

For a Life of Peace and Justice

Dr Adan Yusuf Abokor
In his own words



RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE

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THE RIFT VALLEY INSTITUTE (RVI)

The Rift Valley Institute (www.riftvalley.net) works in eastern and central Africa to bring local knowledge to bear on social, political and economic development.

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COVER: Dr Adan at the RVI office in Hargeisa.

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Dr Adan Y. Abokor: a civic leader to emulate

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It is a great pleasure and honour for me to write few words to introduce the remarkable story of Dr. Adan Yusuf Abokor, his life and legacy. I know Dr. Adan's story since the early 1980s, and for the last 29 years I have worked closely with him in difference capacities. He is a friend and a mentor whose activism has deeply influenced my work as cultural activist.

In 2016 the late Dr. Hussein M. Adan delivered a Keynote Speech at the 12th Hargeysa International Book Fair and spoke about academic leadership. He said 'Leadership may be grouped into two main categories: state-oriented leadership, and civil society focused leadership. An aspect of civil leadership is cultural and academic leadership'. Dr. Adan's life and long-time activism personify civil society leadership. Dr. Adan's story is the history of Somaliland and the struggle that has shaped the identity and existence of the country. That history can be read in the pages of this book—his training as a doctor, his time as the Director of Hargeysa Group Hospital, the founding of UFFO, his years as a prisoner of conscience.

His activism after released from prison is less well known. Instead of travelling to Europe or the US he chose to return home and co-founded the Somali Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SORRA), which along with SOMRA, was one of the first nongovernmental organizations in Somaliland, distributing food to the needy. In the fall of 1993-94, when the country fell into civil war, Dr. Adan was one of the leading figures who crossed to both sides of Hargeysa, to try and broker peace. He later supported the development of many NGOs and community organizations. As an experienced consultant he has been my mentor and there have been very few decisions I have taken without consulting him in the process of establishing the Hargeysa Cultural Centre.

Dr. Aden's social activism since his youth comes from his pure heart, his love for people, and a great sense of humour.

I wish him long life, complete with health and happiness.

Dr. Jama Musse Jama
Director
Hargeysa Cultural Centre, Hargeysa, Somaliland

Introduction

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Dr Adan Yusuf Abokor has lived an extraordinary life and one that is intimately tied to the history of the people and the country that he loves and has given so much of his life to. Born in Hargeisa, Adan grew up in Yemen, trained as a medical doctor in Poland and became the Director of Hargeisa Group Hospital in 1980. As Director of the hospital, Adan played an important role in organizing self-help projects in Somaliland, which were necessary due to the neglect of development and social services in the north. For this reason, he was imprisoned by Siyad Barre's government in solitary confinement for eight years. The student protests that sprang up during Dr Adan and his colleagues' trials were one of the incidents that led to the general uprising in the north against the Barre government and its eventual collapse. You can hear part of Adan's story on a Rift Valley Institute podcast.¹

An Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, Dr Adan was released as the civil war escalated in the north. He returned to what had become Somaliland in 1991 to support reconstruction efforts, establishing one of the first Somali relief organizations. Adan participated in many of Somaliland's peace meetings in the early 1990s and went on to become the Director of ICD/Progressio (formerly ICD/CIIR) in Somaliland, which did much to support the emergence of civil society organizations, particularly womens' organizations.

Dr Adan has always been a strong human rights advocate, an ardent advocate for gender equality, and is a committed democrat who played an important independent mediation role in several of Somaliland's elections. He is a hugely respected person in Somaliland, and the Rift Valley Institute was grateful that he agreed to come out of retirement to join the Institute when we were starting our work in Somaliland.

In December 2013, the late Said Mohamed Dahir interviewed Dr Adan about his life as part of the Rift Valley Institute study on the Impact of War on Somali Men. The interview, conducted in English, recorded Dr Adan's life story in his own words. For the

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1 <https://soundcloud.com/riftvalleyinstitute/jack-mapanje-and-dr-adan-abokor-in-conversation>

purposes of this book the interview transcript has been lightly edited by Mark Bradbury and Judith Gardner.

Part I: My Early Years

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Yemen and Europe

My name is Adan Yusuf Abokor. I was born in 1946 in Hargeisa. At the age of three, I was moved by my grandmother to Aden, which was at that time, a British colony. My parents were already there, because my father was working there. So I grew up in Aden. That is where I went to primary school and to secondary school, which was a Catholic mission school called St. John's High school.

When I completed my secondary school I had the ambition to study abroad because there were no universities in Aden then. Also by that time, the British were already leaving Aden and there were a lot of a liberation movements and fighting going on. So the security was very bad and everybody was leaving. That is everybody who was not actually born there or did not belong there. So one of the options I had was to leave with an Eritrean friend of mine. There were a lot of ships coming to Aden, including cruise ships on their way to and from Europe, Australia and New Zealand. So we decided to go on one of those ships. We left in 1966, a year before Britain left Yemen. And it was with one of those cruise ships that we reached Napoli in Italy. From Napoli we went to Milan and from there took a train to Munich, at the time in West Germany.

In Munich I started looking for a scholarship to study medicine. I soon found out it was very difficult because they said that they only give scholarships to the government of the Somali Republic. At that time, I had not even seen Mogadishu and I had no idea about the Somali Republic. We stayed for one year in Munich doing odd jobs just to survive and learn the language. After one year I had contact with my brother who was studying in Warsaw in Poland. I told him about the difficulty of getting a scholarship in Germany and he arranged a scholarship for me in Warsaw at a medical school. So I left and went to Poland.

In Warsaw I studied the Polish language and went to a medical school and studied medicine for six years. I graduated in 1975 and did an internship in a hospital for one year from 1976 to 1977.

Mogadishu for the First Time

In 1977 I left Poland. I decided to return to my country of origin, where I thought that I could help my people. I flew from Warsaw directly to Mogadishu for the first time. It was a very strange experience, because it was the first time for me to be where everybody

was speaking in the same language, Somali. My parents at that time were not in Mogadishu, but Hargeisa. I was immediately recruited by the Ministry of Health and started my first job as a physician in Digfer, a big hospital in Mogadishu.

I worked there for three years until the beginning of 1980. Then I asked for a transfer to Hargeisa because I wanted to work where my parents and family were. In January 1980 I was transferred to Hargeisa Group Hospital.

My First Project, Hargeisa Group Hospital

This was 1980 so there were many refugees near Hargeisa from the 1977-78 Ethiopia-Somali war. But, as there was another organization at the time responsible for the healthcare of the refugees, I was directly transferred to the Hargeisa Group Hospital. After I had been there for a couple of months, I had a visit from someone in the Ministry of Health from Mogadishu. I don't know how he found out, but he was impressed with the work I was doing. He decided there was a need to change the management of the hospital, so I was appointed the Director of Hargeisa Group Hospital.

