



# UNTMIS NEWSLETTER

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## UN IN SOMALIA MARKS DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

**Mogadishu** – Marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on 21 March, the United Nations in Somalia reaffirmed its support and commitment in promoting equality, dignity and respect for all.

“Racial discrimination has no place in any society. It undermines peace, security, justice and social progress. It is a violation of human rights that tears at individuals and cuts the social fabric of society, and we must all unite and work together to eradicate it,” said the UN Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia, James Swan.

“On this important day, we call on everyone to reflect on the values of respect and solidarity, to take action against racism in all its forms, and to focus on what can be achieved through our collective effort to create societies where everyone enjoys equality and justice,” he added.

In Somalia, the United Nations works with the Federal Government, civil society organizations and international partners to promote an inclusive and respectful

society, in which everyone can thrive, feel safe and express themselves freely, thus contributing meaningfully to the success of the country.

This year's observance also marked the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), which remains a cornerstone in the global fight against racial discrimination and promoting equality – and which Somalia ratified in 1975.

As the first of the UN's core international human rights treaties, ICERD set the stage for future human rights advancements. Its commitment to eliminating racial discrimination and promoting equality fosters the promotion of global understanding and unity free from racial segregation.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed annually on the day the police in Sharpeville, South Africa, opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration against apartheid 'pass laws' in 1960.



## UN AIRCRAFT MAKES EMERGENCY LANDING IN MOGADISHU

**Mogadishu** – A United Nations aircraft in Somalia carried out a successful emergency landing in Mogadishu after detecting a landing gear malfunction.

Operated by the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), the aircraft was en route from Mogadishu to Baidoa at the start of April on its regular flight when the crew identified a fault that prevented the landing wheels from deploying correctly.

The pilots promptly diverted the aircraft back to Aden Adde International Airport in the capital to address the issue safely.

Aside from one passenger reported to be slightly injured during evacuation of the aircraft, all remaining passengers and crew were unharmed.

The United Nations in Somalia commended the swift and professional response of the crew and the airport emergency services and staff, whose preparedness and support ensured the smooth handling of the situation.

"We commend the collaboration between UNSOS and the Somalia Civil Aviation Authority which made this effective response possible," the Head of UNSOS, Assistant Secretary-General Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, later said.

## SECRETARY-GENERAL APPOINTS JAMES SWAN AS HIS SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR SOMALIA AND HEAD OF UNTMIS

**New York** – UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced in late March the appointment of James Swan as his Special Representative for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS).

According to a statement from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General expressed his gratitude to Mr. Swan for acting as Special Representative for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and UNTMIS since May 2024, and was pleased that Mr. Swan had accepted to continue to lead the United Nations in Somalia during this critical period.

Mr. Swan is an experienced diplomat with a long career in African countries facing complex political transitions. Prior to serving as acting Special Representative for Somalia and Head of UNSOM/UNTMIS as well as Special Representative for Somalia and Head of UNSOM (2019-2022), he worked in the United States Government as Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2013-2016), Special Representative for Somalia (2011-2013) and Ambassador to Djibouti (2008-2011).

In his earlier career, Mr. Swan was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African

Affairs (2006-2008) and Director of African Analysis in the US State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (2005-2006). Before assuming these positions, Mr. Swan held various assignments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Cameroon, Nicaragua and Haiti.

Mr. Swan holds a B.Sc. degree from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, an M.A. from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, and a Master's degree in Security Studies from the National War College, all in the United States. He is fluent in English and French.



## UN CONDEMNS ATTACK ON PRESIDENTIAL CONVOY

**Mogadishu** – The United Nations in Somalia strongly condemned the terrorist attack on a convoy carrying President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud near Villa Somalia in Mogadishu, the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) said on social media in the wake of the 18 March bombing.

It added that the world body's representatives in Somalia expressed their

condolences for the attack's victims, wished a speedy recovery for the injured, and reiterated that they stand shoulder to shoulder with all Somalis against terrorism.

In a subsequent statement, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres echoed UNTMIS' response, and reaffirmed the UN's full solidarity and support to the people and Government of Somalia in furthering efforts towards peace and stability.





# UNIVERSITY FOR PEACE GRADUATES CALLED TO TACKLE GLOBAL CHALLENGES

**Mogadishu** — Seventy-nine students from Somalia and five other countries graduated from the University for Peace (UPEACE), pledging to use their knowledge and skills to address the challenges facing their nations and the world.

The event, held in late January, marked UPEACE's fourth graduation ceremony in the Somali capital, Mogadishu.

