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(For IMMEDIATE RELEASE)

**Somaliland Presidential Election: A Great Example for Countries of the Region and Beyond**

On June 26, 2010, on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their independence from Britain, the people of Somaliland went to the polls to elect a president. For several weeks before the election, the ruling UDUB party and the two opposition parties, Kulmiye and UCID, engaged in a robust but peaceful and dignified campaign to compete for votes. The sight of more than a million people peacefully lining up to vote before dawn at polling stations in towns, villages, and at times under acacia trees in the nomadic hinterlands was a sight to behold.

By far, the most remarkable achievement by Somaliland is the advancement of democratic ideals and institutions in a turbulent region and under very difficult and lonely economic circumstances. Multi-party municipal, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in rapid succession in 2002, 2003 and 2005, respectively; and all were declared free and fair by international observers. If these successive elections were the equivalent of mid-term tests, the June 26 presidential election, in which the ruling party lost by a sizable margin and conceded defeat gracefully, was like the final exam. And Somaliland passed that final exam with flying colors.

Several factors were responsible for Somaliland's peaceful, free, and fair presidential elections:

- An independent and competent National Election Commission
- An incumbent president willing and ready to accept the will of his people
- An electorate determined to safeguard at all costs the peaceful gains made in the past two decades
- A robust opposition able to hold the government's feet to the fire but magnanimous in its victory

For the past nineteen years, the people of Somaliland have been on a trajectory of peace, reconciliation, reconstruction, and self-reliance. Unrecognized as a country, they were unable to tap into any of the traditional sources of international funding and investment. They had to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, rebuilding schools and other infrastructure decimated during the civil war that began in the 1980's and lasted into the 1990's when military dictator Siyad Barre was finally ousted.

The Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center, a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in the United States, that is dedicated to peace and economic development for the Horn of Africa sub-region congratulates the people of Somaliland for this singular achievement. As sons and daughters who hail from all the nationalities of the sub-region, brought together by the moral imperative of uniting our people for a better future, we take pride in Somaliland's shining, history-making moment. **The upcoming inauguration of opposition leader Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud on July 26, 2010 in the presence of outgoing president Dahir Riyale Kahin after a hotly contested election is a teachable moment that is rare in the sub-region and elsewhere in Africa. It is a portrait for the history books that must be preserved for posterity.** It is our hope that other countries of the region, and their brothers and sisters in the South, learn lessons from Somaliland and take steps towards a better future characterized by peace, democracy, and respect for human rights.

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