



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, 2019

YOUTH, RECONCILIATION, BUSINESS AND ENVIRONMENT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A SUMMARY REPORT OF OUR ANNUAL GLOBAL SUMMIT, A FOUR-DAY EVENT THAT TOOK PLACE BETWEEN THE 14TH AND 17TH OF JULY 2019 IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY.

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INTRODUCTION

The Global Somali Diaspora (GSD) is an international organisation that aims to mobilise and bring together the wider Somali diaspora, as well as those living in the homeland, for the purposes of enacting positive action. GSD promotes full integration into their host countries while also remaining connected to the cultural heritage of greater Somalia.

GSD encourages Somali diaspora to contribute to the reconciliation and rebuilding of Somalia. We have representatives around the world, including the US, Canada, Australia, Africa, Asia, and several European countries including UK, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, and Denmark. Since its inception in Istanbul in 2014, GSD has held three major conferences: 2015 in Kigali, 2016 in Mogadishu and, as per this report, Istanbul again in 2019.

The conference brought together over 150 distinguished Somali delegates, from all areas of public life, including high-ranking politicians, diplomats, renowned academics, Islamic scholars, civil society leaders and established professionals from the private and public sectors. Themes addressed in the conference derived from some of the most pertinent and pressing issues facing the global Somali population, from business and entrepreneurship to youth and social responsibility.

Keynote speakers and panellists engaged in widespread knowledge exchange with the audiences and shared their expertise, while also providing ways in which certain issues are to be tackled. There were also workshops and other collaborative events that maximised engagement among the audience, participants, and delegates. Entertainment was provided by famed Somali poets and musicians, while exhibitions to showcase the diverse creativity of the Somali culture and tradition were also central to the event.

OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the conference was to create a platform in which to discuss some of the most pressing issues concerning the Somali public, both in the homeland and the diaspora. Subjects included:

- Strengthening efforts for social reconciliation.
- Business and investment opportunities in Somalia.
- Protecting the environment, managing natural resources, and building resilience against disasters, such as floods.

The following report outlines the objectives and outcomes of the conference programme and takes into account the feedback received from attendees.

OPENING CEREMONY

KEYNOTE



Jawaahir Daahir, MBE, Board Chair, Global Somali Diaspora, welcomed delegates to the conference, while also highlighting the 5th anniversary of GSD as an organisation. She thanked all those who were able to accept their invitations and attend the summit, saying that it was of great importance that connections between the global diaspora continue to grow. After outlining the themes of the programme, the Chair acknowledged the GSD committee, partners, sponsors, and members of the Turkish government who made the event possible. They included: Dr. Yusuf Omar, Ahmed Tohow and Nafisa Gudal, Dr Mehmet Karakus (YEI), East Africa Research and Development Association (DAD), Somali Cultural Association (SCA), Hormuud Telecom, ICYF, IGAD, BAYRAQ, KIMS, Turkish Airlines, and Hotel Pullman.

Ifrah Mansour, Poet, performed a poem on how to cook and enjoy the perfect 'Shaah' (tea). She described the tea making process, and how it is an integral part of the Somali tradition, especially with 'sheeko' (stories).



SPEAKERS



Somalia's Deputy Prime Minister, H.E. Mahdi Mohamed Guled, signified the intellect, dynamism, and creativity that exists within the Somali diaspora, and encouraged them to leave a positive mark in their host countries. He stressed the importance of valuing our youth, and how Somali parents should pay closer attention to their children, with regards to culture, religion, and the Somali language.



Representative of Turkish President, H.E. Tayyip Erdogan, hoped that the conference would be of great benefit to Somalis worldwide. He said that Turkey had always kept the Somali people 'in its heart' and will continue to support the Somali people as it has done in the past. He said that the president is determined to develop mutual relations at every level with the Somalia people and their government. While mentioning the building of Turkey's largest embassy in Somalia, he

concluded that it was the Turkish government's greatest wish for Somalia to succeed.



Former Somali President, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, focused on the importance of trusting each other and strengthening brotherhood among Somalis. Emphasising the responsibility Somalis have to their country and their fellow citizens.



Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister, Faruk Kaymakçlı, highlighted how the Somali diaspora are exemplary agents that adapt to their host communities. He said that the moral values of his country dictate that they must support a country like Somalia. Turkey believes in a very bright future for Somalia.



