

Somali Initiative

for

Dialogue and Democracy

(SIDD)

'THE VANGUARD OF UNITY, JUSTICE AND SOLIDARITY'

Review of Developments 2006-2007

382 Craven Park Road, London N15 6AG, UK - Tel: 07950 394449
Registered charity no. 1116372

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Chairman's report

At the time of writing, Somalia is again experiencing tragic events. The pain seems never-ending. But we have to believe and work for the day when Somalis will be able to hold their heads up high in the knowledge that we have found a way of accepting each other, acknowledging wrong-doing and putting the common good above sectional interests.

Those far away in the Somali diaspora have something to contribute. There are conversations and new relationships that can develop more easily away from the intensity of conflict. The perspectives and skills that we gain in our adopted countries can be of benefit to our homeland. This was why SIDD was created. It was registered as a charity on 12th October 2006 with the object of promoting *'national and international conflict resolution and reconciliation with a view to relieving suffering, poverty and distress, and building and maintaining social cohesion and trust among Somalis and between Somalis and neighbouring communities, in the UK, in other countries hosting Somali refugees, and in Somalia, observing strict neutrality, without regard for clan or political allegiance'*.

We have made progress towards these objectives in the last two years since the first meetings took place in London between elders of different clans (see Background, p18).

During 2006, several of those who have received training in Dialogue Facilitation during the last two years played mediating roles of different kinds in Somalia and among the Somali community in Britain.

Hassan Mohamud spent several months in Mudug (p5) building on the two-years of work he had earlier done in south Galkayo (see Appendix I, p19) to help rebuild security and infrastructure. Omar Salad, a well-known figure in the region, subsequently lent his authority to assist in the development of a fledgling regional administration (p6). Sayid Ahmed Sheikh Dahir spent several months in Bay Region assisting elders in bringing to an end an 18 month-long conflict between two sub-sub clans (p8). Abdirahman Osman spent two weeks in Mogadishu in June and July establishing contacts between the UK diaspora and the Islamic Courts (p9). I was also able to engage with some of the leaders of the Islamic Courts in Mogadishu in October (p9).

In February 2006, following a breakthrough in communication between prominent Hawiye and Benadiri personalities in Switzerland the previous year, a meeting of elders from these communities took place in February (p11). We hope this beginning will be built on in the course of 2007. Abdi Afrah Gure played an important role in the continuing development of the Harrow Association of Somali Voluntary Organisations, which has succeeded in bringing all the Somali organisations in the borough into one organisation, and is the first of its kind in the UK.

A second course in Dialogue Facilitation took place on five Saturdays in April and May with 12 participants including a number of promising future leaders (p15). Some of them were part of the group of Somalis who attended the conference on 'An Honest Dialogue for a Clean and Just Africa' at the Initiatives of Change (IofC) centre in Caux, Switzerland in August (p16). There they presented a workshop on issues relating to reconciliation in Somalia.

In the course of the year a number of Members of both Houses of Parliament and staff at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development were briefed on SIDD's development.

We were honoured that Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, former President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of IofC-International, and Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, a distinguished international diplomat, until recently UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on the Horn of Africa, and present President of IofC-International, both accepted to be International Patrons of SIDD. Both gentlemen have earned the respect of Somalis for their efforts during the dark days of 1992-3.

At the first meeting of the Trustees on 28th November 2006 it was agreed that the two principal objectives would be the '*reconciliation and integration of Somali refugees*' in the UK and elsewhere, and '*enabling skilled Somalis in the diaspora to return to Somalia and contribute to national reconstruction (in collaboration with other organizations)*' (p 17). A structure was agreed of four sub-committees, consisting of Trustees and other co-opted members, on the topics of 'Reconciliation', 'International volunteers', 'Secretariat and Communications' and 'Finance and Fundraising'.

Up to this point, SIDD has been dependent on the British charities, Initiatives of Change and the Irene Prestwich Trust, and we are grateful for their support both financial and in many other ways. However, the registration of SIDD as a charity is a step towards self-sufficiency, making it easier to seek funding from a wider range of sources. The challenge is to find resources both from within the Somali community and beyond. Though Somalis should welcome help from whoever offers it, ultimately we are responsible for our destiny and I appeal to all Somalis to help SIDD become a symbol for the Somali people's desire to dialogue and to find ways of becoming one community and one nation.

Our long-term aim is to bring an end to the clan-based approach among Somalis. For this to happen, opportunities for the expression and acknowledgement of grievances must be created. The tragic developments in Somalia are putting pressure on relationships between those of Somali origin in the UK. To this end we plan, during the next 15 months, to hold a series of meetings between prominent London-based members of the communities. A second phase envisages an expansion of the dialogues to other cities in the UK.

We invite all Somalis who sincerely believe in SIDD's objects and who wish to help bring about a change in our people's condition, to join with us. Change must start with ourselves. As it says in the Holy Quran, 'God only changes the condition of a people when they change what is in their hearts'. This is the challenge for us. May God transform and save Somalia and the whole region of the Horn of Africa.



(l-r) Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, Eng. Osman Jama Ali, HE Mohamed Sahnoun

Mediation initiatives

Hassan Mohamud Geesey: A road from a miserable, devastated town to a Regional State

In 2001, when I was living in Sweden, I was commissioned by the Swedish Immigration Authorities to go to Somalia, to the Modug/Gal Region, to investigate whether it was safe enough to send back Somalis who had come to Sweden as refugees. I was shocked by what I discovered there, and on my return considered with my colleague Ahmed H Egal what could be done. We felt it was important to start a reconciliation process at the local level in the area from which we both originated and where our clans had fought each other for years.



We felt that through reconciliation our people could find a way towards a Somali federal state. Our co-operative in Stockholm which runs a school for adult immigrants, Kunskapsutveckling i Norden (KUIN - Development of Knowledge in the Nordic Countries), applied for financial support from the aid organisation 'Forum Syd'. This made it possible for me to spend two years in south Galkayo helping to rebuild security and infrastructure on a basis of reconciliation (Appendix II (p: Report to Forum Syd 2003-2004).

In February 2006 I spent a further period in Galkayo escorting three female Somali nursing teachers from Sweden who were there to give courses on HIV/AIDS, again funded by Forum Syd. This gave me a further opportunity to reconnect with my former colleagues in the town.

With the support of IofC-Sweden and other Swedish friends, and with the Centre for Research and Dialogue (CRD) and other NGOs in Somalia covering the costs of my security, I returned again to Galkayo to be present at an important meeting on May 15th. Omar Salad and I also managed to mobilise 35 other Somalis from Europe, the USA and elsewhere to participate in the process.

For the previous two years, two of the sub-clans of my (Hawiye) clan were at war with each other: the Sa'ad, headed by Osman Ato, and the Soleimans, headed by Mohamud Guled, both at that time ministers in the TFG and both old friends of mine. One has to remember that conflicts often occur because of natural difficulties like water shortage for grazing etc. I had to travel 11 times between their two camps, 111kms apart. Once I had to overcome a roadblock manned by 10 men from other militias. When Osman Ato phoned Mohamud Guled and invited him and his people for a talk and a meal, Guled arrived with 72 of his people. There were many intricate issues to be solved: the exchange of prisoners of war, the return of captured property etc. Finally the parties reconciled.

From July 25th to 20th August, I assisted in hosting a larger meeting in southern Galkayo to which some 300 came, some from far away. From this grew the state of Gal/Modug. With the help of the democratic organisations we had created earlier, a democratically-elected leadership for the new Gal/Modug State emerged. As the Somali constitution stipulates that Somalia will be a federal state, creating a responsible leadership for each state is a key issue. Since then, two former Somali ambassadors have been elected to lead the government and administration of the Gal/Modug State.

When the Islamic Courts gained power, they also intended to move on to Gal/Modug. They reached Bandidoley, a town on the border, but were driven back by the combined forces of the Gal/Modug State, the Puntland State and the Somali Government, supported by the Ethiopian troops.

To summarise: it can be said that 1) the reconciliation of the two sub-clans has become lasting; 2) the Gal/Modug State has been created; 3) the reconciliation between southern and northern Galkayo has progressed so much that they together with the Government were able to withstand the attack of the Islamists; 4) what now remains to be done is a continued healing process between the Hawyie and Darod in the area. That means bringing individuals and groups together who have resentments, hurt feelings, and maybe demands for material compensation. Our vision for the area has taken great steps forward and the Gal/Modug State may soon be able to show a way for all of Somalia. It is not impossible that, in due course, the Gal/Modug State and the Puntland State, former enemies, could merge.

Omar Salad: Visits to Nairobi and Mudug region



During my stay in Nairobi 3rd-13th May 2006, I held discussions with Somali professionals who are friends and former colleagues. These centred on how the Somali intellectual community could contribute ideas and skills to the TFG to enable it to complete the national reconciliation process and become consolidated as a working government. We also discussed networking among Somali professionals in the diaspora and in Somalia so that they can work together towards creating a national movement as an alternative social and political force in the future. I also had one to one meetings with a number of TFG ministers and MPs to exchange information and ideas on Somali problems and ways of resolving them.

I stayed in Galkayo from 13th May to 27th June as part of a diaspora delegation of 17 from Western Europe and North America. We came to help set up a local administration in the south of Mudug region (including south Galkayo, the Port of Hobyo, and the surrounding towns, and villages), as well as to support a reconciliation process between two feuding Habr Gidir communities, the Sa'ad and the Soleiman.

This peace process was begun by Somali ministers of the TFG who belong to the Mudug and Galgaduud regions: Osman Hassan Ali (Atto), minister of Public Works and Ahmed Dualeh Ghelle (alias Haaf) from the Sa'ad community, and Mahamed Mohamud Guled, minister of Local Government and Mr. Mohamed Jama (Furuh), vice-minister from the Soleiman community. They first secured a ceasefire in the two year-long bloody feud in which about 400 young men lost their lives. Then the Mogadishu-based CRD (Centre for Research and Dialogue) stepped in to consolidate the peace talks between elders and other stakeholders of the communities. During May and June, CRD held two Little Tree (Geed Yare – traditional preliminary meeting under a tree) meetings to pave the way for a Big Tree meeting (Geed Weyne) where the peace would be concluded. This was led by CRD officials Yassin Salad and supervised by the CRD Director, Jabril Ibrahim Abdulle. Hassan Mohamud Geesey and I have keenly followed and injected some ideas to the elders and CRD facilitators in their laudable peace-building efforts.

