



Somaliland celebrates 30 years of independence on Tuesday 18 May 2021



Abdirahman Abdillahi Jibril (Awliyo)
Somaliland activist
Jabdi35@yahoo.com

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The 30th anniversary of Somaliland falls on Tuesday 18 May 2021. It is a day people from all over Somaliland celebrate their independence. Previously big events used to be held in the towns and cities of Somaliland, but due to this year's pandemic issues I think, we celebrate differently this year. I am currently living abroad and I share my feelings and happiness with the people of Somaliland. I also share my optimistic feeling towards Somaliland and what it has achieved during the last 30 years.

Although Somaliland has not yet been able to gain full recognition, it is important to note that it has achieved a lot in terms of development and nation building. Considering the long journey it has gone through you realize that what this country has achieved cannot be summarized in a short article. Of course, there are challenges but the people of Somaliland appreciate the progress made in the areas of peace, stability, freedom, rebuilding the country and development which are all things to be proud of.

The celebration of the 30th anniversary of Somaliland is a long journey that Somaliland has been through at various stages. On this occasion, I look back at the struggle to regain Somaliland's sovereignty. I will highlight challenges and difficulties Somaliland went through during that period. I discuss in this article how the people of Somaliland have worked together to reconcile the Somaliland communities and build an inclusive government. I will also discuss the development and reconstruction of the country as well as the manner in which Somaliland conducted the elections that led to the formation of various governments from different political parties and what they have achieved since 1991.

But first, I will highlight the history of Somaliland and the reasons why the British Empire was interested in Somaliland as well as the struggle of Somaliland people to free their country from colonialism.

During Somaliland's existence under the British protectorate there were struggles and movements for independence. There were many people who fought for freedom, but it is worth to mention the struggle of **Sayid Mohamed Abdulla Hassan** who led the **Darawish** fighters based in Taleh (Sool region of Somaliland). In addition to the history of the Sayid Mohamed and his Darwish struggle there were also other liberation movements.



The first movement was announced in Buraao in 1945, under the name of **SNS**. It was not based on politics and the main purpose of the movement was to raise awareness about the problems of tribalism and how to build a healthy and cohesive society.

In 1951, a **SNL (Somali National League)** organization was founded in Buroa. SNL was a popular political organization where their main objective was to achieve full independence from the United Kingdom. Other pro-independence groups in Somaliland included the **USP**, **NUF** and **Hisbullah**. Although these groups had different strengths and struggles, they shared their common goal of gaining independence from the United Kingdom.

The British Government granted Somaliland statehood on June 26 in 1960, making the country the first free Somali nation to join the United Nations. It is noteworthy to mention that the statehood of Somaliland has been recognized by around 35 countries. Unfortunately, five days later Somaliland united on 1 July 1960 with the Italian Somalia to form the Somali Republic. It was a union that happened with emotions without any serious



negotiations. It can be said that the union was illegal because there was no formal agreement between the two parties (act of union).

It was the biggest mistake ever in the history of Somaliland when they quickly and recklessly united with Somalia without considering the future of the people of Somaliland and what was in their best interest when it comes to future generations.

The younger generation today may not fully understand what prompted Somaliland to unite with Somalia. Both politicians and the people of Somaliland have been pushing to unite all ethnic Somalis in the horn of Africa comprising British Somaliland, Italian Somaliland, French Somaliland (now Djibouti), The Somali region in Ethiopia (now kilalka shanaad), and the NFD (the Nothern Frontier District) which is now under Kenyan Government administration. I think, it is important to ask ourselves what Somaliland people have gained from the union with Italian Somaliland. I do not expect that our politicians can give us enough answers about this, but there are many answers towards losses and sufferings when our politicians went to Mogadishu to make the union happen.



According to Somaliland historians, the people of Somaliland suffered greatly under successive governments of Somalia. The rights of the Somaliland have not been considered at all. The first union government was taken over by politicians from Somalia. This created the first outrage and resentment among the people of Somaliland origin. The injustice and oppression by Somalian politicians against people from Somaliland led to a failed coup in 1961 attempted by a group of junior officers from Somaliland. The purpose of the coup was to restore the independence of Somaliland.

The greatest oppression and suffering for the people of Somaliland came when the dictator of Somalia came to power in 1969. Siad Barre and his government began to cripple the economy of Somaliland and oppress its people. Many innocent people were arrested by the regime without going through the legal process and many others were killed without trial.



