

**The ARRIA Formula Meeting On Women, Peace and Security
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Somali Women's Role in building Peace and Security

Your Excellencies, I feel honored to have been given this opportunity to speak to you about women, peace and security. My contribution to this discussion will focus on the roles played by Somali women in fostering peace and security amidst an atmosphere of political instability and chronic violence. The Somali society is organized according to clans and sub-clans and women are not considered full members of clans. Therefore, women are excluded from forums where decisions to make war are taken. However, they are the ones who suffer most in conflict situations. In modern warfare the weapons used do not often distinguish fighters from unarmed civilians including women, children and the elderly. Women are particularly targeted for violence as well as humiliating attacks such as rape, forced pregnancy and prostitution, beatings and stoning. However, the perpetrators are not caught or reprimanded. The clan system makes it very difficult to identify individual criminals where crimes are committed in the name of a clan or clans.

The same clan structure also denies Somali women the ability to join forums where peace agreements are negotiated or political structures and policies are discussed and formulated.

Despite these obstacles, Somali women have taken initiatives to restore peace and security in their communities and involve themselves in national reconciliation transcending artificial boundaries created by the formal political system that tend to exclude them. I would like to give you several concrete examples of what the women have done to promote peace in Somalia.

In 1992, a local women's organization, the Somaliland Women Development Association (SOWDA) in Hargeisa (northwest Somalia) collected funding contributions from the public and some ngos to establish and maintain a police force that focused on creating a peaceful and secure environment for the public to conduct their daily affairs without fear of being robbed, or attacked by armed militia on the prowl for their next victim. The women used the funds to provide uniforms and food for the police force and to reconstruct the police station. In the same year, the women organized demonstrations lobbying the council of elders to intervene in halting civil war between two major clans and to call for a reconciliation meeting. The elders, serving as de facto governors given their traditional leadership roles, yielded to the pressure and after five months of dialogue and debate within the framework of a traditional conference, the community leaders established a local administration. The women handed over the management of the police force to the new local administration.

In about the same period, women in Bosaso (northeast Somalia) led by a very courageous woman, Hufan Artan, lobbied to secure a monthly allocation of funds from the Bosaso Port used to create and manage a police force and a prison to ensure prevalence of peace and security in the town. Prior to that, the militia and their leaders for personal

and political interest used Port revenues. The Hufan initiative, which significantly reduced the rate of crime in Bosaso, lasted until a local administration was in place to assume this role in 1998.

In 1997, IIDA Women Development Organization launched a demobilization project in Merca (Southern Somalia) offering education, housing and alternative income opportunities for 150 boys and men who were part of the militia. They exchanged their guns for a brighter future.

In Mogadishu (the capital), women challenged the civil society to play a more proactive role in promoting peace after warlords failed to reach agreement after 12 reconciliation meetings. The initiative led by the Coalition for Grassroots Women's Organizations (COGWO) facilitated the formation of the Peace and Human Rights Network (PHRN) which brought together different sections of the civil society (media, youth, women, ex-militia, Sports groups, and traditional elders) to coordinate their peace making strategy for which developing a culture of peace and human rights was central. Many of these women crossed lines demarcated by warring factions to advocate for peace across clan differences and successfully brought to the forefront the need for renewed attempts at reaching a sustainable peace in the region. The recently concluded Djibouti Meeting would not have materialized without that groundwork. The Statement by the President of the Security Council (S/PRST/1999/31) dated 12 November 1999 acknowledged the women's role. The Somali men, having also recognized the crucial role played by women made no objection when women demanded their right to be part of the transitional National Assembly in which they were given 10% of the seats. Sadly, however, women were entirely excluded from the transitional government that was formed last week.

Somali women living in the Diaspora also contributed significantly for the same purpose of catering for peace and security. The majority of Somali families were and are supported by their daughters, nieces and sisters who sent them a monthly income that enabled many to repair their shattered lives and avert further violence which could have been the case if it were not for that economic support.

These examples portray the strength and strategic importance of women in the peace process of their nations. As Somalia remains at the brink of a more formalized peace and governance process, it is absolutely essential that women be recognized for the critical roles they have played in steering the country in the direction of peace and that they be supported and empowered to work alongside their male colleagues as Somalia embarks on social, political, and economic reconstruction.

In a post-conflict era, women need the support of the United Nations Security Council, the UN Secretary General and UN agencies in laying the foundations for their vision of a culture of justice, human rights and peace. The Security Council has the power to make decisions that will impact on peace building and empower women in that process. And the women of Somalia are looking up to you - the UN Security Council - for that support.

As I left for New York for this historic meeting, I made several calls to my sisters asking them what they would like me to tell you. They offered the following recommendations, which I am obliged to pass them on to you.

1. **TO END THE IMPUNITY OF THOSE WHO COMMIT SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND SUPPORT THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT WHICH RECOGNIZES WAR CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.** There is a need to bring to justice the warlords commanding armies or militias known to have committed such heinous crimes. And those responsible for participating in acts of genocide and violence against women under the former Somali Government headed by Siad Barre should not be exempted.
2. **TO ESTABLISH A CODE OF ETHICS AND ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PEACEKEEPERS.** Many of the UN Peacekeeping forces in Somalia, as in other places, used Somali women as prostitutes contributing to the growth of the industry of sexual exploitation. What is even worse is that UN Peacekeepers also, at times, sexually assaulted Somali women. In one case, Italian UN forces tied up, raped and inserted explosives into the vagina of a Somali woman and threatened to blow her up. They - the peacekeepers themselves - took photographs, which ran in Italian media. Similar incidents occurred in Bosnia and Kosovo. I ask you to try to imagine what happens to the human spirit when the UN forces we regard as our saviors destroy us this way? The same mistakes should never happen again.
3. **TO ENSURE EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE PEACE PROCESS.** United Nations peace missions should be a role model for nations by deploying women peacekeepers and sending women peace envoys to countries in conflict. It is sadly noted that all the UN peace envoys sent to Somalia were all men who overlooked the specific needs and voices of women.
4. **TO ACTIVELY INCLUDE CIVIL SOCIETY IN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS.** The UN Security Council has traditionally attempted to resolve conflicts by exclusively focusing on warring sides to negotiate peace. This has undermined the voices of civil society, which are the fundamental building blocks to create and sustain peace. We urge the Security Council to consider the Somali experience which has demonstrated the irreplaceable and crucial role civil society organizations with women in the forefront can play in peace making. In addition, it is highly recommended to establish communication and consult with community leaders who are not directly involved in the war.

Women and children are the majority of the population in Somalia. We are the first and worst affected by these tragic crises and yet the last and least consulted on ways to end them. This must change.

Thank you.