

**Remarks at the Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center
Community Meeting on Somalia
June 3, 2007
By Dr. Ali Bahar**

Good evening brothers and sisters,.

I want to thank the organizers of this conference, *Horn of Africa Peace and Development Center*.

I also thank Ambassador David Shinn. He has been a needed voice, offering his expertise in the region so that others may understand more about the problems in the region. And this may encourage the rest of the world to shift their focus to the region collectively.

I also want to thank all of you in here. The fact that we are here underscores how significant it is for us to have a dialogue about what to do to help our people.

It is an honor to be here before you.

I am not a politician nor am I representing one particular group or clan.

I am here because I just couldn't miss the opportunity to learn from this conference and from you all.

On the current situation in Mogadishu:

The fire has been burning in Mogadishu for too long, in fact very, very long.

For the last 16 years, some warring Somali groups have refused to trust each other, failed to rule without violence, and in the process destroyed many innocent lives.

We failed to govern ourselves in a civilized manner. That opened the door for foreign troops to intervene.

People are debating these days the Ethiopian presence in Mogadishu. Some people are against it and some support it, depending on who you talk to.

Let us ask the question: why did the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) invite the Ethiopian troops to Mogadishu?

The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) and the TFG had had lots of opportunities to end the suffering of the Somali people.

Unfortunately, they lacked the leadership to put the nation's interests before their personal feuds. Their ego got in their way.

After a few failed attempts for peace negotiations (twice in Sudan) between the UIC and the TFG, the negotiations fell apart. In part because the UIC thought that they had the upper hand to overpower the TFG in Baidoa. That was a miscalculation that had nothing to do with a peace deal. It was a sheer power hunger on the part of the UIC. Eventually, the UIC called for Islamic "Jihad" against the TFG. They declared war to capture Baidoa, the seat of the TFG.

Abdillahi Yussuf, having barely escaped an assassination attempt in Baidoa, had no disillusion about what sheikh Dahir Aweys was planning to do; to kill him.

The TFG was surrounded, encapsulated and was on the verge of being slaughtered in Baidoa by the UIC. They called for help from their closest ally, Ethiopia.

The reality remains that the TFG is the only recognized government by the world body to represent the Somali people. It has the support of many nations and thus has that leverage to call for help when it so chooses.

Keep in mind also that the UIC was getting support from outside. One country that was clearly in the mix of things was Eritrea.

Therefore, my understanding of the Ethiopian presence in Mogadishu at this time is that Ethiopian forces were initially invited by the government, TFG, to protect them from the UIC attack. The rest is history.

The question now is how long are the Ethiopian forces going to stay?

My guess is that how long they remain in Mogadishu depends on mainly two factors:

- (a) Whether the UIC insurgents stop their terrorist activities of killing innocent people, including the peacekeeping forces, and
- (b) Whether we find enough Africa Union (AU) or United Nations (UN) peacekeeping troops to replace them.

In other words, there will be benchmarks in order to gauge how secure things are before Ethiopian troops are withdrawn from Mogadishu and elsewhere.

But I also hate to see Eritrea emerging as the only African State in the region accused of being the sponsor of terrorism in Somalia. I really hate to see Eritrea drawn into the Somali clan wars.

During their struggle for independence, the Somali people helped the Eritrean people tremendously. Thousands of Eritrean people carried Somali passports to travel around the world. I think they owe us that much to help us stand up again.

I hope Eritrea stops bringing their war against Ethiopia to Somalia. We do not need a proxy war. It does not resolve our internal problems.

By and large, the TFG has the support of the majority of the Somali people outside Mogadishu. It is not a perfect government, but it is what we have now and we must work on it and fix it. Who in the region has a perfect government anyway? We all need better governments.

The UIC openly stated that they wanted to see Mogadishu look like Baghdad. The UIC openly encourage Al-Qaeda-style tactics to kill innocent people indiscriminately.

Men like Sharrif Hassan Adan, Sheik Ahmed and Hussein Aideed have no solution or ideas other than encouraging young men to commit suicidal acts.

And in my view, that is a crime.

