

£SOMALIA

@A Human Rights Disaster

1. Introduction

In the 18 months since the ending of Siad Barre's brutal 21-year dictatorship in Somalia in January 1991, new civil wars have claimed the lives of thousands of innocent victims. Recent reports of killings, torture and mutilations of civilians by rival fighting groups heighten the need for vigorous efforts by the international community to press the different Somali political groups to respect basic human rights. New atrocities have been committed in the southwest just when the carnage in the capital, Mogadishu, had abated during a United Nations-brokered truce.

Civil war, insecurity and anarchic violence in much of the country combine with drought and famine sweeping through the Horn of Africa to threaten much of the surviving Somali population with further massive loss of life. The collapse of the Somali state and its economy intensify the difficulties of international relief agencies in tackling this severe humanitarian crisis. Just keeping imminent mass starvation at bay has engaged the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in its biggest current operational program. Hundreds of children and many adults are still dying each day in the devastated country. At least a quarter of the six-million population have become refugees or displaced persons in their own country.

During this horrific and confused 18-month period, it has been difficult for human rights monitors such as Amnesty International to obtain detailed and impartial reports about human rights abuses. The organization has continued to monitor the same issues which it reported on before 1991: deliberate political killings and torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners. While the fighting was at its height in Mogadishu at the end of 1991 and early in 1992, Amnesty International could not find out whether prisoners or others under the control of armed groups were being killed deliberately. However, it was clear that both sides in the fighting there deliberately aimed artillery shells at areas of the capital inhabited by members of the sub-clan which opposed them, making clan origin the main criterion on which to target people for killing.

Amnesty International is now publishing details it has obtained about new extrajudicial executions and other atrocities in Somalia, which have received little publicity so far. Different from random death from the sky by bombardment or death from starvation which have accounted for most of the thousands of recent deaths, these horrific abuses betoken most clearly a special contempt by the perpetrators for the right to life and the dignity of the person. Even in situations of armed conflict, there can be no justification for blatant violations of the Geneva Conventions which seek to protect those who take no active part in the hostilities. The abuses documented here were committed mostly by General Mohamed

Farah Aideed's faction of the United Somali Congress (USC) - but other groups have also killed unarmed civilians belonging to what they identify as enemy clans.

Amnesty International is appealing to all Somali political leaders to make it a priority to work for human rights and for an end to the human rights disaster. As with other states which have suffered "collapse", such as Lebanon, Yugoslavia or Liberia, the chilling and immediately-understood reference to "the Mogadishu scenario" or "the Somalia chaos" is the tragic shorthand for a context of internecine and apparently irresolvable political conflict, massive human rights abuses by opposing sections of the same community, and a mixture of despair and neglect by the outside world. The relevant Somali political organizations and their leaders have the prime responsibility to end this disaster.

Amnesty International also urges the international community not to give up on the cause of human rights in Somalia. Through all means possible, solutions need to be found to end this horrendous pattern of gross human rights abuses which threatens to persist for months or even years in a cycle of revenge killings.

2. New Atrocities - Testimony of a Massacre

The latest human rights abuses reported to Amnesty International in detail occurred in the Gedo region in the southwest (see Map, page i above). In April 1992 the Somali National Front (SNF), containing remnants of ex-president Siad Barre's forces which had been driven out of Mogadishu over a year earlier, as well as other members of the Marehan clan of the Darod clan-family, fought back to within 50 kilometres of Mogadishu. In the process they reportedly committed the kind of atrocities for which the Siad Barre army had been notorious - killing civilians, burning homes, and killing and stealing livestock. Terror was directed particularly against non-Darod clans regarded as supporting the USC, such as Hawiye and Rahanwein communities around Baidowa and Afgoi (see diagram of Somali clans, page ii above). Details of the abuses are sketchy but surviving Rahanwein clan victims being treated later in hospital in Mogadishu had their noses and ears cut, and genital organs burnt with acid.

With the cessation of hostilities in Mogadishu between the two Hawiye sub-clans, which were fighting each other until a cease-fire in April 1992, the better-equipped forces of General Aideed were able to fight back against the SNF and inflict defeat at Bali Dogle airforce base. Aideed pushed the SNF back through Bay region into Gedo region, which is the Marehan clan's homeland, and without any pitched battles put them to flight beyond Bulohawo across the Kenya border at Mandera. Some of the SNF were disarmed by the Kenyan security forces, while others retained their weapons. Aideed forces made several incursions into Kenya in hot pursuit, shelling concentrations of refugees, taking back many vehicles and abducting some SNF officers and soldiers.

Once in control of the 150,000-population border town of Bulohawo (also known as Belet Hawo) from 28 April 1992, the Aideed forces proceeded to systematically round up people of the Darod clan. An account follows of what one of the survivors later told Amnesty International.

