



MEMBER PROFILE

# SOMALILAND

Government of Somaliland



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unpo.org

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**Status:** De facto State lacking international recognition

**Population:** 4.5 million

**Areas:** 137,600 sq miles

**Capital:** Hargeisa

**Language:** Somali (official language), English and Arabic (widely spoken)

**Religion:** Islam (official religion), and it is forbidden to propagate other religions. Individuals are however free to practice their own religions.

**Ethnic Groups:** Mainly Isaaq clan



### UNPO MEMBER PERSPECTIVE

Since declaring its independence in 1991, Somaliland has overcome a legacy of conflict and civil war to secure peace and stability within its borders. It is a thriving and durable democratic society with a multi-party system. It holds regular elections and has witnessed multiple peaceful transfers of power. Its bicameral Parliament successfully blends traditional and modern forms of authority and representation. Its citizens have taken part in five rounds of peaceful and internationally-observed multi-party elections at the presidential, parliamentary and local levels. International monitors have witnessed all of Somaliland's elections since 2003 and pronounced them free and fair.

The aim of unifying Somali factions continues today as the 2000 Arta Conference in Djibouti created a Transnational National government (TNG), claiming to represent Somalia and Somaliland as one entity. Having been lobbying for sovereign recognition, Somaliland opted not to participate in the negotiations.

### UNPO REPRESENTATION: Government of Somaliland

The Government of Somaliland has been a member of UNPO since 2004.

### OVERVIEW



The Republic of Somaliland is a sovereign, democratic State in the Horn of Africa, sharing its borders with Djibouti to the West, Ethiopia to the South, Somalia to the East and the Gulf of Aden to the North. Somaliland has a coastline of 850,800 km. It encompasses the territory of the former British Protectorate of Somaliland whose borders were established by international treaties between 1888 and 1897. Somaliland achieved its full independence from the United Kingdom on 26 June 1960, becoming the 15<sup>th</sup> African Country to do so. It voluntarily entered a union with Somalia in July 1960. However, following a civil war and the collapse of Somalia, it withdrew from the union and reclaimed its independence on 18 May 1991.

## CURRENT ISSUES/POLITICAL SITUATION

Since 1991, Somaliland has lobbied the international community to accept the *de facto* independence it has enjoyed for the last 25 years.

The governments of Somaliland and Somalia initiated a dialogue in 2012 with a view to clarifying their future relationship, but the talks collapsed in 2015 because Somalia failed to implement what had been agreed and showed an absence of good faith. Attempts to resurrect the talks, in the last one being in 2016, have so far proved fruitless, although Somaliland being ready to reengage should Somalia show by its gestures and behavior that it is prepared to take the process seriously.

Somaliland continues to assert its sovereignty and independence to the international community, including through the UNPO.

Somaliland argues that it is not looking for recognition, but rather 're-recognition' since it was granted independence as a British protectorate in 1960, five days before it agreed to merge with Somalia. Somaliland wants the international community to re-recognise its decision to end the voluntary union with Somalia, in line with other African precedents and accordingly with the African Union (AU)'s principle of "respect[ing] the borders existing on (...) achievement of independence" (Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), Resolution AHG/Res.16(I), July 1964). The AU Commission sent a fact-finding mission to Hargeisa in 2005 to investigate the case for Somaliland becoming a member, and therefore being recognised as a State. The delegation recommended that Somaliland be treated as a special case. But in 2007, the AU agreed with the the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia that the time was not ripe. The AU has not looked at the matter since.

Whilst Somaliland remains a 'State-in-waiting', it continues to satisfy all the criteria for statehood in customary international law: permanent population, defined territory, government and the capacity to enter into relations with other States. In 2016, over a million Somalilanders signed a petition supporting the country's recognition.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Given its geographical position, Somaliland's coastal areas have been visited by many seafarers in ancient times, including the Egyptians.

In 1888, Britain established the British Somaliland Protectorate. From 1896 to World War II, the partitioned sections of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia operated independently from one another. On 26 June 1960, the UK granted independence to the people of Somaliland.







*Photo courtesy of YoTut @Flickr*

However, independence only lasted for 5 days. On 1 July 1960, in a desire to unite all Somali-speaking peoples, Somaliland joined the former Italian Somalia to form the Somali Republic. The union proved a disaster for Somaliland. Its political structure was modelled on that of Europeans, which failed to observe the dispersed and decentralized nature of the region's cultural identity. Almost all key political and economic opportunities being concentrated in South-Central Somalia to the disadvantage of other regions, including Somaliland. The resentment it triggered eventually escalated into a civil war, during which the President of the Somali Republic Barre focused much of his firepower on Somaliland. The 9-year civil war in Somaliland came to an end in 1991, following the overthrow of Barre. On 18 May 1991, the Somali National Movement declared Somaliland an independent republic. Somaliland's democratic record is exceptional, particularly given the region's instability and the ongoing violence and political turmoil in Somalia.

The Burao Peace Conference represented the first of a series that took place from the early 90s onwards, and which involved all of Somaliland's clans through a bottom-up process. These conferences paved the way for the stable, peaceful and democratic Somaliland which exists today. Egal, who had been centrally involved in the peace processes, was elected President by a Regional Council of Elders in 1993. He oversaw the disarmament of rebels groups, the stabilization of the economy and the establishment of the Somaliland army, passport, currency and trade ties with other countries.