CEO of Hormuud Foundation, Abdullahi Nur Osman, spoke about advancing telecommunication services in Somalia and the vast employment opportunities the company provides. He also spoke about the valuable role of the private sector in Somalia, with regards to responding to humanitarian crises and development needs, in the form of building hospitals, importing medical equipment, and creating schools.



Kaah International Microfinance Representative, Rahma Hersi, gave insight into the financial sustainability that Islamic finance can offer. KIMS, which was launched in 2014 as the first private microfinance firm in Somalia, is now active in 10 locations.



Senior Political Advisor, Abdikarim Mohamed, IGAD, reminded the delegates that Somalia was one of the founding members of IGAD, and informed them of the important reconciliation work being facilitated in the country.



President of Yunus Emre Institute, Prof. Şeref Ateş, spoke about the institute's collaboration with GSD, especially its London branch. He said that the Yunus Emre Institute, with its global network, has placed special emphasis on relations with various diaspora groups, as well as relations with host nations. He concluded that his organisation would continue to provide support to GSD, to ensure a more prosperous, developed, safe and peaceful Somalia.



Professor Ali Sheikh Ahmed, East African Association for Research and Development, focused on promoting cooperation between the global diaspora regardless of the continent they reside in, while encouraging them to reach out to the Somalis in the homeland. Strengthening Turkish-Somali relations

was also important, he noted.



Former Head of Turkish Diaspora Organisation, Co-Founder of GSD, Mehmet Kose, said that in order to have a powerful diaspora, we need to have people who believe in the cause. They also need to be well-connected, to both the homeland and the host country, and organised to effectively mobilise their agency.



Director of Strategic Partnerships with UN Agency for Palestinians and Founding Member of GSD, Abdi Aynte, said that GSD was established to create a common platform among Somalis in the Diaspora to share opportunities, information and chart a common vision around what unites them. This may include sharing job opportunities or creating mentorship programs for young young Somalis. He also pointed out that the aim is to mobilise Somalis in the diaspora to positively impact the lives of their people.



H.E. Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Hamza Said Hamza, emphasised the pressing nature of environmental issues in Somalia and the impact it has on the lives of many rural and urban populations. The minister prioritised programs that tackle structural and chronic development challenges in Somalia.

PROGRAMME

The conference programme showcased interactive and solutions-based sessions, that focused on the following thematic areas: **youth, business and entrepreneurship, social reconciliation, and the environment.**

The programme hosted impressive expertise from the Somali diaspora and invited keynote speakers and panellists from international organisations, the Turkish and Somali governments, and various academic institutions, to give **presentations** and deliver **interactive workshops.**



COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL RECONCILIATION

The social reconciliation workshop addressed the ways in which Somalis could reimagine the concept of 'community,' and the difficulty of building trust in the aftermath of civil war. The discussions also recognised that there has been a lack of genuine effort for social reconciliation throughout the years that have followed the war. These additional points were made by the panellists and participants:

To start working on reconciliation, we must take into account the impact of three crucial institutions in our society:

- Home/Family - learn to love, respect, and have compassion for one another.
- Education - acquire knowledge on society.
- The masjid - stress the importance of community, through prayer and sermons.

We have to acknowledge that each of these institutions have the responsibility and power to contribute to social reconciliation. Furthermore, to achieve genuine reconciliation there should be an effort to focus on the social aspects of conflict. Social issues such as economic marginalisation of the youth, social exclusion, and discrimination have to be eradicated. There should be more focus on the social impacts of conflict and we ought to consider 'role play' as a tool to understand the direct consequences of war and conflict. We may even look at reconciliation through the prism of the old Somali tradition of sitting *under the tree*.

Accountability will lead to the implementation of justice, and reconciliation and peacebuilding will follow. This is because without justice and due recompense these things will be difficult to achieve. It should foremost start with the Diaspora, as they are a contributing factor to fuelling the social divides in Somalia.



Many social contracts need to be made, government policies drawn, and regulations should be finalised. Mass corruption has meant that confidence in government/leadership is lacking.

The private sector must also do its part for the reconciliation process, as they have a substantial impact on the wider Somali society.