I discovered Hargeisa hospital was in a very bad situation. It had been completely neglected by the Ministry of Health. And, this I realized was part of the government's policy of oppressing people in the North. Hargeisa, which was in what was called at the time, North West Region, received the least resources of any hospital. In those days because the Siyad Barre government practiced Scientific Socialism everything was in the hands of the government, including the supply of medicines. The government had a monopoly over the drug supply which were distributed through the government-owned company Spima. There were no private drug companies at the time, and no private health practices.

I remember that the amount of the drugs Hargeisa hospital and the region itself used to receive was the same as to the smallest region in Somalia. So people in Hargeisa and the North West were deprived of sufficient drugs, good doctors and equipment. So day by day the hospital was being run down and people were avoiding the hospital because they were not getting the services they needed.

It occurred to me, why should we wait for the government? Why should we wait for the help coming from Mogadishu because nothing was going to come from there. Then I decided to mobilise some of the young professionals I knew in Hargeisa, many of whom

had returned from abroad and from Mogadishu. Among the young professionals, there were doctors, engineers and businessmen, who were originally from the North. So we mobilised ourselves and mobilised those people to help me to rehabilitate the hospital, to improve conditions by cleaning the hospital, and by providing supplies. I contacted businessmen who also organized themselves and sent two agents to visit the hospital. I used to give them a list of medicines and equipment that we needed and they used to go and buy them for the hospital.

So gradually conditions at the hospital improved. Luckily, I also met a German organization called the German Emergency Doctors who used to work in the refugee camps around Hargeisa. I had met their head, through a Somali friend who was working with them. I introduced them to the hospital which became a referral centre for the refugee camps around Hargeisa.

The German Emergency Doctors realised that they really needed to help improve the hospital to help the refugees who are making use of the services. They provided drugs, new beds and mattresses and brought an engineer to rehabilitate the buildings. They built a drainage system and latrines. They even brought volunteer German doctors for two months during their holidays. And then we demanded for more. We said two months were not enough, so they started bringing doctors for one year and for two years.

The hospital was transformed completely and became one of the best hospitals in Somalia. News was passed to Mogadishu through the regional administration in Hargeisa about the work of these young professionals and the self-help scheme in the hospital. The news even reached the president's office. But, they also heard that when these young people met they talked about politics. So they were suspicious that there was a movement going on, that was dangerous to the system and to the regime in Mogadishu.

Part II: Political Awakenings

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Uffo

As the government in Mogadishu was becoming increasingly suspicious of our endeavours, one of our friends started a newsletter. It was typed and distributed through individuals. Anybody who received it would make copies and pass it on. So in Hargeisa, people were chewing khat and secretly reading these newsletters. The newsletter was called Uffo (meaning 'the good smelling wind before the rain') and that became the name of our group—Uffo Group. Amnesty International later called us the Hargeisa Group, but to the Somali people here and abroad we were known as Uffo.

What was in the newsletter? It was enlightening people. It was raising peoples' awareness about the oppression of the Siyad Barre government, and about incidents which took place in the North, which were examples of that oppression. For example, at Berbera port livestock traders were exporting livestock to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf and there was a system where everybody had a chance to sell livestock. But, there was one businessman from the family of Siyad Barre, who did not want to follow the system. So he asked another Marehan who was the head of the military to help him. The colonel went to Berbera port and stopped the other businessmen's livestock from boarding before the Marehan's. That was one of the examples of oppression—giving priority to somebody who is from the president's clan. Other acts included seizing new vehicles that people had brought from Saudi Arabia or Dubai at the seaport. In Berbera, the military, especially the influential ones would come to the port and ask for the keys of the beautiful cars. If they liked a car, which was usually a Landcruiser, they would ask for the keys from the port manager or from the customs officer and drive it out of the port without anybody stopping them and without payment. Because they liked the car, they would take it. Those were some of the things which were happening. Also, people were being randomly arrested and put into prisons.

Uffo not only documented these kinds of activities but also wrote about social services, such as education and about health. It raised awareness about how the schools didn't have chairs and tables, or enough teachers. In fact, some of our group, who were helping at the hospital, and had a background in education, were also teaching as volunteers in the schools just to help.

At that time the regime had so many agents—what you call informers. We called the NSS, the Dhabarjabin, ‘backbreakers’ or Hangash. All these informers were collecting information for the government. In fact, people had started to talk openly about the oppression during the khat chewing sessions in the mafaarish. This was a new trend which of course the government in Mogadishu did not like, and found a threat, because it would encourage the people to rise up or to fight for their rights. These young professionals of Uffo were considered a threat by Mogadishu, as enemies of the state, and they were looking for ways to arrest us. However, there was no evidence against us because what we are doing in the hospital and in the schools were self-help schemes, and the self-help scheme was a scheme introduced by the government itself as a part of scientific socialism. It was called iskaa wax u qabso in Somali and was one of the ideas of the socialist government.

Because we were using the system of iksaa wax u qabso there couldn’t be any reason for our arrest, so the government had to find something else in our activities in order to put us behind bars. We used to get information from those NSS officers who were friendly with us. They used to tell us: ‘There is so much information in your file and this information is taken to Mogadishu and to the presidency. They are looking for reasons to arrest you, so be careful’. But actually, we were innocent and naïve. We never thought that one day we would be arrested for doing something which is good. We felt that we were helping our people, so there was no reason to arrest us. But then one day an incident happened.

One of these informants, who was actually a man from Hargeisa, attended one of the khat-chewing sessions and saw the newsletter. He took one and hid it in his pocket. The next day he gave the Uffo newsletter to the head of the Dhabarjabin who he knew. I remember his nickname was Gacanjeex, and he was from the clan of Siyad Barre. I think that is the first time that the government thought they had evidence that they could use to arrest us for subversive activities, as they used to call it. We were accused of planning to overthrow the government of Mogadishu.

What happened? Well, the first person who was arrested was the guy who had given the newsletter and our names to the Dhabarjabinta. He was asked to write down the names of those who had not only been in the mafaarish, but also in the hospital, who were running the self-help scheme—the young professionals. He wrote a long list including names of others who were not present. That same day the informer was paid by the government

and was told to leave Somalia and go to Ethiopia because they were afraid that he would be in danger when the news became public.

The first person arrested was from our group—Ahmed Jabane—who now lives in Canada. I think he was one of those who used to write the secret newsletter. We visited him at the NSS office and found him sitting outside under a tree, so nobody thought it was too serious. Everybody was telling us, 'No, no...we are just questioning him and then we will let him go'. Because the informer had given them our names, we told Jabane that if they ask him he should give more names because it would be impossible to arrest all the people. The idea back-fired. Jabane gave the names of more than hundred young people in Hargeisa. When he was asked who wrote the secret newsletter, he said himself and Maxamed Baaruud. In fact, it was Maxamed Baaruud who started the newsletter, and Jabane came to help him. So, they went at two o'clock in the night to arrested Maxamed Baaruud.