"I am sure your journey has been one of perseverance, dedication, and determination. I encourage you to carry forward the values and principles instilled in you by UPEACE and continue to be ambassadors for peace, champions of development, and advocates of human rights," said George Conway, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, in his remarks to the graduates.

The ceremony honoured 25 doctoral and 54 master's graduates, including five women - three doctoral and two master's graduates. In addition to Somalia, the graduates hailed from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Somalia's Prime Minister, Hamza Abdi Barre, attended the ceremony.

"Education is a cornerstone of development for any community, nation, and the world at large. The Federal Republic of Somalia recognizes education as a key component to peace, development and stability within a country," stated Prime Minister Barre.

He also announced that 60 new Somali students would receive full scholarships

for their doctoral programmes at UPEACE. This initiative illustrates the Somali government's commitment to enhance access to education and forge partnerships with international organizations to strengthen educational frameworks.

UPEACE Somalia  
is equipping its  
graduates with specific  
knowledge and skills  
necessary for Somalia

Other guests attending the graduation ceremony included Somalia's Minister of Education, Culture and Higher Education, Farah Sheikh Abdulkadir; Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Daud Aweis; Deputy Force Commander of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), Major General Peter Muteti, who represented the Head of AUSSOM; and representatives from various diplomatic missions and UPEACE.

"Always remember that the knowledge you have gained here is not the end of your learning journey nor should it be limited to the degree you have attained. You are expected to actively contribute to leadership and the development of peace with transparency and openness to new ideas," said Mohamed Yusuf, Director of UPEACE Somalia.

## Education in Somalia

Established in 1980 by the UN General

Assembly, the University for Peace's focus areas include conflict prevention, human security, human rights, environmental security and post-conflict rehabilitation. In Somalia, it offers specialised post-graduate programmes with a focus on governance, economic development, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, human rights, environment, disaster resilience and post-conflict resolution.

"UPEACE Somalia is equipping its graduates with specific knowledge and skills necessary for Somalia, looking towards its future to drive positive change and foster development in support of Somalia's national priorities, and investment in knowledge in human capital is in the best interest," said Mr. Conway.

The recent Statistical Abstract of Somalia, published in November 2024 by the National Bureau of Statistics, highlights education as a vital driver of development and a cornerstone for building human capital. The data shows a gradual improvement in adult literacy rates, particularly among women and rural populations, as well as





an expansion in primary school enrollment in recent years.

Despite these improvements, significant disparities remain between urban and rural areas, and the pupil-teacher ratio indicates mixed progress in enhancing educational quality, emphasizing the need for sustained investments and policies to improve educational quality, retention, and equity.

“We have been facing many challenges and the biggest mistake that society can make is ignoring education. It’s a costly mistake. Being educated will change a lot of things in the country. It will develop all sectors, economically, politically, socially and environmentally,” said Ms. Salado Hussein Ahmed, a master’s degree recipient in International Law and Human Rights.

“For peace to thrive, we must put significant effort into education and research. The peace we seek is not merely the absence of conflict, but positive peace that is built on justice and freedom. We encourage both the education institutions and universities to continue researching and addressing the issues that impact our nation,” said Minister Abdulkadir.

### Day of Education

This year, like in 2024, the UPEACE graduation ceremony took place on the International Day of Education. In 2018, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 24 January as International Day of Education, in celebration of the role of education for peace and development.

“This year’s theme is Artificial Intelligence and Education: Preserving Human Agency in a World of Automation, and this is clearly an issue that resonates deeply with our global society these days,” said Mr. Conway.

“On this World Education Day, we are reminded that education is a fundamental human right that every individual around

The graduating students now add to a growing list of over 400 alumni of the university, positively contributing to global peace, stability and prosperity.



the world should have access to. This is why we urge everyone to contribute to the advancement of education, particularly for the youth, so that they can actively participate in the peace, development, and unity of our country,” said Prime Minister Barre.

### UPEACE and Somalia

The University for Peace, headquartered in Costa Rica, initiated its Somalia programme in 2018.

“UPEACE will provide the technical expertise and research support necessary to ensure that Somalia’s contribution to the UN Security Council leaves an enduring legacy. We hope that Somalia’s leadership will inspire future generations and secure its place as a returning member of the UNSC in the years to come,” said Francisco Rojas Aravena, Rector of the University for Peace, during his keynote speech.

Among the graduates from the UPEACE Mogadishu campus is Somalia’s president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. In 2022, he was conferred the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). His dissertation was titled “Examining the Challenges of Clan Politics in State-building: A Case Study of Somalia.”