As a result of the oppression, the SNM (Somali National Movement) was formed in London in 1983. Its military base was established in Ethiopia and it carried out attacks and military operations against Siad Barre's government forces between the period of 1983 and 1991. The biggest military offensive was in the year of 1988, when the SNM captured Hargeisa, Buroa and many other towns and villages in Somaliland. In this war Siad Barre's forces started firing heavy weapons, destroyed major cities in the country such as Hargeisa, Buroa, Berbera and many other towns and villages. To kill more innocent people the dictator hired South African pilots bombarding indiscriminately civilian areas and even targeting fleeing families. According to African Human Watch report, nearly fifty thousand innocent people have been killed.



The genocide experienced by the people of Somaliland under Siad Barre's regime has led to years of war and struggle. Thousands of Somalilanders have fled to neighboring countries, particularly Ethiopia.

Many others have fled to other foreign countries in Europe, America, Australia, Arab world etc.



To defeat Siad Barre and his arm, SNM has invested time and resources to unite the southern opposition movements. As Bradbury writes in his book *Becoming Somaliland*, SNM began to provide moral and military support to rebel organizations in Somalia such as the USC, SPM and SSDF, which later succeeded in ousting Siad Barre on January 27, 1991. It can be said that SNM movement was the backbone of the struggle against the Barre Regime.

One great importance of this 30th anniversary is the memory and prayers of those who have suffered along this tragic journey. The beautiful Somaliland we enjoy today came at the high price paid by those who died and those who got injured for the struggle of independence.

It is indeed very useful for the young generations of Somaliland to know that the SNM movement led to defeat Siad Barre regime and his forces in 1991. Although not all Somalilanders agree on this war, it is important to note that this struggle was part of Somaliland's history. It is also beneficial for the youth to become acquainted with the peace making conferences that brought together the people of Somaliland to strengthen peace and trust among the Somaliland communities.

After the defeat of Siad Barre's forces, SNM administration convened conferences in **Berbera** and **Burao**, which aimed to shape the future of Somaliland. Later, the Government organized other conferences in **Borama**, **Hargeisa** and **Sheikh**, all of which focused on peace building, stability and development of the Somaliland society. The Buroa and Borama Conferences were of great benefit to the Somaliland people. Both conferences resulted in resolutions and recommendations that have become the basis of Somaliland's existence.

Buroa Conference



The 1991 Buroa Conference marked a turning point in Somaliland's history. The conference brought together representatives from all communities and regions of Somaliland. After long and intensive consultation the final outcome became the decision to reclaim the statehood of

Somaliland on **18th May 1991**. One of the other main outcomes was the election of the first Somaliland Government with **Abdirahman Ahmed Ali** as president and **Hassan Issa Jama** as vice president giving them a mandate to rule the country for two years.



Borama Conference

The conference began in **Borama** on **January 24, 1993** and lasted for about four months. It provided an opportunity for all concerned parties to reach a final agreement. It is important to mention that the structure and funding of the conference came from the Somaliland community.

The conference and its proceedings were in the hands of the Somaliland people with zero outside influence. It can be said that the Borama conference was one of the most important as it resulted in decisions to strengthen the statehood of Somaliland. During the conference, the delegates discussed all the sensitive issues in power sharing.

The security frame and the reconciliation among Somaliland communities was another important agenda. The conference also coincided with the end of the two-year presidential term of Abdirahman Ahmed Ali, therefore the agenda of the conference included the election of the new president and vice president. Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal was elected as the president and Abdirahman Aw Ali as the vice president. And a national constitutional charter was produced.



Celebrating this 30th anniversary of Somaliland is also worth reviewing the achievements of past Somaliland presidents. Since Somaliland regained its sovereignty and statehood, five presidents served the country with each leaving behind their distinct legacy.

HE Late Abdirahman Ahmed Ali (1991-1993)

Abdirahman Ahmed Ali became the first president of Somaliland.

When he was elected as a president, the country was in a difficult situation. The country did not have a disciplined army, law and order was non-existent, all government institutions destroyed and conflicts erupting throughout country. It was then recognized that the situation in Somaliland at that time was not conducive to peace and development therefore it was necessary to find a solution to the situation of that time. This led to the organization of the Borama Grand Conference which brought together elders and intellectuals from all the regions in Somaliland. One of the most important things we can remember about the government of Abdirahman Ahmed Ali was that his government peacefully handed over power when Borama conference elected Egal as the president of Somaliland.

HE Late Ibrahim Haji Ibrahim Egal

Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal became the second president of Somaliland when he was elected at the Borama Conference in 1993, for a four year term. In 1997, the conference in Hargeisa re-elected him for another four years. President Egal had been in charge since May 2002 when he died at a hospital in South Africa. The beginning of President Egal's elected government had gone through very difficult times.



During early 1990's there have been widespread clashes among clans in the western and eastern regions of Somaliland. These conflicts brought unnecessary setbacks to the country. Fortunately, these conflicts were eventually resolved through reconciliations and consultations with the help and working together from the government of Somaliland and Guurti (Traditional leaders).