Before the setting up the administrative institutions, we toured southern Mudug to survey the country, its inhabitants and resources, and identify problems and needs. It is a vast territory of about 340 by 350kms (from the sea to the hinterland and from hinterland to hinterland respectively). It was the rainy season and what pleasantly surprised us was the beauty of the countryside. We also visited Hobyo town with its harbour which was once thriving, but is now quiet and depressed, with only a few hundred residents because most inhabitants fled the fighting of the two communities which began there. For the same reason, no ships or dhows enter the harbour. We met some fishermen who transport their catches to Galkayo by road (260kms) for local consumption or for exportation by air to Dubai. When we finished our survey and returned to Galkayo, we set down a time-table and procedures for the setting up of the administrative regional organs independent of the Puntland regional administration. I left the region at this point.

After I left, instead of a regional administration, a regional state called Galmudug State, consisting of two regions headed by a president, a deputy president, some ministers and two Houses of Parliament (a House of traditional chiefs and a House of Representatives) was set up. This administration covers the territory of the Sa'ad and two minority clans, Dir and Sheikhal. The Soleiman community which mainly inhabits the adjacent Galgaduud region but also lives in some parts of south Mudug including the Port of Hobyo did not participate in this Galmudug administration both because they were not invited and because they showed no interest in doing so because of the aftermath of the conflict which is still to be agreed conclusively.

Our diaspora group also met with the Puntland authorities of the northern half of Galkayo such as Brigadier General Abdullahi Mohamed Mire, commander of Puntland Security Forces and right-hand man of President Abdullahi Yusuf, and civilian officials such as the regional governor and the mayor. We allayed their concerns about the new administration in south Galkayo and assured them that whatever administration was formed would be committed to peace and good neighbourly relations between the people and administrations of the two sides.

I had come with the impression that the Somali countryside would be desertified, but although the Gu' (spring rains) were not good, the prairies and meadows were covered with a green carpet of grass and bush vegetation, especially the low-lying coastline stretching from about 70kms from the hinterland to the Indian Ocean coast and over 200kms along the coast. I saw countless packs of deero (Thomson Gazelle) as well as packs of ostriches with multiple chicks. However, I did not see Awl, Garanuk, Dabataag (kinds of gazelle), Kudu, Orex (Garanuk and Dabtaag, two beautiful gazelle species unique to Somalia). I was assured that there are still specimens remaining of all these creatures, although most of them are on the brink of extinction especially Orex, Garanuk and Awl with which the country was teeming 25- 30 years ago. Dik Dik, wild pigs, hyena, fox, hare, and various birds are still found in most places, but lion, cheetah, wild dogs, and leopard, which were once plentiful, are said to be virtually extinct. The land to the west and southwest of Galkayo which was once - 45 years ago when I was a camel boy - covered with thigh-high grass, thick vegetation, and in some places forest, is almost bald. There is almost no wild game and a minimum of vegetation with visible signs of desertification due to wide-spread settlement, overgrazing and resulting soil erosion.

22nd August 2006

Eng. Sayid Ahmed Sheikh Dahir: Mediation in conflict in Baidoa region



In March 2006, I travelled to Bay region to work with a group of mediators in a conflict between the Yantaar and Hubeer, sub-sub-clans of the Mirifle. The dispute, which started at the end of November 2004, was over the ownership of a particular village, Idale, 60kms south of Baidoa. The mediators were religious leaders and traditional elders of the two clans, and of other neighbouring clans. They had been working together from the beginning to resolve the problem.

From among the mediators I selected four, two from each clan. Together, we approached elders on each side who were not among the mediators and we succeeded in persuading them each to send 15 elders to a lunch in Yantaar house in a neutral district, Qansaxdheere. In fact a lot more came that day from each side to witness the event.

Before the meeting the 15 elders had participated in a traditional process of conflict resolution covering matters of compensation. They all knew each other, but had not met for over a year because of the fighting. We placed two from each side to sit and eat from the same platter.

After the meal, I spoke emphasizing that I had come thousands of miles just to help them to come together. Then I called one mediator from each side to present their side of the story and express their willingness to forgive and forget and to stop the hostility so that they could restore their fraternal relations. Then I asked both sides where the next meeting should be held. They hesitated to propose a venue, and so I asked if they would let me nominate a village. They agreed and I proposed a Yantaar village, Hakarka. They accepted my choice and we sent messengers to the surrounding areas to inform everyone that hostilities had ended and to invite them to a general meeting.

After the meeting ended one of the elders from Huber invited all the participants to a dinner at his home. He prepared a very nice dinner and brought a small generator to give light. He also invited the Duqa Degmada (mayor) and his council. There was a very good atmosphere and people were talking about how futile the conflict had been and expressed their regret.

Hundreds from both sides attended the general meeting about two weeks later. The mediators prepared the reception and the villagers provided the camel meat. After the meal there was a general reconciliation and it was agreed that if either side restarted the conflict, they would be fined and banished. Every group was asked to inform those who had not been at the meeting of the agreement, and free movement was subsequently established between the two sides, with wells and pasture being shared as before.

The final phase was to bring the two groups to the disputed village, so that they could discuss how to live together and share the resources of this village, and to rebuild the destroyed properties (which included mosques, shops and houses). I left in August 2006, and the mediators continued the work.

However, after I left, the problem that developed between the TFG and the Islamic Courts prevented the finalization of the process. We still hope that when this wider conflict has been resolved, it will be possible to complete the final stage.

Abdirahman Omar Osman: Visit to Mogadishu

I made a visit to Mogadishu, Somalia, on 25th June 2006 for a period of two weeks. I felt that it was my duty to visit Somalia and to talk to all stake-holders including Civil Society groups, women's groups and other sections of the society in Mogadishu. My last visit prior to this visit was in May 2001.



During my stay I met officials from the Islamic Courts Union, Civil Society groups, Mogadishu administration and other groups, such as media, business, and some professional groups. All groups welcomed me and told me how they were pleased to see me (Somali Diaspora). People I talked to had a positive image of Somalis in the Diaspora, as they make valuable contributions to the society. I was very impressed about these individuals' commitment and determination. Businesses in Mogadishu were thriving despite the lack of security and administration in the capital. Bakaraha Market is the centre of the business community, where due to the lack of administration, the business community came together to help each other and that is why Bakaraha is the main market in Somalia. Mogadishu business groups are entrepreneurs and one would hope that if Mogadishu becomes a peaceful city, business will thrive.

Civil Society groups contribute enormously to education in the capital. There are many schools and universities in Mogadishu. It is evident in Mogadishu that education system is thriving; however, these schools are private and charge fees to the children's families. As a result of this, access to education is limited to those who can afford it.

Somalia has had no functioning government for the last 16 years due to civil war. Trust between Somalis is almost non-existent and it requires a programme that can overcome the animosities between Somalis. Therefore, there is an urgent need to launch a programme that can make a difference to the community and at the same time to build a relationship of trust within the community.

Osman Jama Ali: Visit to Mogadishu



As Mogadishu was peaceful in October 2006, after the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) had taken over, the Centre for Research and Dialogue (CRD) decided to hold its Board meeting in Mogadishu and I travelled there to attend it. After the Board meeting, I stayed there a further two weeks.

I had not been in Mogadishu since I resigned as Deputy Prime Minister of the Transitional National Government in 2003. At that time, every car, bus or truck had an armed guard and all the business people had their own armed guards to look after their property. The ports and the airports were in the hands of warlords. Mogadishu was divided into more than 10 sectors each ruled by a warlord and his armed militia. So no truck could go out of or enter the city without paying at the checkpoints. Every foreigner whether journalist, businessman or doctor, who came to the city had to pay for the protection of one of the warlords. There were certain districts to which members of the government could not go.

This time, I saw Mogadishu in a completely different state. There were no armed men in the streets, and, like in the 1960s, people could move safely and without interference day

and night. People were fed-up with the warlords, and grateful to the UIC for bringing peace. Another positive development was the UIC ruling that illegally-occupied properties should be returned to their owners. Many who had fled the country were returning from the USA, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the Middle East to claim back their properties. This gave Somalis confidence because certain clans had been largely dispossessed by people of other clans. The UIC also ruled that there would be no 'clannish' revenge and that Somalis would be equal irrespective of clan. The planes were full of people returning, the international airport and the port which had been closed for more than a decade were both repaired and opened. Everyone, irrespective of clan, could go about his business. All Somalis admired the peacemaking steps, the return of properties and the reopening of hospitals and schools. Criminals were arrested and brought to court and those who had murdered were executed without any reaction from any clan. People saw the UIC as a government.

It was Ramadan and I was invited to attend an Iftar with Prof Ibrahim Addow, a member of the Shura Council and the UIC's Foreign Minister. My advice to him was that the UIC should engage in dialogue with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and not isolate themselves but maintain good relations with the International Community. I advised them to create an administrative system for the areas they were controlling. I said there were a huge number of Somalis in the diaspora who are happy with the peace the UIC had brought and that they had to cooperate with them as all the skilled people are outside the country. I told them that I was not seeking a position and only wished to offer advice as an elder. Addow said little except that they would follow the Quran, abolish clanism and make justice for all.

Later there was another Iftar organised by the UIC and there I greeted Sheikh Dahir Aweys, Sheikh Sharif and many others. That night they invited nearly 30 MPs who had come from Baidoa, Jama Mohamed Qalib, (a former minister with me in Siad Barre's government and an adviser to Foreign Minister Addow) and myself. (Jama Mohamed Qalib is one of the most honest Somali politicians who writes frankly about Somali problems.) After the dinner they honoured me by inviting me to be the first speaker. I congratulated them sincerely on the peace they brought to the capital which neither the TNG nor anyone before us since 1988 had been able to achieve. I accepted our failure and apologised for it - the first responsibility of a government is to assure internal security of life and property. I repeated that they should not isolate themselves. Sheikh Aweys, as head of the Shura council (the parliament, the highest authority) was the most senior figure. He quoted Quranic verses and called for justice. He was clearly the most senior figure, delegating political speeches to others. When he welcomed the MPs from Baidoa, he said that they would welcome the President and Prime Minister to the capital to have a dialogue there instead of in foreign countries. He received the MPs with due respect. After me, three MPs from different regions spoke and praised the UIC for the peace they brought. At that time they were calling for dialogue and reconciliation, and I heard no one calling for jihad.