DIASPORA AND LOCAL YOUTH

This workshop gave an opportunity to the youth, and experts from various fields to add their perspective and voice their concerns on the issues facing young people, whether they are in Somali or abroad. The panellists and participants made these points:

- People still cling to a nostalgic view of pre-civil war Somalia, this is particularly noteworthy among the elder members of the Somali community.
- The lack of effective governance means that obstacles are created for the youth, as they navigate corruption.
- Management positions and leadership roles are usually in the hands of elders in most fields, and if the youth were given the chance, they may bring innovation and progress.
- It is not enough to say that the youth are the future, as politicians do not always value the youth and their impact.
- The youth must realise that they have a voice, and the power to enact change in their country.
- Diversity is a strength, and there is a wealth of benefits, including knowledge, to gain from a diverse pool of people.



We also need to acknowledge and avoid the “diaspora saviour complex”. It is patronising to the locals, as the diaspora impose their beliefs and values on the Somalis in the homeland. The diaspora should start to engage with the local people, practice the local language and help tackle the many issues facing the community.



Zakaria Abdullahi said that it is the perception of Somalia that needs to change. People have many questions before they visit Somalia; how dangerous it is, how destroyed it has become. It’s important to answer those questions, while also highlighting the untold reality of the buzzing city life, schools, businesses and markets, and the many hospitals and clinics servicing its varied communities. Dispelling the harmful and negative narratives about our

country can be done by all of us. Share and spread awareness by talking to people about our country’s overlooked positives and the ordinary lifestyles of our people.

Deeq Africa shared the importance of job creation for the youth. There needs to be more businesses creating jobs to meet the needs of the yearly pipeline of graduates looking for opportunities.

BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT

The business focused workshop invited business professionals and social entrepreneurs to the panel. They shared insights and experiences, pertaining to challenges in the private sector, government regulations and the importance of having an entrepreneurial mindset.

The following are some of the points made by the panellists:

- To move away from being an employee, and transition to entrepreneurship, you need to notice a gap in your market and be a brave.
- Somalia is predominately an exporter country, but we have not yet tapped into being a 'finished-project exporter.'
- To reduce the trade deficit in Somalia, trade regulations need to be pioneered by the government. This will allow the private sector to sell their goods to wider markets.
- Taking critical steps to ensure your product/service undergoes rigorous quality assurance is important, especially if you wish to export to other countries.
- There ought to be a 'global approach' to businesses, as opposed to being Somali-centric only. If you want to compete within the international market, know who you are marketing to, then adjust your process accordingly.
- 'Where there is a problem there is an opportunity.'
- There is a lot of untouched potential in Somalia.



ENVIRONMENT

Panellists spoke about the droughts and floods that have plagued Somalia for the last few decades. The economic, humanitarian costs of droughts, floods and other natural disasters have residual effects on Somalia's recovery and resilience. Discussions identified a number of issues that need to be taken into account when having a solution-driven conversation:

- Education on environmental causes is required to meet the challenges of these chronic disasters.
- Equipment and human capital are also important during these times.

A significant contributing factor to Somalia's inability to 'bounce back,' following these disasters, is that it lacks a long-term plan to manage and mitigate the risks and threats of droughts and natural catastrophes.

Terrorism, and how the after-effects of disasters can be used to lure young people to join non-state militia groups should be investigated.

When it comes to preparedness and response, Somalia and Somalis are severely handicapped to address the immediate needs of those affected by disasters. The actors on the ground are not coordinated, and do not have an over-arching agenda vis-a-vis response.

Somalia is in a perpetual state of responding to crises. consequently, there is no space or platform that allows for recovery and resilience.



THE NATION AND PEACEBUILDING POTENTIAL OF REFUGEES AND IDP CRISES: LESSONS FROM SOMALIA, DIASPORA, AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

PANELLISTS

Faduma Farah, Director of HIRDA, emphasised the need to be partners with the government, religious leaders, civil society, and other humanitarian organisations. She also highlighted that more coordination within the diaspora is needed, so that they can make more productive contributions.



Jamilah Mwanjisi, Head of Advocacy, Communication, Campaigns and Media (ACCM), Save the Children, Somalia, addressed the challenges that international organisations face. For example, the lack of political willingness from government and religious leaders to speak on certain issues, the lack of finalised policies and laws that could enable justice, and the need to start planning ahead to take early action on crises.