"I was walking alone in the town on 28 April when 20 USC soldiers seized me and another man and took us to their commander, General Aideed. They shot my companion - Abdullahi Abby Farah, a schoolteacher from Mogadishu. I pleaded with the soldiers not to kill me and showed them my foot - it was all a mess since it had been hit by a bullet during the fighting in Kismayu last year. They let me go and I hid for three days and then escaped towards the Kenya border.

"Many people had fled from Bulohawo before Aideed's forces came. Those remaining there were mostly old men, women and children, those who were not strong enough to attempt to run away. They gathered people in the town centre, going round all the houses, and separated people by clan, marking out the Darods - Majarten, Marehan and Ogadenis. Their own people - Hawiyes - they left alone. Darod men and children they killed, Darod women they raped and often killed too. Those that tried to escape or looked as if they might escape were shot. The weaker ones were bayoneted. The bodies were burnt with kerosene and firewood and the bones left lying there. They stole all their property, and took the iron-sheet roofs off houses and shops to sell across the border. Mud-and-wattle houses were just burnt down.

"The killings went on for all the time Aideed held the town - a month and three days. The worst killings were in the first few days, when people were killed in groups of 30 or 40.

"I saw people with their tongues cut out, their arms or legs cut off, and left to die. Children and old men were thrown into oil drums full of a mixture of boiling oil, water and salt. Women were raped by as many as 20 or 30 men, then bayoneted in the vagina or their stomachs cut open. Small girls were bayoneted in the vagina and pregnant women had their stomachs slit open - even women of their own Hawiye clan if they were pregnant by a Darod man.

"Even babies were not spared. They were bayoneted, clubbed to death with rifle butts, or thrown into boiling oil."

Horrific and extreme as this account sounds, it is consistent with other reports of abuses by troops under General Aideed's control. Indeed similar atrocities are said to have been committed in other towns captured by the Aideed forces in Gedo region, such as Dollo, El Waq and Garba Harre, although Amnesty International has not received eye-witness accounts of them. Similar abuses had been reported before, although certain

commanders under General Aideed were said to have been able to prevent the soldiers under their command from committing abuses on other occasions, for example when their forces captured Kismayu in May 1992.

Some refugees were pursued across the Kenya border. In early May 1992 Aideed soldiers raided the Kenyan border town of Mandera, seizing cars, jeeps and lorries in which refugees had fled with their possessions, and taking these back to Bulohawo. An International Committee of the Red Cross vehicle they stole was later returned. They entered Mandera police station and seized Somali Marehan soldiers and officials sheltering there. General Abshir Bihi, a senior commander of the SNF forces, was one of several officers abducted from Mandera on 28 April. In Bulohawo he was taken before the deputy commander of the Aideed forces, Colonel Shebel, who is reported to have immediately shot him dead. General Bihi's body was tied to his own car, dragged round the town and left exposed with burial refused. An army pilot, Captain Adbullahi "Folhun", abducted from Mandera, was also executed by General Aideed's forces in Bulohawo. (Colonel Shebel was later killed himself in fighting with the SNF.)

Captured SNF fighters were mostly killed but 400 SNF prisoners captured in Baidowa were taken to Mogadishu where the International Committee of the Red Cross has reportedly been able to visit and feed them.

In early June 1992, the SNF forces regrouped and fought back, and in collaboration with SNF fighters crossing back from Kenya they pushed the Aideed forces out of Bulohawo and most of Gedo region. This ended the atrocities committed in Bulohawo during the five weeks it was under Aideed's control. Information on later events has not yet been received by Amnesty International.

3. Background to a Disaster

The Siad Barre Government: A Long-term Human Rights Crisis

Somalia, independent in 1960 and comprising the former Italian and British colonial territories, had nine years of elected civilian governments before Major General Mohamed Siad Barre seized power in the "October Revolution" in 1969. The new ruling Supreme Revolutionary Council, which he headed, set Somalia on a socialist path and established a battery of security institutions resulting in widespread detentions, summary trials and executions of alleged counter-revolutionaries and critics of the government. Torture was the routine method of interrogation of suspected opponents by the feared National Security Service and military intelligence. It consisted of tying prisoners in a back-breaking position nicknamed the "Mig"; near-drowning by submerging the prisoner in water or the sea,

sometimes tied in a sack; electric shocks; rape and sexual abuse of women; and squeezing men's testicles with pliers.

As armed opposition grew following an unsuccessful coup attempt in 1978 and the development of the northern Issaq clan-based Somali National Movement (SNM) from 1981 onwards, repression against opposition-associated clans escalated. The worst atrocities were in Mudug region between 1978 and 1982 against the Majarten clan, and in Hargeisa and the northwest in 1988, when tens of thousands of Issaq clan-members were massacred by government soldiers.