On the last day of my visit, Sheikh Sharif, the Chairman of the Executive Council, received me privately in his office. I repeated my congratulations and my message. He told me that he wanted good relations with the International Community, and that he wanted integrity, honesty and justice for the Somalis, to eradicate clanism and to follow the Quran. He was an objective and practical man and he impressed many, both Somalis and foreigners. I also met other members of the 70-strong Shura Council. I repeated the same message on phone-in programmes on Mogadishu TV and radio (Horn Afrik).
23.1.07

London, February 2006: Initial meeting between members of the Benadiri and Sa'ad communities

Background

Since the collapse of the central Somali Government in 1991 and outbreak of all-out Civil War, some of the communities in the conflict in the central, north and eastern regions have achieved peace or partial peace between them through locally-arranged reconciliation or tacit acceptance without any formal reconciliation. But in the south, especially in Mogadishu, though there have been fragile truces, peace has not been secured between armed communities, and between armed communities and unarmed victimised communities, including the Benadiri community. Having been subjected to terrorism, killing, rape and robbery, the overwhelming majority of the Benadiris had to flee from their homes in Mogadishu, Merka, Brava and other adjacent areas where they have lived for over a thousand years, and leaving behind all their possessions, sought safe haven in Western Europe and North America.

Ironically, large numbers of people from the armed communities which drove the conflict also fled and sought refuge in the same foreign countries. This shows that the Civil War terribly affected both the victims and offenders. Today, hundreds of thousands of Somali emigrants, whether from armed/offender or unarmed/victimised communities, equally yearn for reconciliation so that they may return to their homeland to live together in peace. Those in Somalia also have the same feelings. Yet from the experience of false peace and reconciliation initiatives during the last 15 years (mostly arranged by foreigners hand-in-glove with warlords), people need a true reconciliation and peace process which begins with real stakeholders (traditional leaders, civil society groups: professions, politicians, women, youth) to solve their problems and be responsible for their security and development.



(Back row, 1 to r) Abdirahman Warsame Elmi, Dr. Ahmed Sharif Abbas, Abdulkadir Mohamed Shirwa, Khalid Maou Abdulkadir, Hassan Mohamud Gesay: (Front row, 1 to r) Omar Salad, Haji Yusuf Ahmed Mayow, Osman Jama Ali, Mohamed Abucar-Haji Omar, Mohamed Ahmed Alim

With these feelings in mind, on 5th February 2006, Mr. Omar Salad invited 10 Somali emigrants in London (five members of the Benadiri community and five members of his own Sa'ad community, a segment of Habar-Gidir) to a dinner at his home for an initial dialogue. His intention was to begin to build confidence as a basis for true reconciliation and peace process between the two communities which would eventually expand to include other communities in the UK, in other European countries and North America, and inside Somalia. The idea was originally conceived in August 2005 when some of those present at the dinner were attending an international conference at Caux, Switzerland on the theme 'A World in Crisis: Learning From One Another How to be Peacemakers' as well as in subsequent training on Dialogue Facilitation under the sponsorship of Initiatives of Change in London.

Moreover, the move was in line with the aims and objectives of the Somali Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy (SIDD). These earlier discussions had shown a common desire to address the differences between the two communities that arose from the aftermath of the Civil War.

Report of Meeting

The agenda of the meeting consisted of an introduction and an initial step of confidence-building towards true reconciliation and peace between the two communities. The Benadiri participants were: Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas, Mr Mohamed Abucar-Haji Omar, Mr Khalid Maou Abdulkadir and Mr Haji Yusuf Mayow. (Mr Said Bakar Mukhtar Mohamed was absent). The Sa'ad participants were: Mr Abdirahman Warsame Elmi, Mr Abdulkadir Mohamed Shirwa, Mr Mohamed Ahmed Alim, Mr Hassan Mohamud Gesay and Mr Omar Salad. Eng. Osman Jama Ali was Guest of Honour and Witness.

Mr Omar Salad opened the meeting, welcomed and introduced the participants. He briefly explained how the idea of this initial reconciliatory encounter had developed. The meeting which began in a friendly and positive atmosphere, was not only among representatives intending to start a dialogue for peace-building and reconciliation between their communities, but it was a reunion of old school-mates and former colleagues in the Somali service, army or government who had lost contact with one another in the thick and divide of a nasty civil war. After the introduction and personal conversations looking back at their old golden days and common experience and cracking jokes, the discussion moved to the main agenda item: The initial step of confidence-building towards peace and reconciliation between the two communities.

Mr Abdirahman Warsame Elmi (a former army general) took the word, extending a hearty greeting to the Benadiri participants and underlining how significant and pertinent it was to meet representatives from the Benadiri community. He expressly acknowledged the extensive victimisation and displacement that the Benadiri people suffered at the hands of the armed communities during the Civil War. He went on to say, 'Throughout their centuries-long urban and sedentary civilisation, the Benadiris have been the custodian of Somali urban, artisan, cultural, religious and educational treasure store and their victimisation and displacement means destruction of that national treasure store'.

Mr Abdirahman further stated, 'Although I and my friends present here and many of my community members did not play a part in that wrong-doing either in theory or in practice, yet some of the armed militias of my community took part in the commission of that offence. Therefore, on behalf of my friends present here and community, I give an apology to my Benadiri friends and their community for the said offence. Moreover, I and my friends, and on behalf of our community, will work hard and unreservedly to reach out to our community in order to convince everybody to apologise to the victimised

Benadiri community and other Somali communities for any grievances that they have towards our community. To the Benadiri side, we ask for forgiveness so that we can work together for reconciliation and peace between our communities and for all Somalis as well as restoration of our national government - under which everybody should have justice and equality.'

Mr Abdulkadir Mohamed Shirwa, Mr Omar Salad, Mr Mohamed Ahmed Alim, Mr Hassan Mohamud Gesay all agreed to Mr Abdirahman's statement. Mr Abdulkadir added that the result of the Civil War in Somalia has been that 'ignorance, symbolised by nomadism, overthrew the urban civilisation for which the Benadiri culture was the backbone'.

Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas thanked Mr Omar Salad for inviting the two sides to meet together to start an introductory and trust-building dialogue. He thanked the Sa'ad community representatives for their encouraging remarks which acknowledged the misdeeds of their armed militias done to the Benadiri community, and their courage in asking for forgiveness. He added that he believed that the victimisation (killing, robbery and rape) done to the Benadiri community was a systematic and deliberate policy rather than unplanned and sporadic actions committed by indisciplined militias, because so far not one leader or ordinary person from the offending armed communities had spoken out against these terrible atrocities on an unarmed and peaceful community as ours. He said 'Such horrible offences can be forgiven but cannot be forgotten. What makes me very sad is that I cannot visit the place where I was born (Mogadishu) and that hurts me much. Having said this, I am of the opinion that we can work together for reconciliation and peace to find a solution for our communities and for the whole of Somali people by furthering this dialogue'. Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas said, 'At the end of the day what is needed is to make restitution to remedy the existing deep grievances and to reconstruct a just and peaceful Somalia where everybody feels safe and equal'.

Next was Mr Mohamed Abucar-Haji Omar who also expressed thanks that the meeting had been arranged. It reminded him of the stories of 'healing wounds' that he heard when attending the International Conference in Caux. He said that it was good to hear acknowledgement of the offences done to his community from the friends opposite, and asked the question 'But what must follow this acknowledgement?' He continued, 'I think that the bitter aftermath of the Civil War must be addressed, and addressed in a Somali and just way. The point is not only to remedy what happened to our Benadiri community but also to remedy what happened and what is still happening to all the Somalis. Let by-gones be by-gones. Today what is needed is to save the people who are dying because of the conflict or its consequences - above all the young people who are being used as war-fodder. Let us salvage what is left for us as a nation. I mean that the hate and trauma resulting from Civil War which our communities felt should be transformed and not transferred to the young and coming generations.'

Haji Yusuf Ahmed Mayow also expressed his thanks for this first meeting and wished God to make it a good beginning leading to success in reconciliation and peace.

Mr Khalid Maow Abdulkadir expressed his appreciation for the coming together of the two sides and his desire to translate it into a working and feasible project of reconciliation and peace between the two communities and for all Somalis. In this context, he recalled the story of Mr Sayid Ma'alow, Benadiri elder, who hated the Habar-Gidirs and swore not to talk to any of them because of the atrocities their militias did to him, his family, property and community. But a change occurred when he accepted to talk to Mr Omar Salad, a member of the community against which Mr Ma'alow held

grudges, and how the two men arrived at an agreement in Caux to work together for reconciliation and peace between their communities. One or two persons can do a good deed and that can spread to all.

Mr Khalid said we should not only talk of the horror of the Civil War and the atrocities Somalis committed to each other; there were also positive stories where during the Civil War armed Somalis helped save unarmed Somalis. He said, 'For example, in 1991 at the outbreak of the Civil War, when fleeing from Mogadishu to Adado and then Bossaso, all along the way people helped and saved me. There are countless similar positive stories everywhere. In conclusion, I say that one should not lose hope of the mercy of God Who can help us to succeed in our desire to heal our wounds and make reconciliation and peace among our people a reality.'

