



Conveying the SSC Message to the International Community Mission Report

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May 05, 2009

A joint delegation, consisting of Garaad Jama Garaad Ali, the grand traditional leader of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC) regions in North West Somalia and representatives from the Northern Somalia Unionist Movement (NSUM), undertook a three-week mission in April to Nairobi, Kenya, conveying the true voice of the SSC people to the international community. That message in a nutshell was to declare for the umpteenth time their unswerving commitment to Somalia's unity and territorial integrity and their total rejection of secession, more so one imposed upon them through invasion and occupation by clan-based secessionists from neighbouring regions in NW Somalia. A secondary objective of the mission was to seek redress to the blatant inequitable distribution of humanitarian and development aid in which the SSC regions receive only pitiful leftovers.

This was a mission long overdue. For too long, going back to the collapse of the Somali government in 1991, the Nairobi-based United Nations humanitarian and development agencies dealing with Somalia have adopted, to varying degrees, a benign neglect of the SSC regions. This state of affairs has simple explanations:

- First and foremost, the SSC regions are geographically disadvantaged and hence uninviting to outsiders. Being peaceful, remote, landlocked, and sandwiched between one expansionist neighbour to the north west (Somaliland), and another indifferent but nominal partner (Puntland), the SSC news or appeals rarely ever make to Hargeisa or Garowe, let alone draw the reluctant hearing of clan-oriented BBC Somali Service, or the blinkered attention of the international humanitarian organisations based in Nairobi. In humanitarian crisis-ridden Somalia, where regions are competing for attention, those like the SSC that are out of sight, and kept incommunicado and inaccessible by its neighbours, will inevitably be relegated to the sidelines.
- Secondly, the SSC regions have done little to help themselves by way of establishing their own regional administration that could have defended them from their predatory neighbour, Somaliland, or pro-actively articulated their inalienable rights and solicited positive responses and interventions from UN humanitarian organisations.
- Thirdly, Somaliland has done every thing in its power to discourage UN agencies based in Hargeisa from having unhindered access to the SSC regions, a measure amounting to a vindictive collective punishment of the population for their opposition to go along with the secession. A secondary reason is to prevent the

outside world from discovering at first hand the true opposition to the secession in the SSC regions that would shamefully contradict its hitherto claim that the regions and clans in the NW Somalia are pro-secession, a naked propaganda aimed at soliciting recognition.

- Fourthly, Somaliland's baseless and contrived claim on the SSC regions, on the grounds that they are a heritage to them from their former British colonial master, and their eventual invasion and occupation of Sool have transformed a hitherto peaceful area into one where a possible armed struggle against the occupation is possible - a situation that would hardly be conducive to the presence or activities of international humanitarian agencies..
- Finally, most of the Hargeisa-based humanitarian and development agencies have come to value their long-enduring and well-established relations with Somaliland. Aversion to any showdown with Somaliland over SSC regions seems to have become their preferable *modus opeandi*; and when it comes to a choice, they are likely to opt out, when situations demand, for the lesser evil of sacrificing the legitimate rights of the SSC people rather than risk antagonising their pampered host. Indeed, credible and well-informed Nairobi old hands have intimated the hill challenges we faces in trying to reverse well-entrenched pro-Somaliland positions built up over many years since the collapse of the Somali State in 1991.

The mission, aware of the above parameters, and bearing in mind that the defence of the unity of Somalia and the opposition to the secession declared in some parts of NW Somalia were the overarching mission goals, had accordingly decided to commence its programme with a visit to the political offices dealing with Somalia, such as United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), and the African Union (AU); thereafter, it had meetings with the humanitarian and development agencies; and finally, it held various meetings with representatives of the Somali community in Nairobi.

1. Meeting with Political Offices

i) UNPOS

The mission held its first meeting with His Excellency, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (SRSG) for Somalia. Garaad Jama Garaad Ali, speaking on behalf of the other absent SSC traditional leaders, and also in the name of his people, briefed the SRSG of the situation in the SSC regions. He reminded his host that his people had the unique history in Somalia of waging a liberation struggle for over 21 years against the British colonialists in



From left Osman Hassan, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah and Garaad Jama

the early 20th Century in which almost two-thirds of his people perished. It would be unthinkable, he said, for people who made such incalculable human sacrifices for the Somali cause, and who since then played a leading role in defending the independence and unity of Somalia, to throw all that record and shamefully embrace secession and the break-up of Somalia as others did. Rather, they will oppose the new enemies within that threaten Somali unity as defiantly and resolutely as they confronted the British invaders a century ago.