Now, the whole town started talking about the issue, and that the young professionals who were helping the hospital had been arrested by the NSS. Then some of our friends from the NSS would come and inform us that, 'tonight they are coming to arrest you... or you and your friend'.

Arrested and Detained

I remember the night I was arrested. I was the fourth person to be taken. The night they were planning to arrest me, a friendly informer from the NSS came and told me 'tonight they are coming to your house to arrest you'. I did not feel bothered about being arrested. None of us were because when you know that you are innocent you don't have that fear. You don't see the danger that is coming. I left the hospital around eleven o'clock in the night and went home. I lay down in my bed and slept. At one o'clock in the night I was woken up by one of the NSS officers. I opened my eyes and saw this stranger at my bed. I don't know how they opened the door of my house. He told me to wake up and to 'take a blanket and a bed sheet because we are going to take you in and interrogate you. You'll be held for some time but you will be released. Don't worry. The interrogation will be for one night'. So, I was arrested but I never felt fear because I was an innocent person who had done nothing to be guilty of or to be arrested for.

When I was taken to the NSS, to the security office, I joined the other three friends who were already there. After that they started arresting more and more people. Three or four people every night until our number reached twenty-eight.

Actually, at this stage we were under initial arrest for interrogation. A team of security specialists were specially brought from Mogadishu to interrogate us and investigate and prepare our case for the Maxkamadda Badbaadada—the security court. This was a special court for trying political prisoners or those cases which the government considered a serious threat to the security of the country.

So, when I was taken from my house, we were held in a building which was behind the National Security Service (NSS), which actually was newly built and was meant for immigration. Later it became an immigration office. I was taken to a room alone, and then left locked in that room. Still at that stage I was not worried. I did not feel any fear even though I was alone in a room in this small house at night. Two mornings passed before I found out that three of my friends were also in this building. The information was given to me by one of the guards, but as we were in different rooms we could not communicate with the other, there were no activities and we didn't see anybody. As soon as our relatives—my mother and my family—found out that we were arrested, they brought us a breakfast, lunch and supper in the evening.

The place was heavily guarded by the security forces called the Red Brigades, duubcas in Somali. It was a special security brigade. One night I heard an increase in movements in the building, with people coming in and going out. Another friend was brought to my room, so at least then I felt relaxed, because if nothing else I had company in my cell, somebody to talk to. None of us were really that worried at that stage, but then we learned that the number of people who were arrested was growing. The building I was in was partly occupied by the security team which was investigating our case, but I later found out that other friends who were arrested were taken to another building which also belonged to the security services. Our number was growing, but we did not exactly know how many.

We found a way to communicate with friends and families outside by putting small notes in our food containers when it was delivered. We made small notes which we put in a plastic bag so they would not get wet. When the containers got back to our families they found the notes and learned about what was going

on inside. We used to do that regularly and the security guards did not notice that because they never used to check the containers when leaving. They only checked the containers when food was brought to us. They used to put a stick in the food to check that there was nothing hidden inside, such as weapons, but they never thought that we could send information out to people.

When our number reached about ten the interrogation started—the interrogation and the torture. Actually, I was one of the luckiest among my colleagues because I was not tortured. But, other colleagues were taken out at night, by the same investigation team, to the outskirts of Hargeisa and tortured. They used techniques typically used by security to torture people. They tied their hands and legs with ropes and would break the person's back until it became so painful that the person starts shouting. At that point they would start asking questions and interrogate them, even when the person has done nothing wrong. Sometimes because it is so painful you have to say what they want because you want the pain to stop. Some of our friends were badly tortured and up to this day they are still suffering from back pain 31 years later.

I was not tortured, but I was interrogated like the rest. They would take you to a room where seven people, a team of seven people headed by one of the NSS colonels from Afgooye area. They started describing how on a given date you met in somebody's house, that you had a meeting and that you were talking about how to overthrow the government, how the government is bad and what are you going to do to initiate an uprising of the people against the government. They accused you of conspiracy of being subversive. You would repeat that we were just young people having a chat and chewing Khat, but not nothing about politics was discussed. They would repeat again and again the same questions trying to get you to may make a mistake with your answers. But, of course you knew the truth and so you would repeat the same answer again and again and again.

Some of us, like Mohamed Baaruud, were threatened with a gun. One time the head of the team took out a white cloth which is commonly used for burying the dead, and put his gun to his head and said, 'I will shoot you. This is your cloth and I can bury you anywhere in Hargeisa without anybody knowing, without anybody asking. You should know that.' That was torture and it caused some of our friends a lot of stress.

They were doing all this so that they could prepare a case against us for the security court for undertaking subversive activities against the government in Mogadishu, and accused us of trying to overthrow the government. This was a system over which we had no control. They changed your words when they were writing the report of the investigation, including whatever they wanted, and not what you actually said. They would say for example, that a friend had accused you. They used those kind of tactics to undermine you.

Our Trial

After three months of investigation and torture, in 1982 the case was completed and they were ready to take us to court. One of the security people was from the Criminal Investigation Department in Mogadishu. As he was fast at typing they just made him part of the team so that he could record the investigation. He was a very good guy, and he used to visit us sometimes to give us information. It was him who came to us and told us when the case was completed, which articles in the law they were using to prosecute us. We took the information and sent a note in our food containers to our friends and family outside. Our friends and family members then consulted with lawyers, and found those articles were normally used for death or life sentences.

The news spread in Hargeisa that the ‘*inamadii*’, as we were described at the time, would be taken to court and would face death and life sentences. Everybody in Hargeisa was agitated by the news, especially students. The 20th February—a day now called Dhagaxtuur day in Somali (stone-throwing day)—was the day when people expected we would be brought to the security court in Hargeisa. There were no universities in those days, only secondary schools. That day students at Faarax Oomaar secondary school, which was next to the court, came out in front of it to see us brought to trial. When a custodial court vehicle arrived at the court carrying prisoners, the students thought it was us and started throwing stones at the soldiers and the security people at the court. This is how the riots started. The police could not control the riots which spread through the town like fire as others came out to join the students, so General Gaani, who was the head of the military, sent tanks and personnel carriers to control the situation. There was a lot of shooting and at least six students died during three days of riots.

After three days the riots ended and we were brought to the court. The whole area around the court was controlled by the military with tanks and barbed wire so that people could not get close to the court.