Mr Osman Jama Ali, Chairman of the SIDD, who is a member of neither the Benadiri nor Habar-Gidir Sa'ad communities, but who has good relations with both, took the word. He expressed similar appreciation of the importance of the meeting and hoped that it could be a good step towards a true process of reconciliation and peace between communities and by extension to all Somali communities within and outside Somalia. He pointed out that this meeting and its aims accorded with the true spirit of dialogue, reconciliation and peace-building in which several of those have engaged themselves for a long time and especially during trainings sessions at Caux in August and at Initiatives of Change in London, as well as the quest for genuine reconciliation and peace by our people. 'I agree with Mr Abdirahman Warsame Elmi that the Benadiris' centuries-long town culture has constituted the treasure store of the Somali civilisation of civility, peace, knowledge and peaceful life. Its destruction meant the loss of the Somali core sedentary urban civilisation,' Mr Osman stated.

Mr Osman continued, 'The supporters and followers of the Somali armed movements (SSDF, SNM, USC, SPM, SDM, etc) belonged to a traditional nomadic background. That is why these movements neither devised credible organisational and political platforms nor practised their political programmes in a way that was capable of forming a broad-based national front or coalition that could be an alternative to the crumbling regime; hence, the outbreak of the Civil War and the chaos and destruction that followed the disintegration of the central government. In contrast to the traditionally nomadic communities, the majority of the Somali intellectual and educated elite are found in the Benadiri community and that puts more responsibility on the Benadiris to play a leading role in the reconciliation and peace-building process and the restoration of a working and credible Somali central government.

Finally, Mr Omar Salad suggested that the participants of both sides inform their respective communities of the discussions and ideas exchanged, and prepare for another, bigger meeting to discuss deeper and further the issues they need to make a dialogue. Mr Omar suggested that the composition of the forthcoming meeting, its agenda and venue should be coordinated by representatives of both sides in due course. This suggestion was accepted by both sides' representatives present at the meeting.

Training in Dialogue and Reconciliation

12 British Somalis completed a course in Dialogue Facilitation on five Saturdays in April and May. The training was delivered by Lawrence Fearon and Phoebe Gill of *Hope in the Cities*, an IofC Programme.

The course focused on different aspects of facilitation such as: the practical aspects of organising a dialogue; the role and qualities of a facilitator; aspects of communication, listening and understanding one's own emotions; how to 'take in, make sense and decide about intervention'; how questioning works, different types of question; how to manage the dialogue process; dealing with challenges and conflict; using silence as a tool in dialogue; and creating an action plan.



Course participants, trainers and others at the Presentation of Certificates on 13th June 2006

Course participants: Kinsi Abdullah, Mohamed Mukhtar Ibrahim, Mohamud M. Gure, Qasaali Faqi Abu Sheekh, Abdullahi Mohodin Hassan, Abdulkadir Ali Gedi, Hassan Ali Khaire, Abdiweli Jama Hussein, Aweys Mohamed Alinoor, Hussein Saleh Musse, Ahmed Omar Abati, Mohamed Bashe Hassan

What the participants said:

'I feel there is a need to open dialogue between different communities in Somalia'

'I appreciate this course and I hope that other Somalis will have the opportunity to learn what I learned.'

'We need more help to bring about needed change both for ourselves and the community.'

'This course shows us how to share ideas and how to resolve current problems.'

'To get involved in the process of dialogue in Somalia would be an opportunity to implement and if necessary modify the theory given to us.'

'It should have been longer!'

Conference: 'An Honest Dialogue for a Clean and Just Africa'

A group of Somalis participated in the annual Agenda for Reconciliation conference in Caux, Switzerland, 7th -17th August 2007. The purpose was to learn from other African peace-making initiatives and to build team-work among them.

The Somalis who participated were: Ahmed Abati, Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas, Khalid Maou Abdulkadir, Asha Aden, Osman Jama Ali, Dr Yusuf Ali, Hibak Egal, Abdi Afrah Gure, Mohamud Gure, Abdullahi Hassan, Mohamed Bashe Hassan, Ali Jeilani, Mohamed Kilas, Rashid Sabrie, Sudi Ali Yusuf.



Mohamud Gure introduced the whole Somali delegation to the assembly in the Main Hall.

They participated in an international cultural variety evening, presenting national songs and dances.



The Somali delegation presented a workshop analysing the situation in Somalia and their approach to peace-making. Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas gave a paper entitled 'The present political situation of Somalia' (Appendix I, p19)

Omar S I Abasheekh and Amina Khaled Maou participated in an earlier conference in Caux on the theme 'Tools for Change'.

SIDD registered as a UK charity

Somali Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy was registered on 12th October 2006 as a UK charity, No. 1116372, with the following objective:

To promote national and international conflict resolution and reconciliation with a view to relieving suffering, poverty and distress, and building and maintaining social cohesion and trust among Somalis and between Somalis and neighbouring communities, in the UK, in other countries hosting Somali refugees, and in Somalia, observing strict neutrality, without regard for clan or political allegiance, by means of the following activities:

- *investigating and identifying probable causes of the conflict*
- *examining possible solutions to the conflict through participatory research into relevant economic and social issues*
- *publishing reports for the public benefit on the causes of the conflict and recommended solutions*
- *mediating with parties to the conflict through facilitated dialogues and larger reconciliation meetings to increase mutual understanding and awareness and build trust*
- *providing courses to train Somali-language facilitators to organise dialogues in the UK and in Somalia*
- *providing courses and using other means to increase understanding of the importance of moral and spiritual values in private and public life as a basis for the development of democracy*
- *producing and distributing resource materials, including printed (books, pamphlets, reports of activities etc), visual (film) to create an environment favourable to reconciliation*
- *working in partnership with other agencies with similar objectives*
- *fundraising to enable these activities to be achieved.*

The first members of the Board of Trustees are: Osman Jama Ali (Chairman), Sir Jim Lester, Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas (Secretary), Abdi Afrah Gure (Treasurer), Fiona Leggat and Peter Riddell.

SIDD is honoured that HE Mohamed Sahnoun, distinguished international diplomat, and President of Initiatives of Change-International, and Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, former President of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of Initiatives of Change-International, have accepted to be International Patrons.

At the first meeting of the Trustees on 28th November 2006 it was agreed that the two principle objectives would be the ‘*reconciliation and integration of Somali refugees*’ and ‘*enabling skilled Somalis in the diaspora to return to Somalia and contribute to national reconstruction (in collaboration with other organizations)*’.

Four Sub-committees were formed around these two objectives, and also around Fundraising and Communications.

Background 1991-2005

The sustained association of Somalis with Initiatives of Change (IofC) began in 1991 when two Somalis of different clans, Ahmed Hussen Egal and Hassan Mohamud, who were refugees in Sweden, became reconciled as a result of their encounter with it.

In this new spirit, at IofC's international conference centre at Caux, Switzerland in 1993, Egal and other Somali participants drew up a list of potential peace-makers from different clans. Thanks to the support of the Swedish Nordic Africa Institute and IofC, nine of them met in Sweden in January 1994, and committed themselves to work for a long term process of reconciliation and forgiveness. They included General Abukar Liban, Dr Yusuf Omar Al-Azhari, Eng. Osman Jama Ali, Omar Osman and Mrs Anab Hassan.

Among those who have joined them since are Nurta Hagi Hassan, a prominent lawyer and social worker, Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas, a pioneer of Paediatric Medicine and Chairman of the UK United Somali Benadir Council, and Abdi Afrah Gure, Founder member and Secretary of the Harrow Association of Somali organisations in West London.

Osman Jama Ali, Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas and Abdi Afrah Gure began to attend the weekly Agenda for Reconciliation (AfR) meetings in London in the spring of 2004, and the two latter attended the AfR 'Peace-building initiatives' conference in Caux, Switzerland, in August 2004. Osman Jama Ali was a candidate in the 2004 presidential elections.

In February/March 2005, 30 senior Somalis, former government ministers, civil servants and journalists, representing all the clans, met in three workshops on 'The future of Somalia - Building trust and confidence'. A broad consensus was achieved on the causes of the collapse of the Somali state, the reasons for the failure of successive peace conferences, and the priorities for the future. A decision was taken to create an organisation, Somali Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy (SIDD), to carry forward the recommendations.

Ten of the participants were selected for a programme of training in Conflict Transformation, Dialogue and Reconciliation in the context of a conference, 'A world in crisis – learning from one another how to be peace-makers, 13-19 August 2005, at the IofC International Conference Centre at Caux, Switzerland. They were joined by a delegation of six nominated by Hon. Ali Mohamed Ghedi, Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia, and three other participants from the Somali diaspora communities in Sweden and Switzerland.

One significant development was a conversation that developed between prominent figures who had been supporters of the United Somali Congress (USC) and leaders of the Benadiri people. This led to an apology being offered by the former, which was accepted by the latter.

Some of the participants reported on their experiences to Hon. Sharif Hassan Sh. Aden, the Speaker of the Somali Parliament at a reception in London in October 2005.

Fifteen of those who had participated in these meetings were selected for five further day-long training sessions in London in the skills of Facilitating Dialogues in November and December of that year.

Appendix I

'The present political situation of Somalia' presented at the Somali Workshop in Caux by Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas

Somalia, a country in the Horn of Africa, is considered among the most volatile spots in the African Continent. It has gone through all the stages of political structure of the 20th century. From 1884 to 1960, Somalia was under colonial administration. From 1960 it achieved its independence and had the first democratically elected civilian government. In 1969 a military coup took place installing a military regime which lasted up to the beginning of 1991 and ended as a consequence of a popular uprising which led to the present civil war that plunged the country into crisis and statelessness.

The legacy of more than sixteen years of civil breakdown, anarchy and rule by various well-armed, ruthless militia whose allegiances are too often opportunistic and changeable, left Somalia a disordered, fragmented country without a functioning government or accepted civil structure. The central government collapsed and there are no public services; the formal banking sector is non-existent and economic infrastructure has fallen into total despair and insecurity grips much of the country.

This is an unfortunate situation in a country once known for the cohesiveness and unity of its culture and people. Despite all the changes, the Somali people are on the path of recovery. There is a growing business sector, and community-based universities and colleges are being established across Somalia. Remittances from Diaspora Somalis, estimated to be worth \$1.5 billion per year, contribute a capital lifeline to a huge number of Somalis and have transformed some regional towns into thriving economic centres. The telecommunication's industry is now entirely privatized and, although lacking coordination, offers one of the cheapest services in Africa. There are successful interventions, economic and infrastructure development and improved security in some areas. There is a basis for hope and the beginnings of solutions which politicians of inspiration and goodwill may build upon.