“Higher education is much needed in Somalia, and this is going to contribute a lot to Somalia’s stability and reconstruction of the country,” said Abdulkadir Dahir Moalim, who graduated with a PhD focused on peace, governance and development.

The UPEACE Somalia programme aims to promote stability in the country following years of conflict. The graduating students now add to a growing list of over 400 alumni of the university, positively contributing to global peace, stability and prosperity.







## UNMAS BOOSTS SOMALIA'S ANTI-IED EFFORTS WITH NEW EQUIPMENT

**Mogadishu** – Somalia's path to self-reliance in national security received a major boost in late February with the handover of assorted, life-saving equipment to counter the persistent threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

"Given the nature of the IED threat here in Somalia, it's essential that we sustain the capabilities of the national security forces and particularly so, now that we're thinking about the eventual and gradual withdrawal of the AU (African Union) forces," the Director of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), Ilene Cohn, said during the event.

The handover ceremony took place in Mogadishu. Representing the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was its State Minister of Defence, Omar Ali Abdi, along with the Deputy Chief of Defence Forces, General Madey Nurey, and other senior officers from the Somali National Army.

"We need more training and equipment because we are engaged in a bitter war with our enemy who uses mines on the roads as a weapon of choice. The mines slow us down, and if we can overcome them, we'll be able to liberate more areas," Minister Abdi said in his remarks to the gathering, referring to the Al-Shabaab terrorist group.

Along with the Chief of UNMAS's programme in Somalia, Fran O'Grady, Minister Abdi signed for the handed-over material, which included vehicles, training-of-trainers' (ToT) kits, route search (RS) gear, medical hardware, and explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) equipment.

In addition to the equipment, the ceremony also marked the completion of training of 51 of the SNA's EOD and RS teams.

From the United Nations' side, in addition to Ms. Cohn who is normally based at UN Headquarters in New York, was the UN Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representative for Somalia, Raisedon Zenenga.

"The UN is creating real tangible capacity on the ground for the Somali security forces in EOD, IED clearance and this is what we're here for – to build capacity that will last long after UNMAS, UNTMIS (UN Transitional Assistance Mission) and UNSOS (UN Support Office for Somalia) have left," Mr. Zenenga said in his remarks to the gathering.

### Long-running support

Across Somalia, IEDs continue to pose a significant threat to peace and security, with 597 devices resulting in more than 1,400 casualties last year. In tackling this





threat, the SNA's UNMAS-trained EOD teams have made tremendous progress, with a 70 per cent success rate in locating and clearing IEDs.

In addition to supporting explosive threat capacity development of Somali security forces through training, equipping and providing advisory support, UNMAS provides policy and technical advice to the FGS and the country's Federal Member States on explosive hazard threat reduction, weapons and ammunition, and obligations under the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.

From 2021 to date, UNMAS has trained and equipped 51 of the SNA's EOD teams and trained trainers through ToT courses to ensure sustainability of capacity development efforts. UNMAS has also trained the Somali Police Force – through funding from the Government of Japan – resulting in a total of 21 trained and equipped EOD teams among the police force.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr. O'Grady reiterated the UN anti-mine service's commitment to ensuring the SNA is fully capacitated to manage IED threats and contribute to Somalia's long-term security and stability.

"Our work is far from over. There is a lot more work to do not only in training teams but also in all the other aspects that require to be in place for a sustainable EOD capacity, a Somali-led capacity to tackle these threats as they go forward," he said.



## UN IN SOMALIA SENDS ITS BEST WISHES FOR RAMADAN

At the start of the Holy Month of Ramadan in late February, the United Nations in Somalia extended its best wishes to all Somalis.

"Ramadan is a time for reflection, compassion, solidarity and helping those in need. On behalf of the United Nations family in Somalia, I wish everyone a tranquil and restful Ramadan, surrounded by family and friends – Ramadan Kareem, Ramadan

Wanaagsan!" said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

In a statement, the United Nations in Somalia said it remained committed to supporting the Somali people and government in their pursuit of a peaceful and prosperous nation.



## LEYLA ABDI MOHAMED

### FOLLOWING HER JOURNALISM AMBITIONS

#### AND ADVOCATING FOR SOMALI WOMEN IN THE MEDIA



**Mogadishu** – Leyla Abdi Mohamed wanted to become a journalist from an early age – her motivations stemmed from her firsthand experiences of Somalia's civil war.