It was a show trial. One of the strange things is that you are not allowed to speak, only your lawyer, and our lawyers—all seven of them—were appointed by the government. One was from Hargeisa and six from Mogadishu. Jimcaale, a well-known human rights lawyer from Mogadishu (who has since died) led our team of lawyers. When we arrived at the court, he shook hands with each of us and spoke to us straight forward, without hiding the truth. ‘Look, young men’, he said, ‘you will be condemned. This court was made to condemn people. Don’t expect that you will be released.’ He told us we should not expect any mercy from the court, and that the judgement had already taken place and that he had witnessed many similar show trials. So our lawyers were defending us without having the opportunity to interrogate us. The only witness called was for the prosecution, and he was from the same security team that was investigating our case.

So, the prosecutor asked questions from the same man who was torturing us and who presented the case to the court. Our lawyers who were defending us were not allowed to bring us as witnesses so that we could answer the accusations. Our parents were allowed to attend the court. It was very, very sad for them. Most of them were elderly people, sitting there and looking at their children facing such a horrible trial.

One example I remember, which shows that it was a show trial is that they brought the typewriter that was used for writing the newsletter called UFFO as evidence to court. The machine actually belonged to the Pepsi factory where Maxamed Baaruud worke. The security team told the judge: ‘This is the typewrite which was used for the newsletter.’ The lawyer, Jimcaale, was very clever. During a break, he went to the typewriter and started typing. When session resumed, he told the judge ‘I want to ask this security person a question’. The judge agreed. He gave the security office the letter that he had just typed and asked him what sort of typewriter has been used to type the letter. The man responded, ‘I don’t know. I am not an expert. No, I don’t know which typewriter was used.’ Jimcaale asked again, ‘Can you say that this letter was typed by this typewriter?’ He said ‘No I cannot say hundred percent it was written by this typewriter.’ So, Jimcaale asked the judge, ‘How can the security people prove that the letters—the underground

newsletter they found—was actually used with this typewriter since they are not experts and they haven't used any experts to prove that this is the typewriter [which] was used?'

Much of the case proceeded that way and the lawyers were really very good. But, it was a show trial; it had nothing to do with facts. It did not matter what the prosecutor said was correct or not, nor whether what the investigator was saying was right or wrong. The case had already been decided. And, it was decided by the highest authority in the country—the President himself. So, what sort of judgement, what sort of article were they are going to use to judge us? This was just to show the world and the human rights organizations who were watching that a trial had taken place and people had been found guilty.

When the trial came to an end—and it was a very short trial of not more than four days—three of us were condemned to death. These were the two who had written the newsletter and one, Maxamed Xaji Maxamud, whose house they found a copy of the newsletter in. He is a parliamentarian now. They said those three were the ring leaders of this group who wanted to overthrow the government because they were the ones who were writing the newsletter.

Those three were condemned to death, while myself and another ten of us were condemned to life sentences. Seven more were condemned to twenty-five years imprisonment. Three were condemned to eight years and another three were condemned to three years. This was just to make it look like a proper trial. Actually, the eight condemned to three years were the last ones to be arrested and were accused of throwing hand grenades in parts of Hargeisa after we were arrested. So, those who were accused of terrorism—of throwing hand grenades—were only sentenced to eight years, while the rest of us, who were accused of overthrowing the government were condemned to death or life sentences. The three who were sentenced to three years, were found not to be part of this group, but because knew what they were doing and they did not inform the authorities they received three years.

There was an atmosphere of growing unrest in the city and in the country. People were very angry. Already Siyad Barre has sent two senior officers to work on the case. One was Suleiman Dafle, the head of national security and his son in-law. The other, Ina Laxwas, was a minister and a member of what was called the Revolutionary Council. These were important members of the

government. Both of them were from the North, Sulaiman Dafle being Dhulbahante and Ina Laxwas Issa Musa.

They were in Hargeisa when the court case was going on, and were talking to the elders to calm and reassure them. They returned to Mogadishu and spoke with the President about the case. He changed the court's verdict. The three death sentences were commuted to life sentences and life sentences reduced to twenty years and thirty years, and so on. Thirty years is like a life sentence, but because no-one was going to be killed at least the people were calm. Then they took the twenty of us to Hargeisa prison.

In Hargeisa prison we had access to our families, our parents, and our friends. People were visited us almost every day bringing food and event khat for those who chewed. We were there eight months. Why eight months? Because, the president wanted the case to be forgotten and the city to be calm. Then in October 1982, he decided to move us to Mogadishu under the pretext that we would be pardoned. The Governor, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ina Jangali, who was in Hargeisa at the time, and the head of the military police, General Gaani, all met with our parents and our elders and they swore on the Qoran the young men would be taken to Mogadishu to the Presidency, where the president would pardon them. Because it was only a few days before 21st of October, the anniversary and celebration of the revolution, everybody believed them, especially when they swore on the Qoran.

Back to Mogadishu

At midnight we were taken out of Hargeisa prison, hand-cuffed again and with a convoy of military cars and vehicles and trucks, including armoured personnel carriers. The convoy never stopped until we reached Garowe, across the border from the North West Somalia. There the convoy stopped and the drivers relaxed because they felt they were now safe. They even took us out of the vehicles and gave us a meal—our first meal—before we continued to Galka'yo. It was evening when we reached Galka'yo and they put us in the prison for the night.

The next day we reached Mogadishu, but, instead of taking us to the Presidency for a pardon we were taken to the main prison called Gaalshire. There we were separated from other prisoners for at least two nights. We did not know what was going to happen, but were all under the impression that sooner or later

we would be taken to the President who would release us. So our mood was high. We were feeling really excited and there was no fear anymore. On the second night, the head of Mogadishu prison called us to him one by one, wrote down our names and personal details and told us he was doing this at the request of the President, because he had not received any information about us. So, each of us had to tell him our names and the number of years we had been sentenced for. When he had compiled the list he went to the Presidency, also under the impression that the list would be used in the process of pardoning and releasing the prisoners.

But, when Siyad Barre saw the list he became very angry. He was angry about those who had been sentenced to less than ten years—that is, the three sentenced to eight years and the three sentenced to three years—as if he did not know about this. So he said: ‘those who are under ten years of imprisonment, keep them here in Mogadishu prison. Those who are condemned to more than ten years, taken them tonight to Labaatan Jirrow.’

So that was the final verdict and we did not know anything about it. That night we were woken up and fourteen of us who had been sentenced to more than ten years or life sentence were taken from our cells; the other six remained there.

The head of the prison also asked Siyad Barre to allow him to move six Majeerteen prisoners who had been there since 1978 to Labaatan Jirrow with us because they gave him a hard time. The six had been arrested during Cabdillah Cirro coup attempt in 1978 and were from the same family of Cirro, who had been executed, although they had not been part of the coup. They were put in the truck with us, so our number became 20 again—fourteen from Hargeisa and six from Majeertenia. In the truck we started singing. We had no idea about this place called Labaatan Jirrow, so we were singing on the way to the prison.