The people of Somaliland remember President for his leadership in bringing stability and peace to the country. Some of the most memorable accomplishments during his presidency in Somaliland are:

1. Won the demobilization and disarmament of fighters and later unified them to become the national army, such as the police and the military.
2. He initiated and established plans to build national institutions which everyone has benefitted.
3. His other main legacy was the draft of the Somaliland constitution as well as the much needed Somaliland currency.
4. It is also important to note that he had the idea of starting national political parties in Somaliland and formed the UDUB party for his Government in 2001.



HE Dahir Riyaale Kaahin

Dahir Riyaale Kahin had been sworn in as the third president of Somaliland following the death of his predecessor Mohamed Haji Ibrahim Egal in 2002. He was president of the country from May 2002 to June 2010. Certainly the marathon that had been going on for the last 30 years of every president had contributed differently to Somaliland and its social and economic development. Of course every president faced challenges during their presidency but every one of them made efforts to improve the structure of the government and the social development of the country.

During Dahir Riyale's presidency, Somaliland succeeded in maintaining peace and stability and he made a significant contribution to the democratic process in Somaliland by peacefully organizing local elections, parliamentary elections and two presidential elections. He will be remembered for his beautiful peaceful power transfer when he lost the 2010 presidential election.



HE Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud Siiraanyo

President Silanyo is remembered in the history of Somaliland as the 4th president of Somaliland when he won the 2010 presidential election and had been president until 2017.

We also remember him as the longest-serving leader of the SNM.

President Silanyo's key contributions to the nation include the following 1. Increased the country's budget from 47 million to three hundred and fifty million dollars. 2. Construction and maintenance of government buildings e.g. ministry headquarters and other government building 3. Somaliland National Army are allowed to be given the ranks and other awards they are entitled to. 4. The president made it possible for Somaliland currency to be distributed in



the eastern regions especially Togdheer and Erigavo regions. 5. Launching and starting road construction projects, such as the one between Burao and Erigavo (Silaanyo Road), which will be a great legacy for the people of Somaliland 6. The government's achievements also include holding a local election in 2012 and most recently presidential election. 7. Silaanyo's Government had doubled the salaries of civil servants and soldiers 8. One of the biggest achievements of Silanyo's government is its agreement with DP world, which is a major investor in the country.

HE Muse Bihi Abdi

Muse Bihi Abdi, fifth president, was elected president of Somaliland in the country's 2017 presidential one person one vote elections. He is a president who has not yet completed his presidential term therefore it is difficult to fully describe here what he achieved during his presidency. Here are just a few examples of some of the things he has accomplished so far:

1. Observing Somaliland's agreements with DP World and initiating the construction of Berbera port and Berbera corridor.
2. Continuing the construction of Silanyo road, which is a vital route for the economic development of the people of Somaliland.
3. Maintaining the value of the Somaliland shilling and controlled inflation
4. Reformed the protocols of the nation's presidential office
5. The president kept his promise to reduce the size of his cabinet
6. Developed standards and quality control measures.



7. Continued to improve relations with neighboring countries.
8. Introduced the bespoke national youth service.
9. Strengthened domestic revenue mobilization
10. Distribution of free educational books for public school students.
11. Creating diplomatic relations with the foreign countries such as Taiwan.

The achievements of the current and past presidents of Somaliland are an example of what Somaliland has achieved despite difficulties and challenges which we wanted to share together in this 30th anniversary.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the freedom we enjoy today came at a high price. Many people sacrificed their lives for it, many others lost limbs for it. It is important that our younger generation in Somaliland become aware of the fact that this freedom came as a result of a bitter struggle against occupation by an oppressive regime. Although Somaliland has not yet received official recognition, its people are aware that independence and statehood will never be comprised again. Somaliland learned unforgettable lessons from the dubious union with Somalia.

On this occasion of the 30th anniversary we have to be grateful to all those who have contributed to the reconstruction of the country and invested their time, knowledge and resources. It is important that the people of Somaliland remember the role played by the **Somaliland Diaspora** in rebuilding the country. It is gratifying to see that the markets in Somaliland are full of people and thousands of children are going to schools to learn. However, although Somaliland has taken great strides in the last 30 years, there are still

obstacles to its progress. I hope that the people of Somaliland are not wasting their time looking back to the past. Now the focus of the people is to preserve their **unity** and **togetherness** to improve the lives and conditions of the normal Somaliland citizen.

Finally, it is certain that Somaliland's future is bright and prosperous. All that is needed is for the people of Somaliland to maintain their unity and work together to strengthen the trust and cooperation among Somaliland communities.

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