Amnesty International's reporting of this pattern of gross human rights abuses in 1988 and increasing international condemnation led to some improvements in early 1989 and Amnesty International's first permitted visit to Somalia since 1969. President Siad Barre's one-party rule changed little, however, and despite an amnesty for political prisoners - including former top officials condemned to death in a grossly unfair trial - political imprisonment and killings continued. The SNM, which had been based in Ethiopia since 1982, won several victories in the northwest in 1989-1990 and in December 1990 a new Hawiye clan-based armed group, the United Somali Congress (USC), attacked Mogadishu. Heavy fighting and shelling by Siad Barre's forces of opposition areas in the city lasted for some weeks before the USC drove Siad Barre and his forces out of Mogadishu on 26 January 1991.

The Overthrow of Siad Barre and New Abuses

The end of Siad Barre's rule over a year and a half ago should have provided the opportunity to establish the protection of basic human rights in Somalia for which Amnesty International had long called. Instead, new conflicts and new human rights abuses arose. The ousting of the Siad Barre government led to new violence that seemed even worse on account of its arbitrariness. Violent reprisals by the victorious Hawiye fighters in the capital were targeted against civilians of the ex-president's Darod clan-family - including both his Marehan supporters and his Majarten opponents without distinction. In the first three months after Siad Barre's overthrow, hundreds of Darod clan members were killed and Darod women raped in Mogadishu and their property looted, mainly by troops loyal to General Aideed. The USC's hostility to the whole Darod clan-family extended as the Somali Salvation Democratic Front, a Majarten-based force formerly based in Ethiopia and involved in fighting Siad Barre's troops in the early 1980s, was reorganized in 1991 to oppose the USC. In March 1991 the SSDF secured control of Majarten and other Darod clan areas in the northeast when they drove out USC forces who had massacred hundreds of civilians in Galkayu the previous month.

Within four months of the USC installing Ali Mahdi, a businessman, as interim President of Somalia in January 1991, the USC military chief, General Aideed, disputed Ali

Mahdi's leadership and led his Habar Gedir sub-clan to fight Ali Mahdi and his Abgal sub-clan. The first major fighting in April 1991 was stopped by mediating clan elders. Fighting resumed in August 1991 and went on intermittently for some months until it flared up to an unprecedented degree in November. By late 1991 it was evident that the country no longer had a government and that the state had collapsed. Subclan fought subclan in the largely destroyed and looted city of Mogadishu, where those who survived the constant bombardments found little safety from the numerous heavily armed clan- or family-based marauding gangs terrorising the city.

Bloodbath in Mogadishu

Between mid-November 1991 and April 1992 some 10,000 unarmed civilians were killed, sometimes at a rate of about 100 a week and including many children, in Somalia's war-torn capital of Mogadishu. Most were victims of medium-range tank, artillery and mortar exchanges between the two rival USC groups but a substantial number were deliberately killed by gunmen, some of whom belonged to one or other of the USC groups. In addition, an estimated 30,000 others were wounded or maimed by the artillery shelling and shooting as the two factions fought to extend their control over parts of the city. Nine negotiated ceasefires were disregarded, mostly after giving only hours respite from the bloodshed. Neither side took prisoners, indeed prisons no longer functioned. Bodies turned up in the streets and the near-derelict hospitals. Armed robber gangs killed and raped with impunity. Few international relief agencies endured the violence and the constant theft of their distribution food supplies and vehicles in the starving city.

Claims by Ali Mahdi and General Aideed that they ordered their forces to fire only at military targets do not seem true. Few of those killed were "caught in the crossfire". The truth is that they fell victim to indiscriminate artillery exchanges targeted on enemy subclan areas. The carnage of these violations of the Geneva Conventions' prohibition on attacks on civilians was described by out-going UN Secretary-General Perez de Cuellar at the end of 1991 as "the worst humanitarian crisis in the world". Both sides seemed to have repeatedly refused to jointly or unilaterally heed the international revulsion at the slaughter or to order their followers to respect basic humanitarian principles.

Since April 1992, efforts by clan elders and international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic have resulted in a fragile ceasefire in Mogadishu. However, though the bombardment has ended, violence and insecurity remain the order of the day. Communications to the outside have been cut for a year and a half; the administration and economy have collapsed; there is no force to maintain law and order.

Secession of the Northwest and Other Civil Wars

Anarchy in the capital was paralleled by the collapse of central government in the rest of what was the Somali Republic. When Siad Barre's government was overthrown in Mogadishu in January 1991, the Somali National Movement (SNM), which had fought Siad Barre's government since 1981, quickly took control of the northwest, with relatively little fighting and few reprisals against former government or military officials. The SNM refused to recognize the USC interim government declared in Mogadishu and declared unilateral independence on 18 May 1991 within the borders of former British Somaliland. But the new "Somaliland Republic", as it is called, has not so far gained any international recognition.