Our mood changed when they blindfolded us. We were already handcuffed but we were also blindfold when we reached Baydabo. Labaatan Jirrow is about seventy kilometres from Baydabo, and they didn’t want people to see the way. It was at night and dark and the truck was covered with a canvass so you couldn’t see outside anyway. The blindfold was just a way of terrorising the prisoners.

When we reached the prison the truck went inside and they asked us to step down one by one. Each one was taken to a cell, the blindfold and handcuffs removed and the door locked. All of a sudden, you find yourself locked in a small room, which is not more

than five by six metres, a very small room, with a toilet inside and a tap, so you won't need to leave that room ever, for the rest of your imprisonment.

And that is when the new reality dawned, and how we started seven years of our lives in solitary confinement. That is another long story.

Part III: Life in Prison 1981-1989

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Living in the Dark

When each one of us was locked up in solitary confinement, in single separate cells, that was the moment everybody started reflecting on what was going to happen to him and to his friends. One of the coping mechanisms we used was to convince ourselves that this was not going to last long, that this would not continue for long, that we would not remain there for long. We were trying to console ourselves that we would only be there for a short time.

But, there was no possibility of communicating with each other. The guards were not allowed to talk to us. We were completely in a solitary environment for 24 hours. In the afternoon at four o'clock or five o'clock you are given your last meal, your outer door is locked so there is no light, you are in a blackout until the next morning. When you are in a blackout in a cell like that you struggle with insects like cockroaches, and with rats in the cell, and with other kinds of things which come out in the dark. So, you try to remain in your bed because you are afraid that you might meet one of those things. In the beginning it was very difficult for us to cope with that darkness, complete darkness—blackout—and it took some time to get used to that unusual environment of remaining in a completely dark room for more than fourteen hours.

When we were brought to Labaatan Jirrow, which was the name given to the prison because the nearest village was called Labaatan Jirrow, we were told that no people were allowed to come within fifty kilometres of the prison. It was the high security prison. Not even nomads could come close. And the security was very tight. If we climbed to look through that ventilation hole in the cell to the outside world, we saw nothing but soldiers outside guarding the prison. On the top of the prison there were security towers. The prison was meant only for those designated by Siyad Barre, the dictator. He was the only person who could order people to be taken there and the only one who could release people. It was not part of the custodial system. The head of the custodial corps had no idea of what was going on in Labaatan Jirrow. The guards were the notorious Red Brigades who were used for security purposes, who belonged to the same clan as the President.

The man who was the head of the prison was very close to President, and from the same sub clan. Although a young man, he was a full colonel. We were told that not long before he was

appointed he was a corporal of the guards who guarded the house of the First Lady. But he was quickly promoted to colonel. On the first night we arrived at the prison, we were taken one by one to his office and there we had our bags checked. The bags had come with us from Hargeisa and had clothes and books and other things. We were deprived of the clothes and books; we were deprived of everything. He even took away our eye glasses, accusing us of pretending to be upper class people, and highly educated by putting on glasses. He thought that people who wore eye glasses were people who pretend to be educated. Everybody was allowed to have the Holy Qoran. The only clothes we were allowed to wear were t-shirts and mawcis. He started abusing us, calling us names, threatening us, taunting us: 'Do you imagine that the SNM (Somali National Movement) will come and liberate you from here? Never dream about that. Nobody can come here and...liberate you from this prison.'

He actually found a note in the bag of one of our colleagues written by a friend in Jeddah. The letter said 'please support SNM and please...resist the dictatorship and liberate the country from dictatorship' and words of that kind. The Colonel became very, very, angry and told the guards to take that prisoner to a place far from our cells and to lock him up for twenty-four hours in chains. So, that friend was taken away from us and was locked up and chained all the day in a black room.

There were times when they used to come and close all the doors of our cells so that we stayed in a blackout for more than a week or two. Later after we were released we came to realise that this punishment occurred whenever the SNM had been victorious, like when they attacked Mandera prison and released prisoners. The government retaliated by punishing us in Labaatan Jirrow. He was actually punishing people who were already in solitary confinement. You just can't imagine what sort of additional punishment he can do to that person.

One of the coping mechanisms when we were in those cells was of course praying, and reading the Qoran. It was the only book we had. And we maintained our sanity by becoming more religious and praying. We knew that our friends and family were really supporting us and we prayed for them all, for our sanity, and for our release.

Language of the Walls

What changed our situation was that the same person who had been condemned by the head of the prison to a far cell far from ours was brought back to a cell near ours. He had joined us again, even though he was alone in a room. He was very stressed because of what he had been through and he wanted to communicate with his colleague in the cell next to him. So, they started knocking on the wall between them, not saying anything, but to show each other they were still alive and alright. That man was called Yusuf and he started thinking of a way of communicating with his colleague next door. He thought about the Morse code and realised he could use the knocks as a form of alphabet which his friend could 'read' so they could communicate. So, he started creating an alphabet from those knocks. He made the alphabet out of two different knocks. He started from A up to Z, making a combination of knocks. When the guards were not around he had to shout and explain to his friend in the next cell that, "What I am knocking on the wall is the alphabet. Please write it down and learn it by heart." His neighbour in the next cell got the message and wrote down the alphabet from those knocks which he learnt them by heart. He got rid of his note because our cells were checked by the guards every afternoon before they locked the doors, to see if we were writing on the walls or digging holes.

This language of wall knocking was the breakthrough for us. We all learnt this alphabet from A to Z and started communicating with each other by knocking on the walls. This actually saved our sanity. Once you can communicate with the others and talk and make jokes and laugh and reminisce and share memories of childhood, of when you were young, or when you were in Hargeisa or Burco, or in Europe, it gives you a great relief.

How Anna Karenina Saved a Life

It happened that the man whose cell was next to mine, Maxamed Baaruud, got sick from stress. He was one of the three who had been condemned to death. That death sentence caused him a lot of stress and when he was put in solitary confinement in Labaatan Jirrow he experienced acute anxiety.

As a doctor, I tried to console and counsel him. I tried to explain that what he was going through was restless anxiety, that his heart beat was very fast due to the stress he was going through, and what he needed was to do some physical exercise and meditation

to reduce the stress. But that did not work. So I thought about it. In my last visit to the prison warden I had requested him to give me a book from my bag. Because of my medical profession he felt some sympathy, so he had asked me to choose one. I chose the biggest one, which was about 800 pages, called Anna Karenina, by Tolstoy, the great Russian writer. Among my fellow inmates I was the only one having a book.

Since talking to Maxamed through the wall did not help much, I thought of reading the book to him. I knew Maxamed used to be a book worm who read a lot of books and he remembered this one from his secondary school in Sheekh. It is really a very nice story which when somebody listens to or reads he cannot stop. So, I started reading it through the wall word by word and he started to listen and in this way he was distracted from his destructive thoughts. By concentrating on the book and the knocking on the wall he was distracted from thoughts of dying and started to calm down.