In 2001, Somaliland conducted a referendum which endorsed a new constitution and reaffirmed its status as an independent State. The Initiative and Referendum Institute concluded that the referendum was conducted "openly, fairly, honestly, and largely in accordance with internationally recognized election procedures." 97% of the voters approved the constitution. In 2002, 6 political parties took part in municipal elections, to which Somaliland women were able to participate for the first time. In April 2003, following the demise of Egal, Somaliland held its first universal suffrage, multi-party elections. Kahin, from the ruling Unity of Democrats (UDUB) party, emerged as the victor.

The second Presidential elections in 2005 saw Kahin re-elected. The latest election in 2010 saw Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud "Silanyo" elected President of Somaliland. The next Presidential elections are expected to take place in October 2017, while the Parliamentary and local elections in October 2018.

## **POLITICAL SYSTEM**

Somaliland's 2001 Constitution provides for a separation of powers between the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The legislative assembly is comprised of two chambers: an elected elders chamber, and a House of Representatives. The elected President and Vice-President are Heads of government, and the President nominates cabinet members who subsequently approve legislation. Somaliland has an independent judiciary. The country has three political parties: Kulmiye (the ruling party), WADDANI, and For Justice and Development (UCID). The next Presidential elections are scheduled for 2017.



Photo courtesy of Stars Foundation @Flickr

## POPULATION

Almost half of the population is nomadic or semi-nomadic, with the remainder living in urban areas or rural towns. The life expectancy is 50 years for males and 55 years for females. Population centres include Hargeisa, the capital city with a population of 1 million, and smaller cities and towns such as Burao, Borama, Berbera, Erigabo, Gabiley, Baligubadle, Saylac, Oodweyne, and Las Anod. The Horn of Africa is inhabited by six larger clan groups. Each clan has its own customs and culture, and dozens of sub-clans. Somaliland is mainly populated by the Isaaq clan, as is the Somali Region of Ethiopia and Djibouti.

## SOMALILAND DIASPORA

The Republic of Somaliland has a large diaspora estimated to over 600,000 mainly living in Western Europe, North America, the Middle East and in several countries across Africa. In 2016, the World Bank (WB) estimated that from 500 to 900 million US

dollars is remitted by the Somali diaspora to Somaliland each year, equivalent to 35 to 70 percent of the State's GDP.

The Somaliland diaspora has crucially contributed to the democratic transformation process and the multi-party system of Somaliland. Also their engagement in the political arena has increased within the last decade, aiming to support reestablishment, peace-building, reinstating, and constitutional development.

Apart from its strong support to nation-building, the diaspora plays a significant role regarding economic investment, modernization as well as social and political development in Somaliland. The WB recognizes that Somaliland's growing economic activity since 1991 is partly based on "high flows of remittances from the diaspora".

The diaspora provides up to 35 percent of start-up capital for small- and medium-sized companies (Hammond et al., 2011). The WB further notes that the Somaliland diaspora is mature and "has acquired new skill sets and capital abroad and is ready to harness both if conditions appear favourable."

Furthermore, the diaspora is transferring innovative business ideologies and modern service models; they provide support through qualified professionals with a variety of skills. Last but not least they significantly contribute to international awareness rising on the Somaliland issue.

## ECONOMY

### Currency: Somaliland shilling (Sl. Sh).

The region's main source of income comes from the export of livestock, mainly camels, cattle, goats, and sheep, to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States through the Port of Berbera. Livestock production accounts for 65% of the GDP. Produce from agriculture are

predominantly sorghum and maize, with the Hargeisa highland being best suited for dry-farming, whilst the Haud region is more suitable for animal grazing.

Annual government expenditure amounts to 350 million US dollars. Somaliland's lack of international recognition means that it cannot obtain loans from the international financial institutions, including the WB and the IMF. Economic and diplomatic isolation damages the employment prospects of the populace and increases their susceptibility to poverty.

Although Somaliland is a relatively poor country, it is rich in natural resources. It is believed to have commercially-exploitable deposits of oil and gas as well as coal, iron ore and semi-precious stones. The waters off Somaliland's coast contain ample fishing grounds and the Port of Berbera is to be developed as a major outlet for Ethiopia's external trade thanks to a 2016 agreement signed with Dubai Ports World.

## **CULTURE**

### **Religion**

The majority of the population adheres to the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence. Participation in Sufi orders is common with most persons at least nominally affiliated with a Sufi order, and Sufi customs and disciplines are widely practiced. Religion informs many social norms and practice, such as women wearing a hijab (a veil covering the body except for the hands and face) in public, and abstinence from gambling, the eating of pork, or drinking of alcohol.

### **Cuisine**

Somali peoples' daily breakfast often consists of bread called laxoox, liver, toast, cereal or porridge. Traditionally, the main meal of the day is eaten at lunchtime, and includes a combination of rice or noodles with meat and sauce. Camel meat and milk are especially prized as food items. It is considered polite to leave a small portion of food on one's plate when visiting homes; the remaining food signifies that you been given enough food.

## **RELEVANT LINKS**

[Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Development Fund](#)

[Diaspora Agency](#)

[Foreign Ministry](#)

[Government](#)

[Laws](#)

[Ministry of Energy & Minerals](#)

[Ministry of Trade & Investment](#)

[National Planning & Development Ministry](#)

[UCID Party](#)



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