Referring to the invasion and occupation of Sool region by Somaliland militia, the grand Garaad described the humanitarian catastrophe they caused and related human rights violations they committed. These, he said, amounted to indictable war crimes. He spoke how the once flourishing Lascanod city, regional capital of Sool, with a pre-invasion population of over 120,000 has since been emptied and reduced to a ghost town with less than 20,000 people remaining; the rest having been forced to flee their homes and are now scattered in the bush and neighbouring villages, dependent on meagre handouts from an already impoverished and overburdened community. Whatever help they received so far from humanitarian organisations have been like a drop in the ocean given the scale of the needs. Some of the displaced people are now trekking to the refugee camps in Kenya out of desperation. No less affected are all the traditional leaders of the SSC who have also been compelled, himself included, to leave their homes in Lascanod and live in temporary make-shift homes in the hinterland.

The Garaad reminded the SRSG that the main reason for Somaliland's invasion of Sool was not the presence of the Puntland administration in the SSC regions as they claimed, though that was a secondary reason which served as a good pretext. The real reason he said was their need to conquer and silence a people whose vehement and vocal opposition to the secession for the entire world to see and hear would render Somaliland's already dodgy recognition prospects even more remote.

Obviously, if the SSC regions were in favour of the secession, (as Somaliland often claimed in the past), they would have voluntarily joined Somaliland from the start, in which case the invasion would not have been necessary. The fact of the matter is that even if SSC regions were not part of Puntland, (which was their inalienable right to belong to it and not the business of Somaliland to interfere or oppose it), Somaliland would have still invaded them in order to bring the area forcibly under its control and stamp out any visible opposition to the secession at least in the regional capital, Lascanod..

With a view to apprising the SRSG on the collective stance of the traditional leaders on the invasion, occupation and wider secession issue, the Garaad handed him a copy of the Boocame Declaration of November 2007, issued soon after Somaliland occupied Lascanod. The declaration, signed by all the traditional leaders, had condemned the invasion and occupation, requested the immediate withdrawal of Somaliland's militia from Sool, decried any adherence to the secession and reiterated the SSC adherence to Somalia and their commitment to Somali unity. The Boocame

declaration represents, the Garaad stressed, the stance of the SSC people with regard to the Hargeisa-based administration. It puts to rest the crude disinformation Somaliland has fed the international community for years, claiming that the SSC regions are theirs, or that its people support their secession.

The Garaad lamented the failure of the United Nations to condemn the unprovoked invasion and occupation of one part of Somalia against another and the heinous crimes committed against his people. The perpetrators, he said, merited to be tried at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, just as other African war criminals had been indicted and put on trial. Instead, the silence of the United Nations in the case of Sool is tantamount to condoning the invasion and occupation.

Garaad Jama Garaad Ali has compared the invasion and occupation of his regions by Somaliland's militia like a crazy intruder who claims your home to be his and uses force to occupy it. In the face of this mindless aggression against ones home, the owner, he suggested, has three possible options open to him: be patient and hope the crazy aggressor will come to his right senses and leave ones home; failing this, a third party, like the international community, could intercede with him on ones behalf and hopefully prevail over him; and if that does not work either, then one has to use the only language the aggressor understands and that is the use of force. As things are now, the SSC people are close to the last option.

Although the patience of his people with the occupiers have been exhausted, and armed struggle is now being increasingly seen as the only option left, the Garaad is still sanguine about a peaceful end to this invasion. Sool was occupied, he said, in the misguided belief that this will usher recognition. Once the Hargeisa administration realises that recognition is unattainable, they should conclude, if they are rational and reasonable, that their continued occupation of Lascanod and Sool only entails costs, including possible armed resistance, and no political rewards. When that reality dawns on Somaliland's leaders, that will be the time when they may be persuaded to cut their losses and withdraw from Sool.

As a traditional leader, avoiding war to the extent possible is his main mission, he said, but there is a limit to how long he can hold back and restrain his people. A blind attachment at all costs to a doomed recognition will only bring untold suffering to the people of Somalia, particularly those in the North. As such, Somaliland's leaders should have the courage and required statesmanship to acknowledge this reality and choose peaceful dialogue with their fellow Somali brethren rather than secession, confrontation and eventual war, the Garaad concluded his presentation.