Somaliland has also had its own internal conflicts. Clashes between different Issaq sub-clans in Burao and other towns in January 1992 left hundreds of combatants dead. Further conflicts flared up in later months and led to outbreaks of fighting between Issaq sub-clans and disputes between the SNM and non-Issaq clan groupings, each with its own armed group controlling its territory. Although nowhere near the scale of the slaughter in Mogadishu, the internal political crisis in Somaliland, combined with growing insecurity and failure to obtain international aid to re-start the economy, affected relief work by international non-governmental agencies and efforts to rebuild the region devastated by Siad Barre's troops in 1988.

In the south, other clan-based armed groups loosely control or compete for control over different parts of the country outside Mogadishu and its surrounding Hawiye clan areas, where the most violence and fighting has taken place. Efforts by the international community, particularly those with historical ties with the country, to bring the different sides to the negotiating table have so far met with little success. The Djibouti "reconciliation conferences" in June and July 1991 secured political agreement between most southern groups but were boycotted by the SNM. They also failed to heal the split within the USC.

The SSDF established control over the northeast regions. In June 1992, however, hundreds were killed when a new Islamic group fought the SSDF near Bosasso, although the SSDF seem to have regained control. The control by the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) over the southern border regions broke up in internal conflict and fighting in early 1992, until one group captured the port of Kismayu.

Refugees

800,000 Somalis have fled the country in the past year, adding to the 200,000 or more who had previously fled from the Siad Barre government and have been unable to return home safely since then. At least half as many are also displaced and homeless within their own country. Few who fled the country have been granted proper refugee status.

For most of the 125,000 Somali refugees who sought safety in neighbouring Kenya, their hoped-for safe haven has consisted of badly-managed and congested refugee camps

with little food, water or health care. Hundreds have died of diseases in camps such as Liboi and Ifo so far this year. Reports of ill-treatment, rape, robbery and even killings of Somali asylum-seekers by members of the Kenyan security forces have been common. At the same time, dozens of ex-officials of the Siad Barre government stayed comfortably in Nairobi hotels until public revulsion forced their move to Nigeria together with the ex-president.

In other countries in the region, Somalis have been denied entry or confined to special refugee camps in poor conditions. Scores of Somali refugee boat-people perished by drowning or disease as a result of being denied entry to Kenya and Yemen, although both countries have accepted large numbers of Somali refugees.

Peace Efforts and United Nations Involvement

In March 1992 peace missions by the UN with the support of the OAU, League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference succeeded in obtaining a ceasefire in Mogadishu between the two USC factions. A UN Security Council resolution on 25 April 1992 proposed a military ceasefire monitoring team of 50 members and a further contingent of 500 UN troops to protect distribution of relief food in Mogadishu, and the UN Secretary General appointed a Special Representative to seek a political settlement. However, due to General Aideed's opposition, an advance group of ceasefire monitors of the UN Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) could not go to Mogadishu until mid-July 1992, and prospects of early implementation of the UN resolution seem poor.

Food is being distributed by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Mogadishu and other areas, despite constant theft of food by gunmen. Tragically, the death-toll from starvation in Mogadishu is now higher than during the previous months of battle and bombardment in the city.

4. Amnesty International's Appeal to All Somali Groups

Amnesty International's role in this crisis can only be to remind the Somali belligerents and the world that the human rights protection long denied to the Somali people can only be won when this terrible cycle of civil conflict is ended.

Taking no sides and negotiating for no political position, the worldwide human rights organization urges an end to the deliberate and arbitrary killing - whoever commits it. Through any means possible in the absence of usual international forms of communication and established organizational authorities, Amnesty International appeals for human rights to be recognized and protected by all groups. It asks them to make formal commitments to work for human rights for all Somalis irrespective of clan affiliation or political opinion. It condemns the latest abuses, as it has consistently condemned previous human rights violations in Somalia over the past two decades.

Amnesty International calls on all Somali groups to cooperate with the United Nations and international relief agencies to find solutions urgently to the burning humanitarian problems - to restore peace, stop the killings and avert mass starvation.

Most immediately, Amnesty International appeals to all fighting forces to respect those aspects of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, to which Somalia acceded in 1962. In particular, Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which are applicable to non-international armed conflicts as well as wars between states, states that all persons taking no active part in hostilities - civilians and surrendered or wounded combattants - shall be treated humanely and it specifically prohibits the following crimes:

- "violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- "taking of hostages;
- "outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- "the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court affording all the judicial guarantees which are regarded as indispensable..."

For the future of human rights for all Somali citizens irrespective of clan membership or political opinion, Amnesty International appeals to all sides to publicly and explicitly adopt internationally recognized human rights objectives so that abuses can be ended as soon as possible and so that safe-guards and structures based on the rule of law can be firmly established.