Rev. Bonnie Evans Hill, Coordinator, UK Coalition, UN Office on Genocide Prevention, shared her experience of working with refugees. She said that the most vulnerable in these communities are women and young people, and it's always the youth that are the first to assist the community during times of displacement, while the women ensure their survival. She spoke about initiatives where punitive measures were not used for perpetrators, and that processes of inclusion and integration were encouraged. She emphasised that the only solution to hate and fear is love, and that we all need to find ways to use love.

DEVELOPING SOMALIA AND ITS HUMAN CAPITAL

PANELLISTS

Dr Abdulqadir Abdi, Founder, Amin Ambulance, says that the service his organisation provides has been crucial for Somalia, as it attends to casualties during bombing incidents. He explained that the main focus is to build the capacity of its staff through training and equip them with the necessary skills to save lives.

Anders Helge Knudsen, Danish Refugee Council, explained that the diaspora is a significant actor with huge potential for rebuilding Somalia. There needs to be closer and a more coordinated relationship between the diaspora, the government and development systems. He encourages the government to devise a policy that involves the diaspora.

Mehmet Kose, Africa Foundation, emphasised the importance of having organisation and structure in place that would make it easier for the diasporas return home. He explained the intergenerational changes that take place in the diaspora and how this leads to transnationalism.



REBUILDING A NATION: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE DIASPORA AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

PANELLISTS

Ahmed Tohow, Vice Chair of GSD, Director of East Africa Security and Policy Forum, explained that nation building is a dynamic process. People build a political entity that corresponds to given territories, as well as commerce. We need to build institutions, such as bureaucracies, universities, civil services, and civil societies to create the conditions that allow social and economic improvements. It is necessary for this to be a collective vision, and imagination, about the nation which is shared by all.

Martin Wolf Anderssen, Danish Refugee Council, shared some of the objectives of his organisation. One of which is to explore current intervention methods and organisational capacities of diaspora organisations. He also spoke about ways to help improve the coordination mechanisms between the diaspora and the humanitarian systems.

Mirkka Henttonen, Head of Labour, Mobility and Human Development, IOM Somalia, shed light on the importance of unity between the diaspora and locals, and how they can work together. Especially with regards to providing internship opportunities for students to develop skills, upon graduation.



MEDIATING FOR PEACE, FINDING COMMON GROUND WITHIN OPPOSING LEADERSHIP

PANELLISTS

Dr Olga Bakar, Former Turkish Ambassador to Somalia, highlighted the importance of peace, security, and reconciliation in Somalia. He commended the progress Somalia has made in achieving stability, implementing a strong federal institution, and adopting an electoral model. Dr Olga recommended peace and security can be achieved when the system is fair for all Somali citizen, and corruption and marginalization are no longer a problem.

Dr Shukria Dini, Founder, Somali Women Studies Centre (SWSC), said that the role of civil society is critical in holding the country together. She also explained that we need to develop a respectful language and review our traditional methods of peace-making so that we can make them more inclusive.

Dr Abdurahman M Abdullahi Baadiyow, Peace and Reconciliation Advisor, Office of the Prime Minister of Somalia, says that that we have acknowledged our weaknesses and understand that we have been torn apart by clannism. He pointed out how many societies experience these issues of exclusion, stating that it is time we begin to take control and manage the problem.



ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

The conference hosted nearly 200 international guests, from over 20 countries and across 5 continents. Feedback from the conference survey showed that the guest and participants found it satisfying to see how it brought together Somalis from around the world. The summit provided an excellent opportunity for Somali professionals from all walks of life, and all over the globe, to network and build lasting connections.



ENTERTAINMENT

GALA DINNER



The platinum sponsor, **Hormuud Telecom**, hosted a gala dinner on the second day of the conference. During the event, Hormuud's team shared the important work they do in Somalia and for the Somali people.

PERFORMANCE BY AAR

MAANTA



Aar Maanta is a Somali musician who produces songs that explore identity, migration, and citizenship. He harnesses the power of music to connect and relay the experiences of the diaspora. He performed with his band, **The Urban Nomads**, on the third day of the conference.

EXCURSION DAY



The final day of the programme, the guests took part in a cultural immersion of Istanbul, which included a boat tour and a trip to the city's landmarks and historical sites. This gave the guests an opportunity to learn about Istanbul's rich culture and history, as well as creating a social environment for connecting with other like-minded delegates.