On the political side, at the beginning of 2004, the Somali political landscape was uncertain but more promising than it has been for a long time. The Somali National Reconciliation Conference in Kenya produced a charter that makes provision for a transitional government and federal state as well as proposing several mechanisms to assist the country's efforts to heal the bad legacies of the past unnecessary civil war.

On 29th August 2004, the Transitional Federal Parliament elected the new President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia. He, as mandated by the Transitional Charter, appointed the Prime Minister on 4th November 2004. As Government began relocating the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFI) to Somalia, a new political crisis emerged within the TFG structure dashing the hope for full factional transitional authority in Somalia. The TFI remains weak, divided and lacking the capacity to deliver. Early this year, Somalia's political dynamics took a new turn, shifting from clan-based to religious conflict.

On 18th February 2006, a group of four warlords-turned-ministers and a well-known and well-armed businessman in the north of Mogadishu declared the establishment 'The Coalition for the Restoration of Peace and War against Terrorism'. Many people interpreted the ideals of the coalition as addressing the needs of others rather than Somali needs. This feeling reduced the support of the people for the coalition in general and the warlords in particular. The same day the coalition's statement was issued, heavy fighting erupted between the forces of the coalition and Islamic Courts in and around Mogadishu.

Islamic Sharia Courts, using Islamic slogans, declared that members of the coalition were non-Muslims working under the cover of foreign elements. With public uprising, the US-backed

forces were defeated. The new Islamic Courts Union (ICU) began consolidating power by capturing all the warlords' armaments and taking over the entire region of Mogadishu.

Early in July 2006, the Sudanese Government invited members of the TFG and the ICU in an attempt to bring the Islamic Courts into the Government. This first round ended successfully. Hence, we believe that the Khartoum venue for negotiation is considered by all Somalis as the right place for mediation and reconciliation between the two parties, since there is a trust and confidence based on a common culture and history.

On 1st August 2006, the Extraordinary Session of the Council of Ministers of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) held its meeting in Nairobi, attended by the Foreign Ministers of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Eritrea and Sudan. Also in attendance were HE Dr Attala H. Bashir, Executive Secretary of IGAD, Amb. François Fall, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative to Somalia, and Amb. Mohamed Ali Fom, African Union Special Representative to Somalia. Representatives of the following International Partners Forum (IPF) countries attended the meeting as observers: United Kingdom, Denmark, United States of America, Italy, Norway, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Netherlands, Egypt, League of Arab States and European Union.

The Council received and considered the reports of the African Union (AU) and IGAD's Assessment and Reconnaissance Mission which went into Somalia 5-9 July, and noted that the situation calls for urgent IGAD political and security intervention in order to safeguard the gains made in the Somali Peace Process. Regarding political intervention, the Council re-affirmed the support of IGAD Member States for the TFI as the legitimate authority in Somalia, and welcomed the UN Security Council decision expressed in its Presidential Statement of 13th July 2006, in which the Security Council supported the TFG and the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) as 'the internationally recognized authorities to restore peace, stability and governance to Somalia' and further 'emphasized the importance of dialogue between the TFG and the Islamic Courts Union, and urges for the immediate resumption of genuine and active dialogue between the TFG, ICU and other parties'. Towards the end, the Council mandated the Chair to lead an IGAD delegation to Somalia to engage the parties in Somalia in constructive dialogue.

The Council also welcomed other initiatives that support the Somali Peace Process and appeals to all stakeholders and sponsors of various initiatives to collaborate with IGAD so as to harmonize all positive efforts, and noted the communiqué on Somalia issued by the International Contact Group on 21st July 2006.

Furthermore, the Council welcomed the efforts of the Arab League under the chairmanship of the Sudanese Government in facilitating dialogue between the TFG and the ICU and re-affirmed the unity of the IGAD Member States in assisting to resolve the Somali problem. The Council called upon all Member States to exercise restraint and ensure that their actions do not jeopardize the Somali Peace Process. Similarly, the Council warns all internal forces in Somalia not to engage in any actions that threaten the security and stability of the neighbouring countries. It urged countries within and without the region to strictly adhere to the UN Security Council Arms Embargo on Somalia and mandated the Chair of the Council of Ministers to lead a high level delegation to the UN Security Council and major capitals of the Security Council States to advocate a unified international approach to the Somali crisis.

The International Crisis Group (ICG)-New Report entitled 'Can the Somali Crisis Be Contained?' released in Nairobi/Brussels on 10th August states that 'Somalia is on the verge of a new war which can only be contained if both sides and the international community take urgent steps to pull together a government of national unity'.

The situation is, in part, a by-product of the long decline of Mogadishu factional leaders, who, a decade ago, monopolized political representation in the country but who have gradually faded,

creating a political vacuum filled by the Islamists. Their decline has multiple causes, including unwillingness to provide basic services and the rule of law in areas they controlled, and the rise of rival business elites. The clan-based Sharia Court System in Mogadishu, which began a decade ago as a local mechanism to deal with chronic lawlessness, is valued by local people and business interests as one of the few sources of local governance in the South. Its ascent has radically altered the Somali politics.

Since the Courts defeated the harmful warlords in four months of heavy fighting in Mogadishu this year, they have consolidated their grip on the capital and the adjacent regions, establishing a new political force in the South which threatens to eclipse the TFG. Ironically, the crisis is a direct product of ill-conceived foreign interventions. Decisive international action to contain the Somali crisis is long overdue. Diplomatic initiatives have tip-toed around the core issues, such as the fact that any negotiated settlement must reconstitute the TFG as a government of national unity and include credible leaders from the Islamic Courts. The TFG's draft National Security and Stabilization Plan (NSSP) must be revised to reflect new realities on the ground and agreement must be reached on a phased return of the federal institutions to the national capital, Mogadishu. An independent, broad-based constitutional commission should be established, as per the Transitional Federal Charter, in order to provide a forum for dialogue over the structure and legal foundations of the Somali State.

It is an obligation to mention, while international community focuses on re-establishing inclusive negotiations with Somalia's political leaders, concrete efforts are needed within Somalia to address the longer term issues of sustainable peace building and -legitimacy, without such efforts, the outputs of peace talks, externally sponsored interventions, would not have roots inside Somalia and would end up lacking the broad-based support necessary for sustainability.

To bridge this gap, the Center for Research and Dialogue (CRD), with which we have friendly relations, is conducting an extensive process of public consultation on issues essential to peace building and state reconstruction. CRD activities involve meetings across Somalia that bring local communities, civil society representatives, business leaders and Somali political leaders together to identify and agree on key issues and methods of addressing them in order to build a sustainable and peaceful society.

Given the drive needed to reconcile the Somali people and restoring the rule of law and essential social services and the large untapped professionals in the Diaspora, we are going to embark the establishment of a program that will reverse Somalia's brain drain and help those who voluntarily wish to go back and provide the well needed expertise which Somalia badly needs in its economic recovery and rebuilding of national institutions.

Equally important is that all Somalis are increasingly concerned about the meddling of Somalia's internal affairs by outside forces. We, therefore call upon the international community to actively engage in the peace process and encourage the mainstream moderates in the Union of Islamic Courts to accept a negotiated settlement with the Transitional Federal Government. This will avert any re-emergence of renewed violence and provide secure grounds for lasting political settlement in Somalia. We want to end the blame game and work towards the principle of "what is right" and not "who is right" for our situation.

It is my duty before ending our presentation to thank those colleagues who enabled our delegation to be here to-day and namely Jim Baynard-Smith, Peter Riddell, Fiona Leggat, Amina Dikedi-Ajakaiye, Campell Leggat and Amira Elmissiry of United Kingdom and Mr. Gunner Wieselgren of Sweden. Our gratitude goes to Dr Cornelio Sommaruga, the out-going President of Initiatives of Change International for his assistance towards the training program for our compatriots in UK in peace-building and conflict resolution, conducted by our good friends Phoebe Gill and Lawrence Fearon.

Similarly, we are grateful the support Initiatives of Change-UK has provided for the capacity-building of our newly-formed organization: Somali Initiative of Dialogue and Democracy.

Finally, all members of the Somali Delegation in Caux would like to express their deepest gratitude and appreciation to the Organizing Committee for making our stay delightful and our newly-acquired friends from the world over with whom we shared thoughts and ideas and from whom we gained experience and wisdom.

Appendix II

Extract from the final report to Forum Syd by Hassan Mohamud for his work as a volunteer in building reconciliation and peace in the southern part of Galkayo in the Modug region (2003-2004).

Background and purpose

Somalia was for 13 years a country without a government and Southern Modug a region without government. In the southern part of Galkayo there was no law and order. The northern part of Galkayo is in the state of Puntland and is mainly populated by the Darod clan. The southern part is a part of the Modug region with a population belonging to the Hawyie clan. Both parts have for decades been at loggerheads with each other. The northern part has recovered to some extent, and its judicial system, economic life, health service and educational system functions. When I started work in the southern part in 2003, there was no such infrastructure. It was a society in destitution where the people had lost the belief that it could be different.

The strategy developed with my colleagues, was 1) to create a society in the southern part where law and order and democracy could begin to function; 2) to create constructive relationships between the northern and the southern parts of the town so that they could work together and cooperate on the basis of equality.