When the cells were in blackout in the evening, we lay down on our beds and I continued talking with him about our childhood and experiences and everything. I had to find interesting stories to entertain him, to keep his attention and distract him from other thoughts. Then he would gradually fall asleep. If he woke with a nightmare he would knock to me on the wall and I would wake up and start talking to him until he calmed down and fell asleep.

This process went on for a couple of months and he really started to recover from the problem. Even after we finished the book he was able to communicate while he was in bed and he was calm. We continued to communicate like that until we were released from the prison.

It not only helped Baaruud but also our other friends and colleagues. Because there were three doctors among us whenever a friend had a medical problem, they communicated with us to ask advice. Most of the time, their problems were psychological manifested in physical symptoms caused by the solitary confinement. So, we had to console them and explain to them what was happening to them and that the problem was not physical, but psychological.

Keeping the Faith

There were some friends who were learning the Qoran through the walls. One guy knew the Qoran very well while his friend in

the next cell did not. So he taught him through the wall, giving him a tafsir interpretation of the Qoran. One day we could hear this guy who was teaching the Qoran laughing. Everybody started knocking on his wall, sending messages and asking 'why are you laughing Ahmed?' And then explained that his friend who was learning the Koran stopped him yesterday and told him 'Listen, you are becoming like Radio Mecca, without an interval, without a break. Why can't you make it Saaca bi Saaca?' In Somali that means we continue the interpretation of the Qoran at the same we talk about life itself and have fun, 'but you are just like Radio Mecca without a stop.'

It was those kind of things that helped us cope. Other prisoners who did not have that opportunity to communicate through the wall using this language got sick and became mentally ill. Some become psychotic and shouted day and night.

That is the way we continued our lives in solitary confinement. Of course the month of Ramadan was different from the usual routine. It was the only time we knew about the time and date. Otherwise, we had no idea about the date and the time and the months. When it came to Ramadan, we knew that we had finished a year. In this way we were able to count the number of years we were in prison.

During Ramadan they would give us as usual the last meal at breakfast and then close our doors. During the night they would give us a meal around midnight, which was the last meal before fasting. They would close the doors and by the time we got the meal we were in blackout. When you are eating that last meal in total darkness, the cockroaches and other things would come running to eat the food. So, while eating with one hand, you will have to use the other hand to chase the cockroaches and other things away. So, eating was a terrible experience during Ramadan.

A Life So Monotonous

Otherwise, life was so monotonous, with every day the same. As a matter of fact, it is very strange to conceive of time passing when you are not feeling time pass. When you don't know what the time is everything moves the same and you feel like the time stands still. And because the time is still, you don't have that feeling of changing days. For example, when you are free and doing something you experience those things so you can feel the length of the day. But when you are sitting in one place, on the bed and

reflecting and thinking, as the time passes by, that is the moment you don't even feel the time, and you don't even know it but you are again in the night and again in the morning and so on. Every day is the same as the last.

Released at Last

It was one of those times when we were sitting in our cells alone that they opened our doors and they gave us each a new t-shirt and a new macawiiis (longee). Then they closed the doors again and we did not understand why they were giving us new clothes for the first time. Before this we were using our own clothes. Every two years they gave us one of those t-shirts from our bags, but this time it was new clothes. We did not understand why. We knocked on the walls and asked each other 'why did they give us these clothes? It is not even Eid.' It was only during Eid that they used to give us fresh clothes. While we were all sitting in our beds in dark rooms, waiting to fall asleep, we heard them opening the doors again. Then they took us from our cells one by one and handcuffed us. There were no lights anywhere so it was dark outside. They called the guards to take us to an empty cell. When I entered there were already two of my colleagues sitting there. When I looked at them I did not recognise them, because during those seven years they had changed completely. I looked at their faces which looked so familiar, but I could not recognise them.

We could not talk, because the soldiers would not allow us to talk. And more and more of our colleagues were brought to the room handcuffed. Then, in fours we were taken from room, blindfolded put in a Land Cruiser and driven out of the prison. It was a terrible moment because we are blindfolded and handcuffed and then we started to think about the worst scenario. We thought this time they would take us somewhere and shoot us. It never occurred to us that we would be released, because when somebody is released you don't blindfold and handcuff them. So, we thought the worst.

When we reached Baydabo town they removed the blindfolds but kept the handcuffs on and they started driving straight to Mogadishu. In Mogadishu, they took us straight to the Presidency. And when we reached there it was at midnight. And we were asked to stop in front of one of the offices. In that place we all gathered, the fourteen of us and three of the six Majeerteen. Three of them

had been released, so only three remained, one of whom seemed mad.

An Audience with Barre

At two o'clock we were asked to stand up and go one by one into an office. At the door they took off the handcuffs. What we saw was the most amazing picture. I was the second person in line, and the guy ahead of me jumped back as he entered. I pushed him inside only to realise that he had jumped back when he saw Siyad Barre sitting alone in his office. It was a shock to be staring face-to-face with the man who had put you in the prison.

He did not allow all of us to enter, only according to our clans. One colleague, Dr. Taani, who was a Samaroon from Awdal region, was not allowed to come in to the room with us. He was told to wait outside. And the Majeerteen were also left out. He had to see everybody according to their clan, because that was the only thing he understood at the time. Then he started asking us, 'Are you guilty of what you have been convicted?' This was a very strange question to ask somebody who had been eight years in prison, whether he or she was guilty. Each one of us said 'No, I was not guilty.'

Then he said, 'I am not the one who put you in that prison. I only release people from prison. But if those people who put you in prison knew you were innocent, God will judge them. Ilaahay baa kala xisaabtami doona. I am here to release you.' We were just surprised. Coming out of solitary confinement after eight years and talking to no-one, that was the first time that we heard somebody talking. We were used to using the wall language, not talking.

And then he continued. He told us the story of what had happened while we were in prison because we had no idea of what was going on in the country. He said, 'There was bloodshed while you were in prison. Hargeisa, Burco are all gone, they are ghost cities. Everybody is in the refugee camps and all this was because of you. You started the problem. It was because of you that all this thing happened and all this bloodshed took place.' And he said now it was our 'responsibility to reconcile with those who are fighting the government—meaning the SNM—and to bring them together.'

It was such an amazing moment. It felt like a horror film because we did not understand what he was talking about. We could not really imagine what he meant by calling Hargeisa and

Burco ghost towns. We did not understand what the bloodshed was that he was talking about. Before we went to prison the SNM had started fighting near the border with Ethiopia. And then, when he had finished his lecture, he told the officers who were accompanying us to take us to their houses. Then one of us, who was a bit more sober and understood what he was saying, told him 'Mr. President, but you said all our houses are destroyed and that our cities are ghost cities, what do you mean by take them home?' Then the president realised that he made a mistake. He told the officers, 'Take them to a hotel in Mogadishu.' And they gave us plastic bags full of Somali Shillings.

