide training to media associations and other civil society groups.

Over recent years, he has combined those travels with another project, this one inspired by his experiences visiting Somalia as a journalist – in particular, an incident that stayed with him from 2009 while filming on Somalia's eastern coast.

"Those working with me quietly told me to change my clan identity, warning that if I revealed my real background, I could be in danger. Reluctantly, I did. That night, I could not sleep," Mr. Hashi recalls.

"After decades of civil war, why are Somalis not forgiven each other? That question stayed with me," he continues. "It became the moment that pushed me to focus on reconciliation and forgiveness."



In 2017, he founded Cafis – a Somali word meaning ‘forgiveness’ – a grass-roots, non-profit organisation based in Finland, with the aim of helping local reconciliation efforts that bring together communities that have been affected by the decades of war.

Run by eight administrators and supported by 30 volunteers in Somalia, Cafis organises meetings and national events across Somalia’s regions to promote forgiveness.

“We focus on those who have been hurt,” Mr. Hashi explains. “And often, people voluntarily come forward during our events to forgive. Seeing that happen is very powerful.”

“I am hopeful,” he adds, “that initiatives like mine, with proper government support, can create lasting change and reach the whole country.”

UN support

The United Nations Transitional Assis-

tance Mission in Somalia’s (UNTMIS) Political Affairs and Mediation Group (PAMG) supports governance reform and reconciliation efforts across the country.

“Reconciliation is a powerful means by which to help societies heal after brutal conflicts. It can encompass tribunals, truth commissions, reparations programmes and other reconciliation instruments – but it can also include smaller-scale, grassroots efforts like that of Mr. Hashi,” says Vikram Parekh, the PAMG Chief.

“The main aim is to help bring communities together, and contribute to rebuilding Somalia,” he adds. “We hope it continues and can serve as an inspiration to others.”

In May 2024, Somalia launched its National Reconciliation Framework, a tool meant to guide work at the federal, state and district levels, with an emphasis on collaboration across different sectors as well as involvement from elders, religious leaders, women’s groups, and youth groups. Its



different pillars include a mental health pillar and a trauma-healing pillar. Within the trauma-healing pillar, it addresses the effects of the 30-plus years of civil war on Somali communities. Another chapter focuses on current events in Somalia, particularly the liberation efforts, and explores how to reconcile communities that have been under the control of Al-Shabaab for over 15 years, returning them to normalcy.

PHOTO HIGHLIGHT

In Somalia, the UN continues to work with women leaders, civil society, national institutions and partners to advance inclusive peace and governance. Shown here, Somali women civil society leaders take part in a UN-supported consultation in Mogadishu.



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