Results so far

a) The most important result so far has been the establishment of a police force of 70 men in southern Galkayo/Modug. A 'committee for peace, security and development' (KFSU) was responsible for this, dividing the work into different sectors of responsibility. Besides collecting the money (US\$ 4500 a month, 50% from local people and 50% from diaspora Somalis), they also act as judges. They are responsible for the entire work of the police, the prison and administration and the payment of wages. So far about 100 persons have been caught for a variety of criminal activities eg murders, robbery, illegal roadblocks, rapes, assaults etc. The youngest was 7 years old and the oldest 60. Setting up this police force has been a decisive new phase which will take years for everybody to fully accept. Many were against it and did what they could to prevent it, but the founders feel that there is no turning back. The result is that violence had decreased by at least 60% to the end of 2004. That is why we believe that the new legal system will be accepted and permanent in the long run. But several disturbing elements are to be expected. The building of the prison will soon be finished and a number of cars for the use of the police have been repaired. The prisoners still live in miserable conditions (for example, prisoners' meals are weighed in grams) and that must be changed, but there is lack of money.

b) One part of this new order is also that all illegal roadblocks have been removed. This is of great importance for the development as Galkayo is a junction on the main road from southern to northern Somalia and into Ethiopia.

c) Regarding building 'bridges' between the two parts of the town, we succeeded in enabling a number of students from the southern side to participate in the training of mechanical engineers run by the so-called 'Göteborg initiative' on the northern side. Previously, this would have been inconceivable. It is a first step in breaking through the mental wall between the two parts of the town. At present (2005) this has been interrupted because of the ongoing battles between rival factions in southern Modug and the region of Galgadud. Our intention is however to resume this

process as soon as the conflicts are resolved. We have asked the 'Göteborg Initiative' if it could then be resumed on a bigger scale.

d) The NAADO (?) organisation has started to break through the wall between the two parts of the town in a different way. They have opened an office on the northern side and they cover the costs of the rent themselves. Here also members from the southern part can come. Through my presence, NAADO has become the most well-known example of how people can work together across clan boundaries even if it is not yet completely safe. NAADO arranged seminars over New Year 2004 for Asha Aden-Egal and Godvej Adenius from our cooperative - Kunsapsutveckling i Norden - to talk about HIV/AIDS. This issue may very well be one of the most important in future. NAADO is the only well-known organisation which is officially known to have members from both clans. One of its members is deputy head of the Galkayo hospital on the northern side. NAADO has made other important contributions in both parts of the town, for instance, improving the sanitary conditions with campaigns to clear rubbish and tidy up the town. (People share the town with animals, and animals often die from eating discarded plastic bags.) In southern Galkayo the ruins and all rubbish that has been thrown away over the years is a constant sanitary danger. On July 30th the women's association of southern Galkayo with whom I have been working closely and NAADO together arranged a joint 'tidy-up day'.

The chairman of NAADO has been on a three-week leadership training course. He told me that the visit of the two lecturers from Sweden had given him a new motivation to learn more about leadership and about the issues of HIV/AIDS. He said that the members of NAADO had grown in commitment to the task. They were looking forward to continued cooperation with the Swedish cooperative and the Institute for National Health in Sweden as well as the return of the Swedish lecturers with other experts.

e) Because of the presence of the police and the new security situation Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) has dared to establish its operations in southern Galkayo. So far, they have employed 70 persons from this part of the town and, supported by Forum Syd, they have started to expand their activities at the Eastern hospital (the hospital on the southern side). I have worked together with Mohamud Kulane who is the volunteer that 'Imam Nawavi' sent there during the summer supported by Forum Syd as well as the volunteer of Daaryeel who also works in the area. It has been a joy to me that several persons from Sweden now can support each other in this area.

f) The World Food Programme (WFP) responded to my appeal about the severe drought last year in southern Modug. They visited the area twice to survey the situation and decided to deliver food to the population of the area. It is the first time in 14 years that something like that has happened. Because of reasons beyond our control, WFP was forced to temporarily withdraw from their commitment, however, Care International are preparing to take their place.

g) UNDP also listened to our appeal and visited the area to assess the security situation. This is important as the area's violent history made it impossible to get international help. (The area was under the control the late General Aideed's militia.) It is important that international organisations have started to give southern Modug its own status.

h) As preparations are underway for the new government to take power, international experts are planning centres for disarming and demilitarizing the militias and the population in general, and for the first time, southern Modug is included in this strategy.

i) Another organisation that has visited the area and is planning activities is the Swedish Diakonia. The chairman of our cooperative, Ahmed H Egal, in 1993 visited the head of Diakonia at that time, Mr Elmquist. As a result, Diakonia became involved in Somalia, and in particular, in Puntland. Now Diakonia is in the process of building a centre for the women in southern Galkayo, as they have in the northern part of the town. It will be the responsibility of, and the working base for 'Somali women for Peace and Development', the women's organisation I have cooperated with.

j) Through my presence in the area, other Somalis both from inside Somalia and ex-patriots with roots in the area have started activities. One of them has opened an internet coffee house; another

drilled a well in order to provide water for southern Modug; a third established a telephone company which includes electricity in its operations. When I went to southern Galkayo for the first time in 2001, no one dared to come into southern Galkayo apart from Värnen Warsame Bashir who was in Galkayo as a volunteer. It was at that time that I met a group from Forum Syd with Gunnar Kraft which was the beginning of our cooperation. Through Bashir and me they were the first Swedes ever to visit this area.

k) There were two reasons why I as a volunteer needed to participate in the Somali Peace and Reconciliation Conference in Nairobi in 2004: 1) In order to contribute towards the reconciliation of leading personalities and bring them together for constructive talks. For example, as a volunteer, I had created relationships of friendship with the new President as well as with one of his worst enemies, the former warlord Osman Ato. I managed to bring the two of them together and it led to reconciliation. When they arrived together to talk to all the new members of parliament, many of them, also enemies of Abdullahi Yusuf and former warlords, changed their minds. After that they also were included in the new government. 2) To involve the international NGOs in the needs in Modug, one needs to be in Nairobi as they have their Somali base there. The decision by Diakonia to build a centre for women in southern Galkayo was one result. The Italian NGO, APS, has also decided to become involved in southern Galkayo.

My contribution at the Nairobi conference was mainly to arrange seminars and to show films with a message of reconciliation. In the beginning Musa Sudi, Abdul Qasim, Mohamud Dire and other leading persons of the Hawyie clan refused to participate in the Nairobi conference as they wanted the conference to continue in Somalia. I succeeded in persuading some of them to change their attitudes. As I belong to the Hawyie clan, I could, together with other like-minded friends, contribute to creating unity within the Hawyie clan. To everybody's surprise the Hawyie clan became the first group which succeeded in distributing the seats in Parliament among themselves without outside influence. My role was to initiate personal contacts and to bring people together who otherwise would not meet or talk to each other

Summary

I have experienced two years of hard work, but I am very grateful to have seen a population rise who had 'hit bottom'. There had been total disunity and there were seemingly no human or material resources. The support from Forum Syd has been invaluable. The total disruption has been replaced 80–90% by a common engagement and the result has been a completely new unity. Through my participating in the Nairobi conference, I have been able to influence the development both from below and from the top. The population listens and accepts what the warlords and other leaders say on the radio. Because of my participation in Nairobi, I gained the authority to give leadership at the same time as obtaining a platform from which to influence the leadership without threatening their position.

Stockholm, February 8th 2005

Appendix III

'The Courage to Change and Beyond' - Msgr Fortunatus Nwachukwu, deputy to the Papal Nuncio to Switzerland, presented at the closing session of the Caux conference

Initiatives of Change

Your organisation bears the name, Initiatives of Change. The conference, An Honest Dialogue for a Clean and Just Africa, which is winding up today is one of these initiatives organised by your organisation aimed at bringing about effective and positive transformation in society. I wish to thank you for associating me with this initiative and for asking me to speak on the theme, The Courage to Change. I have modified the topic to read "the Courage to Change and Beyond" to

indicate that my reflections will go beyond what is contained in the book which I published three years ago entitled *The Courage to Change*.¹

Change, Initiatives and Courage

We sometimes hear people say, “this is my nature, there is nothing I can do”, or “the people are that way, you can’t change them...”. The impression is given, in such cases, of the human nature, particularly our characters and moral traits, as something fixed, final and unchangeable, which only has to be accepted. There certainly are things about our human nature which we cannot change: we cannot change our dates or places of birth, or our biological parents. These are simply received. But can we really prolong the list of such “unchangeables”?

Change is one of the few constants of human nature. Change happens, whether we like it or not, whether we wish it or not. In human life, there are no static situations. One is either moving ahead or sliding backwards. The person, who affirms not to move, may in fact already be rolling in the opposite direction! This is no new observation. Aristotle and other ancient Greek philosophers already spoke of the constant flux of nature, which is kept in motion by an unmoved mover². Similarly, in more recent years, William Barclay has also affirmed that human life is “a process of gaining more or losing more” and that “nothing in life stands still”.³

If then change is such a constant of nature, why do we need initiatives or courage in order to bring it about? The simple answer is that while change may be unavoidable, in one way or the other, it is not unmanageable. We can manage change, give it a particular rhythm or direction. We can make things move better, quicker and in the desired direction. To do that we need good initiatives and generally also courage.

The Change of Anabasis

The change that is referred to here is the transformation of persons and things. It may be *ab intra*, i.e. originating from within, from the very nature of the person or thing, or *ab extra*, i.e. from outside. It may also be *ad intra*, i.e., directed towards oneself, or *ad extra*, i.e. focused on the other. Change may be positive or negative; a change of growth, of development, of positive evolution, or one of degeneration, disintegration, depreciation or decay. It may be a change for life, or one towards death, an *anabasis* (the Greek for “upward movement”) or a *katabasis* (Greek for “downward movement”)⁴.

In nature and in human beings, the positive and the negative changes – the *anabasis* and the *katabasis* - are often found together. Just as ordinary material objects could be moved upwards or downwards, so also human beings; and as material objects left in the air tend to fall downwards, so too human beings. Similarly, animate beings or their seeds left solely to nature’s forces often tend towards a disintegration, decadence and decay – i.e. to *katabasis*; when they do germinate to life, such a life has to be tended or guided to protect it from that negative tendency towards decadence. Usually, to prevent the natural tendency to *katabasis* entails resisting and countering the effects of the force of gravity. While such a resistance is not possible in inanimate things which are simply at the mercy of external forces, animate creatures, and especially human beings, can counteract external forces and choose the direction of their own motions. This is the change that is meant here: a transformation from *katabasis* to *anabasis* – which involves resisting the common or “normal” tendency and swimming against the current in order to turn around the course of things. It usually entails facing up to a challenge and requires a will and decision, perseverance and courage. This is what I call the courage to change⁵.

¹ Cf. F. Nwachukwu, *The Courage to Change. Take Off Your Shoes*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2003, pp. i-120.

² Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, 12.7; 107b8-9.

³ W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of Matthew, vol.2, chapters 11-28*. The Daily Study Bible, Revised Edition. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1975, p.67.

⁴ Cf. F. Nwachukwu, *The Courage to Change, op. cit.* 12-13.

⁵ *Ibid.*

A typical paradigm of this pattern of change – from katabasis to anabasis – is to be found in the falling and rising of a soccer ball.⁶ The sense of such a paradigm lies in the peculiar similarity between the ball and a human being. Just as the soccer-ball originally consisted in leather (skin) and air (breath), so is the human being made of flesh and breath, of a tangible body and an intangible spirit. When the ball is deflated and without air, it cannot rebound, but remains grounded. It only rebounds if it is filled with air. Similarly, when the human being is deflated, without air or spirit, the person remains grounded and lifeless and can no longer react or rebound. He or she becomes dispirited. In order to react or rebound, like the ball, the human being needs air, breath or spirit. It means that true change requires and begins with the spirit - a change of spirit, a new spirit. The courage to change is essentially a matter of the spirit. Not every type of spirit is meant. Scientists tell us that cold air is heavy and tends to move downwards, while warm air moves upwards. That is why hot air is used in keeping balloons afloat. Consequently, the new spirit which is meant here has to be warm, in order to be able to generate and sustain an upward movement.

A New Spirit for Africa

Let me now try to apply this concept of change to the African context. In the past 9 days, this dialogue session for “a clean and just Africa” has focused on four main themes, namely: good governance and corruption; peace and conflict resolution; trade and economy; and health and food security. Various interventions have perused these themes eloquently, hammering out new trails and renewing older ones for a cleaner and just Africa. At the root of these proposals lies the desire for a positive change, an anabasis, an upward transformation of the African situation. And it is our contention that such a transformation can only begin with a new and warm spirit.

The need for a new spirit should not be understood negatively. Africa is not a failure. It is a continent on its way, although its journey these past years has been so turbulent one sometimes gets the impression of an almost dispirited continent, from which its sons and daughters try to escape.

The woes of Africa and Africans and the criticisms leveled against them are not difficult to remember: wars, massacres, rapes, famines, sicknesses, indolence, corruption, poor governance... etc. Some of the greatest detractors of the continent and its inhabitants, like Stephen Smith, evoke a malign parallel between the story of black Africa (“negrology”) and its funeral announcement (“necrology”).⁷ Smith’s description of the African situation couldn’t be bleaker: half of the continent is devastated by wars (“guerres d’écorceurs”); the other half limps between crisis and corruption, tribalism and anarchy; clandestine emigration and brain-drain are common, whereby the best abandon the continent; in a number of countries, government officials and other employees accumulate months and years of unpaid salaries; hospitals are defunct, schools are closed; in some cases too, the State is in total collapse; HIV-AIDS strikes everywhere, takes away the elite and reduces life-expectancy by fifteen to twenty years.

While some of the criticisms correspond to concrete sad situations in Africa, others are stereotypes born out of prejudice. It is certainly unjust to resort to such stereotypes in formulating general evaluations of the African situation. But it is equally simplistic to recourse to another set of stereotypes in defending or excusing failing African leaders or other evident culprits in the African saga: the stereotypes of colonialism and pillage of African resources by the colonial powers, of slave-trade and its consequences, and of Western greed and injustice.

Non-Africans do have a lion’s share in the causes of the woes of the continent and it is always easy to find in them “the scapegoat” to explain the things that go wrong in Africa. They are the makers and exporters of the arms that feed and sustain the African wars and massacres; they are the partners of corrupt African leaders; they provide safe refuge for money and wealth stolen

⁶ Elsewhere I have tried to present the paradigm in the poem, “*Call me a soccer ball*”. Cf. F. Nwachukwu, *The Courage to Change*, pp. 88-90.

⁷ Cf. S. SMITH, *Négrologie: Pourquoi l’Afrique meurt*. Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 2003

from Africa, etc. The list could be made much longer, but that does not solve the African problems.

However kind or understanding the Western world may be or pretend to be with Africa, it is not going to solve the problems of Africans for them. The fact is that the foreign policy of every country is primarily designed to promote that country's national interest. Non-African countries will help Africa and Africans to the extent that such help serves their interest and they have something to gain out of it.

One instance is the current effort of Western nations to appear friendly with oil-rich Arab and Muslim countries, a situation which has contributed a good deal to making the defence of Muslims politically fashionable. In a similar way, Africa has to strive to make itself attractive and its defence and that of its children also fashionable. The continent may not have the same abundance of oil that the West is looking for, but it could search out other ways of making itself attractive, especially with regard to its human resources and natural reserves. This would entail a reform that has to come ab intra, from within Africa and Africans, from a change of spirit. Such a change has to embrace all those areas of life which are also linked to the human spirit, including especially, education and training, general upbringing, mentality, identity, religion and immortality.

A New Spirit: Education and African Self-Esteem

One of the major sources of spiritual renewal is education, and the greatest form of education is the formation of the mind, the seat of the spirit and personal comportment. What is meant is not just the formal passing on of information, including scientific, technical and technological information, but also the formation of the whole person, including the person's relationship with his or her fellows and environment.

Education is essential if Africans are to correct the loss of self-esteem and the mental alienation they have suffered due to centuries of confinement to servile roles. In fact, centuries of imposed or accepted slavery has made most Africans come to consider themselves and their fellow Africans as good enough only for second pipers. The African's self-esteem has been so much affected that many Africans automatically consider non-Africans, especially if light-skinned, to be more capable than they are. It is annoying enough for a Westerner to underestimate a person simply because that person is African or dark-skinned; but it is disappointingly irritating when an African underrates or treats with disdain another African simply because he or she is from the same continent or has a dark skin. In some cases, in fact, Africans find greater esteem in the hands of non-Africans! Instances abound. Gabon Flash⁸ tells the story of an African proprietor with a successful business in the field of the new technologies (cited at the Davos Forum among the world's 100 most promising young leaders), who sent consultants (black Africans) to give training in Gabon. On arrival they were told by their hosts that, judging from the high fees charged, they had been expecting white consultants! Again, how many Africans would buy chocolate made in Ghana rather than Europe, although the former may have a greater guarantee of being produced 100% from cocoa? It would also be interesting to ask Africans occupying high ranking posts in international organisations and agencies whether they receive greater recognition and cooperation from Africans or from non Africans. How can we speak of African recovery if Africans do not give due value to African talents and products? How can Africans justly expect others to give them that which they do not give themselves?

The problem is accentuated where ethnic or, more especially, racial differences are involved. As I was concluding my three years' sojourn in Northern Africa, the mother of my very close friend from the region thanked me for my presence in their family and told me that before meeting me, she had never imagined that black Africans were capable of speaking so many languages and doing the things that I did. I have since then begun to wonder what would be the result of a study

⁸ Cf. G. Flash, "Négrologie, pourquoi l'Afrique meurt de Stephen Smith, éditions Calmann-Lévy"; Article posted on web on April 19, 2004.

on the situation of black Africans in those parts of the continent and of the world! Yes, Africans need to love more, and not underrate, Africa and Africans.

In fact, if Africans, and especially African leaders, were to give due value to the capabilities and talents of fellow Africans, the amount of space given to nepotism and tribalism in public administration would shrink drastically. A great blow would therefore be dealt to a major source of mismanagement and corruption in the African society. There would be no more cases of African leaders wishing to cling to power, under the pretext, sometimes unpronounced, that they might be the only ones capable of leading their nations. In fact, when talent and efficiency are replaced with nepotistic criteria, the result is failure, mediocrity, socio-economic quagmire and suicide, not to talk of the rivalries that eventually explode into all out wars.

African Identity and the Question of Citizenship

The new spirit for Africa would also tackle the question of African identity and of citizenship in the various nations and parts of the continent. Is it not saddening that at a time when Western countries are gradually removing the barriers between them, Africans are treated to stories of the possible horror of racial cleansing in some of its regions (one can't but think of Darfur) and, in others, African leaders are still brandishing jingoistic slogans, with dubious justification, that foster exclusion rather than integration in the continent (one thinks of the concept of "Ivoirité")? In certain countries minority ethnic groups are mistreated due to the absence of adequate cultural formation, effective political will, balanced legislation and reliable judicial system to guarantee and protect the equal rights of all citizens. In some cases, in fact, some nationals find themselves refused, for example, the right to possess property on equal footing with members of the dominant ethnic group(s) in particular areas or cities of a country; or when they do own property, they are often subjected to various sorts of pressure, including financial exactions.

A new spirit is needed to address with courage and sincerity questions such as: who is an African?; do Africans take that identity seriously or treat it simply as a matter of convenience? These questions are not as innocuous as they appear and the answers to them are not as obvious as they may seem. A case in point is the experience of Taiwo, a sub-Saharan African student at a university in Northern Africa. Taiwo tells of how he was once irritated by a fellow student from the region who, in their conversation, was repeatedly using the expression "vous africains" (you Africans). So Taiwo asked, "You keep on saying, 'you Africans'. Are you not African yourself?" The other replied, "Well, geographically speaking, I am African, but at heart, I am Arab". Taiwo felt hurt, as though a sensitive spot in him had been touched. He cut in with annoyance, "If at heart you are only Arab and not African, then you are no better than an occupier of Africa or the colonial powers!" He did not know he was touching a volatile keg, because the other student practically exploded at being compared to occupying colonial powers. Africans of that region have also known the brunt of colonial occupation and like to distance themselves from an experience they detest...

The reactions of both students are quite understandable but totally uncalled for. These days people speak calmly of Afro- or African-Americans, of Italo-Americans, etc., without comparing Americans of African descent or other origins to the colonial powers or occupiers of the United States of America. The difference is that such people do not feel themselves Americans only geographically, but also at heart and in their blood. They defend the American interest - fight their wars (whether "just" or "unjust") and die for their nation - like the rest of Americans. This fact is not altered by the persisting discrimination against Afro-Americans in their own country. It certainly makes that discrimination very painful and incomprehensible. Is it therefore not possible to arrive at such a calm integration in Africa that people would have no problems in speaking of Arab-Africans or Afro-Arabs, Indo-Africans and even Euro-Africans without any complexes? The important common denominator is that all feel themselves fully Africans, at heart and geographically, so that all defend with equal zeal the interest of the continent and its peoples.