The United Nation authorized the African Union intervention in Somalia. The AU peacekeeping forces did not invade Somalia, but the UIC will try to make you believe otherwise. They want these peacekeeping forces dead.

The UIC should respect this resolution and should not attack these peacekeeping forces if they are really serious about peace in Mogadishu.

Now, let me also briefly comment on the **process of reconciliation:**

Who should be included in the reconciliation process?

I don't pretend to know the answer to this question; however, I don't think I would be overstating if I said that the word inclusiveness has been over used without any specific and clear explanation of what it means.

You hear these days, both from the European Union Commission and the US, statements urging and sometimes even threatening the TFG to be inclusive in this reconciliation process, or else.

But it is my view that this broad statement lacks specifics and clear emphasis on whom to include to the reconciliation processes and why.

If the EU's definition of inclusiveness MEANS including anyone who uses violence to gain power, as some of the UIC members believe, then the EU needs to know that every time you reward one group or one clan because they threatened the peace process and advocate for

violence, then all other clans will follow suite with violence and demand a bigger piece of the pie. That is just the way that clan mentality operates.

It seems clanism, in the Somali case, is a frozen identity that is not easy to break up. Somalis tend to ignore all the other national interests and other shared identity they have in common.

Maybe the EU, the US, and Eritrea for that matter, if they want real peace for Somalia, should advise the UIC and their supporters to condemn violence, turn themselves in and become part of the solution. Come to the table with no pre-conditions and with solutions that may move us forward. Anyone who is supporting or advocating and assisting violence shouldn't be included in this process for lasting peace. We need people who have the nation and the Somali people in heart.

What we need, in order to move to the future successfully, are people with the quality and qualification necessary to move us out of this mess. We need quality, NOT quantity of more clan politics.

And finally, let me say two words of advice to the TFG:

- I. They should move beyond Baidoa and Mogadishu and talk to the rest of the Somali people; offer them hope and needed leadership on how to start rebuilding their lives and their communities back together.
- II. Make this reconciliation process as transparent and inclusive. This process should include those Somalis that have been marginalized and left aside by the 4.5 formula. These Somalis deserve better treatment and their concerns should be addressed by this government.

This process should pave the way for real peace in the future, as this government will not exist beyond their current term; it should hand over power to those who may come after it.

Therefore, we need a road map for future elections where people could elect their governments in a peaceful and democratic process.

In conclusion, it is evident that peace, at the end of the day, is up to us. We could only solve our problems if we get off the sidelines and willingly and intellectually sit down together for the purpose of finding a real peace for our people. Many nations are showing goodwill to help us resolve our problems. But their support may not last long.

We have no time to waste before resolving our problems. It is about time the Somalis move beyond these useless political games.

And be mindful that, ultimately, finding a lasting peace for our people is up to us.

I hope the Somalis use this opportunity and save their nation. There is a better chance for peace today than ever before.

My only hope is that somehow this time the Somalis will rise to the occasion and honor the prospect of peace in the region.

No other alternative is available to us.

Because the alternative has been tested and has been proven deadly:

The alternative is a failed nation, and when the nation fails, people suffer.

An overwhelming number of the Somali people are dying everyday.

Our people face the everyday threat of violence, starvation, illiteracy; as well as political unrest and civil wars.

Human trafficking and drug smuggling are also on the rise.

Environmental degradation is rampant and beyond control.

Thousands of our children die everyday from preventable diseases.

Our children die from wars they have no control over.

Our children are growing up fighting wars that they don't even understand.

Wars and violence, by their very nature, interrupt human progress, economic growth and kill productivity.

That is the alternative and it is NOT a choice for us.

Today, only 20% of our school-age children go to school. The rest are either dead or fighting. **That is not an alternative to peace.**

We need to help our children put down the AK-47 killing machines and, instead, build schools for them and provide them an environment where they could grow and become tomorrow's leaders for our nations. What our children need is protection from diseases. They need clean water, medicine, food and shelter, and above all, education, **not wars. Enough is enough, we cannot continue losing our future, our children, to senseless wars. It is a must that we stop this clan-driven madness.**

I thank you all for listening.