We were taken to a hotel and in the morning when we had breakfast most of the bag of money was taken from us. Because of inflation the Somali shilling has become useless. Money that had some value in 1981 had changed after all these years into something valueless. If you want to go to a restaurant you had to carry a bag of money, of notes. And that is where our next chapter starts, when we were met by our own people.

Part IV: Release, Peace and Human Rights

A Changed World

I explained what Siyad Barre said when he saw us, but what he told Taani was very strange. When Taani went to the President's office, the President told him, 'don't you know that these people you are collaborating with, (he means the Isaaq), are killing your people in Awdal Region, in Borama? They are killing your people and abusing your people and you are collaborating with them.' He started to give poor Taani who had just came out of solitary confinement a hard time. He told him, 'I am releasing you now. You will be free. But I don't want you to have anything to do with these people anymore.' He called the colonel who was accompanying us and he told him 'Take him to his brother-in-law's house'—Taani's sister was at the time married to the Minister of Defence.

Taani was a special case. The President has been approached by the Samaroon elders many times when we were in Labaatan Jirrow, asking him to release Taani. But Siyad Barre did not want to and kept him for a purpose. His intention was to show the world that he was not only abusing the Isaaq, that the intellectuals and professionals who were in prison were not only Isaaq, but also Gadabuursi and other Somalis. He had a hidden agenda. When Taani's sister got married to the Minister of Defense, the Minister of Defense went personally and requested the President to release his brother-in-law, Dr. Taani. Then, Dr. Taani, in 1988 was called by the colonel who was the head of our Labaatan Jirrow prison, and told him to write a letter requesting a pardon from the President. Taani wrote the letter, and when he came back that evening he informed us through the wall. He told us that he has been called and he wrote the letter of pardon to the President and that meant that Taani would be released. We were happy for him because he was a really good friend and because at the time we did not know when we would be released from the Prison. Knowing that at least one of us would be free was really good. But before the President signed the release of Taani in 1988, the SNM war against Siyad Barre's forces intensified. As a result, his case was forgotten, and Taani remained with us in the prison until a year later, in 1989, we would be all released together.

After we were released we were taken together to a hotel. In that hotel all our friends and other people we did not know from the same clan, came to visit. There were hundreds of people

coming, and they were all rejoicing and excited that we were free. It was such an overwhelming experience for us, to have been in solitary confinement for seven years where you don't see anybody. And then suddenly you are out of that cell and back into normal life. You see that number of friends and people you used to know all rushing to greet you. Some of them were crying, some were so happy, and some of them, who already knew about what had happened to our families in the meantime, were feeling really sad.

Some of them broke the news to us. They told us how my father had died when I was in prison, and my elder brother, who was an economist and was killed during the 1988 war. I knew nothing about this news until I was released. It was the same for the others. Others had lost parents, some their whole families. Some had wives who had divorced them. Two of our friend's wives left them and got re-married. When they were released they were informed 'Your wife has got divorced and she has re-married...'. In spite of all the bad news, we were still able to cope. It was a feeling of numbness that you don't feel anything. It's as if you don't comprehend the real meaning of what these people are saying. It takes time and as previously mentioned, Somali men or boys are taught from their childhood not to cry. Despite all this bad news we received about our parents and families, none of us shed tears, none of us cried. I think none of us could have remembered the last time he or she cried.

While we were in Mogadishu we were invited for a celebration in one of the restaurants called Haraf, the same restaurant that is in in Hargeisa today. There were many people who were invited and it was such a joy to see all these people and everybody rejoicing. And then the three people who organized those celebrations, who invited us to these celebrations, were arrested in the evening by the NSS. Because, of course the regime did not like people really enjoying themselves and celebrating as if they are celebrating a victory. And a victory of course is something that the government did not like or support.

We stayed in Mogadishu for few months, but in July an incident took place in the city and there were riots and a curfew. Luckily, we were not in our house because people from the North, especially the Isaaq, were rounded up in the area where we lived and were arrested. They were accused of having thrown stones at some of the government elite, including Maslax the son of Siyad Barre. They were taken to Aljazeera a deserted area at the beach and

shot. It was a lucky escape for us because we also lived in that area, but were out when this incident took place.

We decided to leave Mogadishu fearing we were in danger. We left two by two from Mogadishu airport so that the government would not notice our departure. We flew to Djibouti where we all met up again and there we stayed for a few months, just rehabilitating, and trying to pick up the pieces. We were contacted by human rights organizations which had supported our case, like the human rights branch of the American Academy for Science. They had found out that the Americans were willing to give us asylum. So, they sent an immigration officer from the United States to Djibouti where he interviewed us, after which we filled in forms and were told our papers will be processed so that we can go to the United States.

Among the Refugees

We were not ready to go to right away to the United States because we had to go to the refugee camps to see our relatives, and then go to the SNM in Ethiopia to really see how the struggle is going on and find out about the situation. We left Djibouti for Diridawa and from Diridawa we went to the refugee camps. Our relatives were in different camps. Some of them were in Dulcad, some of them were in Abokor, some were in Daroor and we had to go in different directions to find them. We had a very good reception from the people who were there. Some people had thought that we were dead and were not going to see us anymore. They were really happy and we were well-received in those refugee camps. One of the ideas which occurred to us when we were there is what we could do to help these people? We decided that we should organize ourselves and form a local NGO which we called at that time, Somali Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SORRA).

We went from the camps to the bush to meet the SNM. In Diridawa we met the Chairperson of the SNM, who had been Siilaanyo, and who later became the President of Somaliland. And then we went from one front to the other to meet the combatants and fighters who are fighting to overthrow the Siyad Barre regime. One of the things we noticed is that the SNM at that time was fighting along clan lines. They were organized according to clan lineage and we realized that it would be very difficult when the Northern part of the country was liberated because there would not be a united sort of force to really control the country. What

we proposed to the Chairperson at the time was to help the SNM to choose the best fighters and organize them into one unit which was composed of all clans. This unit was later given the name of Koodbuur, after a combatant who died during the war who was really loved and well-respected by the other fighters.

By the time this unit was organized it was 1991. Fighting was going on in the North, but also in Mogadishu. It was the last stage of war and almost the fall of the regime of Siyad Barre. The system, the regime collapsed in 1991. And in May 1991 in Burco, the Somaliland independence from Somalia was declared and the Somaliland Republic was announced.