In his turn, the representative of NSUM added his voice to the Garaad's submission. He emphasized that the free choice the SSC people made in July 1960 to be part of Somalia, and their present opposition to secession, are their God given rights that could not be taken away or suppressed by another clan or region in Somalia even if they resort to naked force and occupation. Since its establishment a year ago, the NSUM had left no stone unturned in order to expose the clan nature of the secession and the opposition to it

throughout Somalia, both north and south. That message is now well received and understood.

Only a month ago, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office affirmed to NSUM that Britain, together with its other partners in the European Union as well as the members of the Security Council of the United Nations are all committed to uphold Somalia's unity and territorial integrity. This clear-cut stance by Great Britain would hopefully put the last nail on the coffin for those who were hitherto entertaining baseless wishful thinking that Britain, as the former colonial power, was edging towards recognising the enclave. He added that, given this stance by the EU and the UN Security Council, it behoves all UN agencies in Nairobi dealing with Somalia to forswear all actions, covert or overt, that undermine Somalia's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In his response, the SRSB talked about the current situation in Somalia and his efforts to put Somalia on the right keel that could restore its stability. He professed his knowledge of the history of the SSC regions and people, and assured the delegation that the unity of Somalia and its territorial integrity are the clarion calls of almost every resolution on Somalia adopted by the Security Council of the United Nations.

The Garaad expressed the deep appreciation of his people for the SRSB daunting task to help Somalia, and assured him that he could count on their support. The people in the SSC, he added, being peaceful and free from the conflict and turmoil that bedevilled the South for nearly 20 years, are ready to play their historical role and make new sacrifices for Somalia, its unity, sovereignty and stability.

The delegation therefore left the meeting with the SRSB highly satisfied that the unity of Somalia and its territorial integrity were in safe hands and invincible to any secessionist assault.

ii) African Union (AU) Office for Somalia

The second political office for Somalia based in Nairobi, other than UNPOS, is the Office of the African Union Commission. The AU has unparalleled say on the destiny of its member States. The EU and the Security Council of the United Nations all take their cue from the AU in deciding on the recognition or future of any part of the African continent. Only after the AU has taken a decision by consensus on a particular issue, including secession, does the rest world takes it up from there. Of all the issues that are anathema to the AU, none could compare with secession and for good reason. If it were accepted for one secessionist party or another, it could open a Pandora Box that would threaten the unity or existence of almost all the African countries. The insurmountable hurdles put up by the AU in the way of secession have done more for the defence of Somalia's unity than anything done by all those nominal Somali governments hatched since Siyad Barre's era. The only on-going defence of Somali unity is the current struggle of the SSC regions against Somaliland's secession.

With the above introduction as a backdrop, the SSC delegation had a meeting with the AU Special Representative for Somalia, Mr. Nicolas Bwakira and his staff. Mr. Bwakira was given the same briefings about the SSC regions that were presented to the SRSG. In his response, Mr. Bwakira assured the delegation that the *raison d'être* of the African Union was to protect the unity and boundaries of each member state and Somalia was no exception.

Turning to the simmering tensions in the SSC regions, Mr Bwakira said that Somalia had enough catastrophic conflict in the South since 1991 and the last thing it needed was another conflagration in the North. Responsible leaders everywhere, he voiced, should put peaceful dialogue before the use of force as the most potent approach to conflict resolution and reconciliation.

The Garaad, thanking the AU Special Representative, assured him that he and his fellow traditional leaders have been following his advice since Somaliland invaded his regions but that it was unfortunately the latter which resorted to the use of force as an instrument to achieve unrealistic political ends. He therefore appealed to the AU Special Representative to direct all their efforts and influences in persuading Somaliland to see reason and to immediately end its aggression and unconditionally withdraw from the SSC regions.

The AU Special Representative informed the SSC delegation that he would soon be going on mission to northern Somalia, including Puntland and Somaliland, and expressed interest to visit some parts of the SSC regions. The delegation extended an invitation to him to visit the SSC regions and assured him the cooperation and hospitality of the SSC people. They urged him not to heed the contrived “dispute” over the SSC regions by their neighbouring regional administrations and find for himself the true situation in the SSC regions

The meetings the mission had with the SRSG and the AU Special Representative are very reassuring to any Somali unionist as they are heartbreaking to those contemplating Somalia’s break-up.