SOMALI CULTURAL EXHIBITION LAUNCH



Coinciding with the conference, the first Somali Cultural Exhibition in Istanbul Museum Gallery in Taksim Square opened on Monday 17 June. The exhibition was curated by the founder of Somali Cultural Association (SCA), **Abdullahi Aden Ibrahim**. The SCA partnered with GSDIC, to source the artwork on display. The exhibition was the first of its kind in Istanbul, and became a welcomed feature by all, including the Somali people and the Turkish government representatives.

Awards Ceremony



The conference would not have been as successful without the support, dedication and hard work of its volunteers, sponsors, organising committee and its many participants. **The Awards Ceremony** was an opportunity to give recognition to those who made excellent contributions to the event.

OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The GSD Committee has compiled the following recommendations from the workshops to develop a strategic action plan for moving forward. These recommendations are crucial for creating tangible outcomes.

DIASPORA AND LOCAL YOUTH

- Bring together diaspora and local youth that have business ideas and connect them with investors. One of the biggest problems in terms of business failures is that diaspora entrepreneurs come to the country looking at things from a western perspective. How do we make these ideas locally relevant? Maybe they need to utilise the local community and become partners. It is vital that there is a job-creation scheme to meet the needs of the yearly pipeline of graduates looking for opportunities.
- There needs to be funding/ investments and enabling platforms, such as innovation hubs, that allow youth to create businesses and start-ups. This will increase their financial stability, grow the economy, and allow the youth to actively contribute to state building.

SOCIAL RECONCILIATION

- Finding a language that is respectful, that recognises the value of people is crucial, especially at the beginning of any reconciliation process.
- It is no surprise that a nation that has undergone war and destruction will leave the most vulnerable people in its society behind. We must integrate them into the wider society and provide the social support they need.
- Accountability will lead to the implementation of justice and the process of reconciliation and peacebuilding will follow.
- We should foster peacebuilding and conflict resolution within schools' and early education to instil those values in the next generation.
- Holding regular reconciliation seminars between diaspora and those in the homeland is necessary. This would help demystify the negativity that is generated between them and foster synergy.

ENVIRONMENT

- The impact of environmental degradation is continuous; both periods of heat and rain are destructive. Preventative mechanisms need to be put in place.
- The economic and humanitarian costs of droughts, floods and other natural disasters have residual effects on Somalia's recovery and resilience.
- A significant contributing factor to Somalia's inability to 'bounce back' following a disaster is that it lacks a long-term plan to manage and mitigate the risks and threats of droughts and natural disasters. Somalia needs to move away from short-term reactionary plans and policies.
- The official disaster management infrastructures and policies should be publicly communicated, during every stage of the recovery and resilience process.

- Coordination begins at the top: the government should be in a position to coordinate NGOs, citizens, private actors, the international community, the diaspora in times of disaster.
- Implement campaigns and strategies that increase community resilience.

BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Every problem can become a business opportunity.
- Diaspora should strive to become a business link between their host and home countries.
- Taking critical steps to ensure your product/service undergoes rigorous quality assurance is important, especially if you wish to export to other countries.
- Local entrepreneurs should identify local solutions for local demands, instead of relying on other countries to provide them.
- Somalis should prioritise Africa-Africa market trading. There is huge potential for Somali products in African markets.

OVERVIEW

- Global Somali Diaspora International Conference took place 14 – 17 June 2019 in Istanbul, Turkey. The Conference hosted up to 200 international guests from over 20 countries, and across 5 continents.
- 64 participants answered our survey questions.
- The conference was rated as ‘Good’ and 97% answered that they would attend future events based on their experience of GSDIC 2019.
- Help received from staff and volunteers was rated as ‘Above standard.’
- Overall, feedback provided was overwhelmingly positive and constructive suggestions were made to improve future events.
- The programme hosted 4 workshops running simultaneously in the mornings and afternoons. The sessions created more intimate and inclusive discussions.
- Objectives of GSDIC2019 were met and tangible recommendations were received. GSD Committee will develop an action plan from the outcomes.

PARTNERS AND SPONSORS

The Global Somali Diaspora's International Conference, 2017, was sponsored and supported by 11 organisations. They all became active participants the programme of the conference. We thank them all.

Co-Host



SPONSORS