Relief and Rehabilitation

Some of us started leaving Somalia or Somaliland and going to the United States. I left for the United States in 1992. When I was in the United States, I could not stop thinking about the problems we had left behind. So, after just a few months we all started returning to Hargeisa to continue our work with our NGO, SORRA, so that we could help the people there.

SORRA was one of the first NGOs to be formed in Somaliland. We started raising funds to support education and rebuild schools. The African Development Bank gave us big funding of about \$ 400,000. With that we rehabilitated the schools in Somaliland without roofs and windows, from Borama up to Burco. We did many other projects. As SORRA we successfully fundraised for the organization of the 1993 Boroma Peace Conference, which lasted three months and was where Cigaal was elected President.

For a Life of Peace

Unfortunately, in 1994, while we were working with SORRA, internal conflict happened in Somaliland, known as Dagaal Sokeeye. The conflict was between the government and militias who held onto and refused to give up the airport. The conflict spread widely and divided the clan and Hargeisa, with people forced to flee from the town. It was such a bad experience because it brought back memories of that war in 1988 when they had to flee from Hargeisa to the refugee camps. Some people returned to the refugee camps in Ethiopia and some of them went to the rural areas to live with their relatives and kinsmen.

This internal conflict was one of my worst experiences. I was not in Hargeisa when the conflict started between the militias and

the government forces, but in Djibouti with a friend of mine. We were doing a survey of energy and charcoal in Djibouti and were thinking about how to find an alternative source of cooking energy using gas instead of charcoal and kerosene. So, when the war took place Mohamed and I returned, but the plane landed in Kalabayd not Hargeisa. I personally could not land in Kalabayd because the area belonged to the clan which was supporting the government and I belong to the clan fighting the government. Mohamed being a Samaroon could land in Kalabayd, while I had to fly to Burco and come all the way to back to Hargeisa but through the areas which belong to my clan.

This complication just a few years after declaring independence was such a bad experience. My family lived in the center of Hargeisa, exactly where the fighting took place. At that time, we had four children, two sons and two daughters, and they were all small. As a matter of fact, our son was born exactly that year, in 1994, so he was just a couple of months old and our daughters were born in 1990 and 1992, so they were very small and my wife and her sister were in the house. There was shelling going on and the fighters were on both sides of our house and my family was right in the middle and they could not leave because if they leave the house they were afraid to be shot or get killed.

My wife waited for a moment when the shooting stopped and then, without any shoes, took the three children. She carried two kids and held the hand of the older daughter and the four of them started running out of the house to the mountains where they could be far away from the shootings. They hid there and waited for the dark to come. When it became dark, my wife left the children with her sister and went back to the house. Everything was open, but nothing was lost. She took some of the things they needed, and some money and went back to the kids. In the morning, she found a car and she travelled all the way to Gabiley. From Gabiley the family of Mohamed Sheikh, with whom I had been with in Djibouti contacted them and they took another car to Borama.

I returned to Hargeisa from the side of the airport that my clan comes from. The worst experience is to be in such a situation where you are one part of the town where you were born, but cannot reach the other side because fighting going on. At that time Anyone could be killed because he was from the other clan. I could not stay any longer so I went to Borama to join my family.

My friend Mohamed Sheekh had already opened an office for SORRA in Borama so we started working from there. It was one of

my worst experiences which is why I was later involved in peace building and strengthening peace because I knew how painful all these conflicts were, internal conflicts, conflicts which took place in one town and divided the people into friends and foe. Always my focus was how to maintain peace and I volunteered in every activity where there was a need for people to mediate.

At this time, one of our friends, Maxamed Baaruud, who had been in the cell next to mine in Labaatan Jirrow became the Minister of Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Reconstruction. Baaruud and I belong to the sub-clan which was holding the airport and which was actually fighting the government. So Baaruud and myself and some of our kinsmen from that clan in Hargeisa, started to organize ourselves for peace-making, to bring the clan and the government together to bring this bloodshed to an end.

We travelled from Hargeisa to a refugee camp, Kaam Abokor, in Ethiopia where our people had gone. We really faced a lot of problems bringing the government and the clan together. At first the people in Kaam Abokor demonstrated and started throwing stones at us, and chased us from the camp. Some of us had to escape to save our lives. The hostility continued until 1995 when the reconciliation process started properly and there were talks, peace talks, and then a peace accord with the government. At that time, the demobilization of the militias and of the SNM was underway. Cigaal had succeeded in the process of putting all the combatants and militias into one army. This was really the end of internal conflict, because from then onwards there were no militias running around with guns and technicals in the towns.

In 1996, after attending a semester long training course on conflict resolution and peace building at Responding to Conflict, Selly Oak College in Birmingham, UK, I left SORRA to become a trainer and conflict resolution 'expert' for an international NGO called Life and Peace Institute, a Swedish peace-building organization. In January 1998 I joined the British NGO, Progressio (at that time called International Cooperation for Development) where I became the country representative. I continued to be involved in conflict resolution through committees and the peace committees involved in mediating between the opposition and the government, such as during President Rayaale's government. There were frequent tensions between the government and opposition political parties, stalling progress in the democratisation process. We had to intervene and bring them together, to

organize a dialogue which later on resulted in the signing of a code of conduct, which all three parties agreed on.

I worked with Progressio, supporting local NGOs and civil society organizations in capacity building for almost 14 years until I retired in 2011. I didn't stop work, I became a freelance consultant and joined Rift Valley Institute as the Somaliland focal point. I always focus on issues of human rights because of what I have come through. I do not want anybody else to have to go through what I experienced and because of what the country has been through. And I think that is the way my life will continue. We have already experienced enough conflict.

I applaud and respect Dr. Adan, my friend and colleague for twenty years, for his sense of justice and firm determination to contribute to peace and human rights in Somaliland. I especially admire Adan's steadfast support for gender justice in a country where most Somali men would shy away from challenging gender inequalities. Thank you, Adan, for your unwavering service to our country so as to make it a better place for all of us.

— Amina Warsame 'Milgo'

'It has been my privilege to be a friend and colleague of Dr Adan since 1992. As medical doctor, a social activist, a human rights campaigner and a peacemaker, Dr Adan has touched many peoples' lives in profound ways. His place in the history of Somaliland deserves to be recognized and his life celebrated. At the Rift Valley Institute, we are pleased to be able to contribute to that by documenting a part of his life in his own words.'

— Mark Bradbury, Executive Director, Rift Valley Institute

Dr Adan Yusuf Abokor was born in Hargeisa, Somaliland, and grew up in Aden, Yemen. He graduated from Warsaw Medical School, Poland, in 1976. He was the director of the Hargeisa Group Hospital in the early 80s and together with other young professionals was arrested and imprisoned by Siad Barre's regime from 1981 to 1989. He was Country Representative for Progressio, a British NGO, from 1998 to 2012 and the Rift Valley Institute's Representative in Somaliland from 2013 to 2019.



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