2. Meeting with humanitarian organisations

i) Meetings with WFP, UNICEF, WHO, OCHA

The SSC delegation met the above agencies separately. The discussions centred on the SSC delegation complaining of the pro-Somaliland leanings of the agencies and of their culpable neglect of the SSC regions. While some of them admitted to this neglect, others, like WFP, have presented a strong defence of their record. It claimed to feed close to 73,000 persons, including school children, facts strenuously disputed by some members of the delegation. All the same, none of the agencies could provide convincing explanation why they failed to have operational presence in the SSC regions which by all accounts are the most peaceful regions in Somalia and instead chose to rely on offices and routes in Somaliland that have become part of the problem and not the solution.

The artificial “dispute” between Somaliland and Puntland over the SSC regions, as well as the other factors listed in the beginning of this report seems to have separately or cumulatively shaped in varying degrees the benign neglect of the SSC regions by these agencies. However, following our meetings, some agencies like OCHA were ready to visit SSC regions and assess the humanitarian situation afresh. However, what are urgently required are not *ad hoc* and token gestures but major policy and operational shift to the humanitarian activities of these agencies. Such a collective change by all the agencies could only materialise if directed by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, Mr. Mark Bowden. And it is for this strategic reason that the delegation chose to have the last meeting of its mission with him.

ii) Meeting the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia

The meeting between the SSC delegation and Mr. Mark Bowden was a productive one. Having reiterated the SSC misgivings about the humanitarian agencies neglect of the SSC regions, Mr. Bowden took a positive stance. He said that the guiding principle for their work from now on is that humanitarian aid will be delivered through whatever route was the quickest and most effective and delivered by staff whose loyalty was to the humanitarian missions of their agencies and not serving the interest of any regional administration they may belong to. He agreed the need for the agencies to have operational presence in the SSC regions that are independent of the rival neighbouring regional administrations. He suggested that OCHA could be the first such agency to have an office in the SSC regions.

3. Meeting with other southern regions and clans

The SSC delegation decided to include meeting with southern clan leaders in their mission programme in the belief that the defence of the unity of Somalia is not the sole responsibility or concern of the SSC people but one of equal importance to all Somali unionists anywhere in Somalia. In this regard, Garaad Jama Garaad Ali had reminded his counterparts and audiences at these meetings of the strategic geographical importance of the SSC regions as the bridge which unites the south and north of Somalia. As long as that unifying bridge exists, he emphasized, Somali unity would be alive and well. But if it is broken, as the secessionists are attempting to do, the break-up of Somalia into north and south would not stop there but could lead to similar break-ups in the south along clan and regional basis. Somalia is either one country and one nation or simply a collection of Bantustans, he repeated at all the meetings. Getting this message to clan leaders and the wider Somali public might be easy going but communicating it to the leaders of the Federal/union government may be an uphill task. All the same it has to be done.

4. Meeting with TFG/Union Government leaders

The weakest links in defending Somali unity are ironically the very ones that are tasked to do so, namely the Somali government and its leaders. The leaders of the governments cobbled together in Kenya and Djibouti have rarely ever spoken in support of Somali unity. It is true that former President Abdullahi Yusuf had once or twice mentioned Somali unity albeit half-heartedly but that was all. His first prime

minister, Prof Gedi, was at least frank about his indifference to the unity of the country and made no secret of his ambivalence towards Somaliland's secession. The current leaders, President Sheikh Sheirf Ahmed and his Prime Minister, Omar Abdirashid, have yet to find the time or interest to declare their adherence to Somali unity. The message this sends to Somaliland is quite clear: that they are not standing in the way of their separation though they may not openly endorse the secession. Somaliland is therefore fully aware that the road to its recognition no longer goes through London or Addis Ababa but ironically through Mogadishu, the birth place of Somali unity.

It is against this worrying background that the SSC mission deemed it necessary to seek urgent meetings with the President and his prime minister, government ministers and members of Parliament in order remind them of their responsibilities and that betraying Somali unity by design or default is something current and future Somali generations will never forget or forgive. The Garaad and his SSC are now going this phase of their mission.

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