The challenge here is accentuated by the fact that many Africans have genuine links and roots outside Africa - in Europe, Asia and in the Arab and Mediterranean worlds. Yet, the average

black African would like to see all Africans distinguish themselves clearly from the former colonial powers and from the more recent apartheid Afrikaans of South Africa. It is not enough to argue that one's forefathers settled in a particular region of Africa centuries ago. The supporters of the apartheid regime in South Africa also made similar claims over parts of that region of the continent. Nor is it satisfactory to argue that one's ethnic group has been accepted by the local populations. Most of the colonial powers also found local acceptance. The diffusion of a language in the continent is also not a legitimising argument. On the contrary, effort must be made to distance the spread and acceptance of the English, French, Portuguese and Arabic languages in various parts of Africa from unwelcome redolence of colonial powers. Finally, care has to be taken not to evoke religion in order to support a forced presence as some supporters of the apartheid regime did (for example, using the Biblical story of the curse of Ham by Noah) in their desperate effort to justify apartheid. Every African has to feel himself or herself truly African at heart and with no complexes.

A New Spirit: Religion

It is necessary to emphasize the need not to misuse religion in the African context. Africans are generally known to be very religious people and it is not surprising that two of the world's most widely diffused religions, Christianity and Islam, have found a warm welcome in the continent. What is not only surprising but very is saddening how often these religions have been misused and made a source of deadly conflicts in Africa. This is particularly disturbing because both religions preach peace and love, brotherhood and goodness.

Moreover, it has to be said that neither Christianity nor Islam is originally African. Both religions were imported into the continent. With regard to Christianity, although Jesus was made to take refuge in Africa (Egypt) as a baby, we have no accounts of his returning there as an adult. His message was brought to the continent later by his followers. Regarding Islam, no commonly known author has written of the Prophet Mohammed visiting Africa personally. Islam was also brought to Africa by his followers. If then both religions were imported into Africa, for the spiritual uplifting of Africans, there should be no excuse for anyone – African or non-African – who, overlooking the good elements of these religions and clinging to those they can manipulate, turns them into justifications for horrible fratricide in the continent!

Rethinking African History: the Slave-Trades and Colonialism

A more balanced approach to certain elements of African history, particularly the slave-trade and colonialism, is necessary if Africans are to salvage their credibility before the observing and listening world. For example, it has been observed that many African authors writing on the painful drama of the transatlantic slave-trade either keep silent over or purposely underemphasize the commerce on black slaves that were carried out through the trans-Saharan and other North-Eastern trade routes in the continent. As a result Africans have often been accused of trying to exonerate, “for political reasons”, the Arab world from their participation for centuries in the deportation of black slaves, while laying the main blame on the Western world⁹. That accusation should be dealt with sincerely and courageously, not primarily to please non-African commentators, but especially to heal the common memory of black Africans, Arab-Africans and the rest of their Arab friends. A balanced history of Africa should also shed light not only on the atrocious crimes of the foreign slave-dealers, both from the West (Europe) and from the North-East (the Arab world), but also on the culpable roles of Africans themselves, who captured and sold their own brethren for various gains. Only then can Africans begin to exorcise the horror of

⁹ Stephen Smith writes, in fact, that the dominant African historiography exonerates the Arab world from their participation in the deportation for centuries of black slaves for “des raisons politiques opposées à celles visant à aggraver la culpabilité des Blancs”. Cf. *Négrologie*, p 87. Professor Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau has recently recalled that between the 7th and 19th centuries, about 17 million Africans were captured and sold to Arabs. He calls it an “*episode aujourd'hui méconnu, resté tabou*” but still the “*plus grand trafic d'hommes de l'histoire*”. Cf. O. Pétré-Grenouilleau, “*La traite oubliée des négriers musulmans*”, in *L'HISTOIRE*, no. 280, Oct. 2003, p. 48.

those long chapters of their history and extinguish the many remnants of that history that are still very much alive in the continent.

With regard to colonialism, there should be no minimizing of the revulsion and humiliation of that rape of the African continent. The fact that a new life could result from a rape, and that life is in itself a beautiful gift, does not assuage the disgust caused in the victim by the violent act. So it is with colonialism. The bitterness of former colonies is therefore totally understandable, notwithstanding the fact that some colonial powers did leave some positive elements in the territories they occupied. Yet, it is unhelpful to remain chained to the past, especially when it offers an easy excuse for the errors of the present. The fact is that most modern nations, including developed countries of the West, have known the experience of colonialism in the course of their history. It was normal for the ancient great empires to conquer territories and turn them into vassal states. Much of today's Europe and Northern Africa suffered that experience at the hands of the Greeks, the Romans and the Turks. What about today's Middle East, where for centuries sovereignty over the peoples and territories exchanged hands between the Mesopotamians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, Europeans, Arabs, etc.? In more recent times, much of Asia was colonized by some of the same powers that occupied Africa. Similarly, the Americas were subjugated by the Spanish conquistadores... It is unnecessary to attempt a comprehensive listing. In any case, such a list would not offer an excuse or, much less still a justification, for colonialism. Yet, it does show that former colonies can put their pains behind themselves, pick up their lives and forge their way to modernity and progress. Some Asian and American countries have done it. African countries can also do it. I heard someone recently wonder why Nigeria, with its crude-oil deposit which surpasses that of some Arab countries, is not able to give itself an image as internationally respectable as that of these Arab nations.

It is not uncommon at sessions of United Nations Human Rights mechanisms to hear pro-African activists argue for the right of Africans and people of African descent to receive financial reparation for the crimes of colonialism and the slave-trade against them. Without any prejudice to the merit of the claim or of the arguments presented, it may still be wise to ask how one would guarantee that such reparations, if they were to be paid to some African leaders of today, would not quickly find their way back into private bank accounts in the West. If that were to happen, then the West would have washed its hands and conscience with money, while the poverty and misery of many Africans, because of the lack of accountability of their leaders, would continue. Common sense would require therefore that before insisting on such a demand, Africans do some home-work in putting their house in order. This has to begin with reformulating national constitutions and legislations to cater for essential values such as accountability and equity in the running of State's affairs.

A New Spirit: Immortality

The new spirit in question is also one of immortality. Africans, both Christians, Muslims and followers of the African traditional religions, generally believe in immortality. Yet, the reference here is not just to religious immortality, but to the continued life of a person in the minds of people long after the person's physical death. This immortality, like the religious one, is gained through sincere personal commitment to doing good, but it also comes from true heroic leadership. Unfortunately, many African leaders do not seem to think of this immortality. Nor do some of them think of religious immortality, since otherwise they would be more circumspect in their actions. Many think only of their political immortality on their thrones, either personally or through their direct children. Others think only of material immortality whereby they try to accumulate so much wealth, siphoned from the State's coffers, that generations of their descendants would not finish squandering years after their death.

Yet, Africans would have loved to see their leaders courageously engaging in initiatives that make a significant contribution to their countries' development and render them immortal in the minds of the citizens. One thinks, for example, of a Nigerian President who takes it upon himself to offer the country a modern rail transport system to replace the almost half-century old railways, which were built by the colonial masters for the evacuation of goods from the interior

of the country. What about a functioning electricity or telephone network, or effective sanitary and education systems? A good number of African leaders have at their disposal the necessary resources to take such bold and courageous steps. A heroic leader need not be excellent in everything in order to be remembered, but can immortalise his or her name through a single project of crucial importance.

A New Spirit: Defeating the Barrier of Poverty

A major obstruction to these measures that have been suggested is the problem of widespread poverty in Africa. Poverty triggers off an unfortunate vicious circle: it impedes progress while the lack of progress in turn generates more poverty! Breaking such a poverty-cycle is not easy, especially in our world of today in which, generally, the wealthy nations determine the agenda and direction of international discussions and negotiations. They impose their views and positions, while the voice of the poorer nations is suffocated, ignored or, at best, de-emphasized in favour of particular “political” considerations and agreements. Poor countries which dare to propose or support initiatives that challenge the wealthier ones, or make them uncomfortable, are threatened or punished with various sanctions, including the suspension of economic assistance. Consequently, many poor nations prefer to lie low and follow the current in silence, for fear of losing economic subventions that they consider vital for their survival. Yet, by so doing, they gradually become addicted to living on “handouts” and unable to develop the necessary tendons and biceps to stand and walk on their own.

To counter such a tendency requires courage, heroism and sacrifice. In the short term, attention has to be moved from material wealth to a healthy upbringing and mentality. The new spirit and mentality will then inspire greater efficiency in the management of the few resources possessed by a country, leading it gradually out of the shackles of poverty, through self-respect and dignity, towards a general well-being. It is possible to be materially poor and still be respected for one’s strength of character. The worst thing that could happen to a nation is for its poverty to be both material and mental, while the fundamental way out of material disadvantage is spiritual renewal and mental strength.

In conclusion, all the points that have been raised may be reduced to one, namely, animating Africa and Africans with a new spirit. When the spirit is in good shape, the body reflects it and is more beautiful and attractive. A change of spirit in Africa will produce a more beautiful Africa, more attractive to Africans and non-Africans alike. This will in turn inspire a change of mentality of many people towards Africa and Africans. Africa will become again the land of sunshine, aprica or aphrikê. Similarly the change for Africa, an almost dispirited continent, and for Africans, would entail a new spirit, and thus a new mentality, vision and sense of priority. Some decades ago Chinua Achebe published the book, *Things Fall Apart*.¹⁰ The volume is an epitome of the katabasis of the African society and culture as they came in contact with the colonial powers and Western culture. The time is now long overdue to write, not only on paper, but in reality, as a follow-up to Achebe’s story, the anabasis of Africa and of the African society and culture. It is time to rise, to move from “Things Fall Apart” to “Things Back in Place” – from collapse to reconstruction.

¹⁰ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Oxford et al: William Heinemann Ltd, 1958.

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