"I witnessed firsthand how the civil war and conflicts in my country resulted in numerous tragedies that needed to be documented – essentially, living in a war-torn city motivated me to pursue journalism," she says.

Today, with 13 years of experience in Somalia's dynamic media sector, the 30-year-old Ms. Mohamed has exceeded her childhood aspirations and has become the editor-in-chief of one of the Horn of Africa's leading radio stations, as well as a well-regarded activist speaking up for women's representation, inclusion and rights in her field.

"Although I started my career at a young age, I have never regretted my decision for a second. I saw journalism as the only way to build a career that would transform my life, and it certainly has," says Ms. Mohamed, who is also known as 'Leyla Ugbaad.'

#### Student

Ms. Mohamed was born in Mogadishu in 1994. She attended the Al-Farhan Primary and Secondary School in Mogadishu from 2001 to 2010, and went on to pursue a bachelor's degree in public administration

at the University of Somalia in 2013, graduating in 2016.

"I regularly took an active role in school competitions, including the early morning assemblies where literature and other activities were performed. I was particularly involved in reading poems and reports, which became a platform where I felt my dream of becoming a journalist could come to life. My Somali reading skills were considered to be exceptional, and my classmates often encouraged me to keep pursuing my dreams," she says.

"I didn't start my university education with a degree related to journalism. At the time, there was only one university in Mogadishu that offered a journalism programme, and when I discovered that the courses were taught in Arabic – I wasn't proficient in Arabic at the time – it wasn't possible for me to enroll. Still, I wanted to work in the media so I pursued my education

in a different area, but at the same time looked to gain practical experience in media houses instead," she says.

This academic direction soon changed. After she completed her undergraduate degree, Ms. Mohamed was awarded a full scholarship for an online Master of Arts degree in Journalism Innovation and Leadership at the University of Central Lancashire. She began in January 2023 and graduated in July last year.

"This was a lifetime opportunity for me. I received a scholarship for what my heart desired from one of the best universities in the United Kingdom," Ms. Mohamed says.

"I wanted to go beyond the limits of an undergraduate education," she adds.

"I received a scholarship for what my heart desired from one of the best universities in the United Kingdom"





“When a scholarship presented itself, I seized the chance as I was driven by my passion for journalism and the belief that it would develop my career and enhance my ability to excel in my field.”

Alongside that academic achievement, Ms. Mohamed also graduated in 2024 with a master’s degree in diplomacy and international relations from Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

The radio is the sole media providing specific and daily humanitarian information to Somalis

“My graduate studies can also help pave the way for a brighter future in academia as I hope to one day be able to teach at universities in both Somalia and abroad,” she says.

#### Journalist

Ms. Mohamed began paid work in journalism in 2012 at the age of 18, while undertaking her undergraduate studies. She worked at Radio Kulmiye, a Mogadishu-based broadcaster, as a reporter until 2013. She then joined the now-closed, UN-backed Radio Bar Kulan, where she worked as a reporter and producer until 2015.

That same year, she moved to a leading Somali news outlet, Goobjoog, where she worked until 2016.

“Before I started working at my first radio

station, I sat with my mother and told her that I wanted to be a journalist. Initially, she refused, arguing that I was too young, only 16. I convinced her that I could be earning a monthly salary and supporting the family within a couple of years,” Ms. Mohamed says.

“But the driving force behind my decision wasn’t the salary I mentioned – rather, it’s my deep passion for the media,” she adds. “My mother’s concern wasn’t about my age, it was about the dangers faced by journalists in Somalia, as many had been killed simply for doing their job.”

According to the independent organization the Committee to Protect Journalists, Somalia is one of the most dangerous places to work as a journalist. Since 1992, 79 journalists have been killed in Somalia.

#### Editor

The support of her family also helped with her next career move: a shift to Nairobi and take up a position as a producer with a prominent media outlet, Radio Ergo.

Run by an international non-government

organization (NGO), International Media Support, and currently financially supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the radio produces and broadcasts humanitarian news and information across Somalia and the Somali-speaking region.

Its programming covers health, education, displacement, agriculture and livestock, gender, employment, environment, culture, governance, among other topics. According to its website, Radio Ergo “aims to provide local audiences with the critical information they require to make better informed choices on the important issues affecting their lives and livelihoods.”

By 2018, after just four years, Ms. Mohamed was promoted to the position of the radio station’s editor-in-chief – at a time when very few Somali women reached the upper echelons of leading news media outlets – and managed a team of 40 journalists in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia.

“The radio is the sole media providing specific and daily humanitarian information to Somalis,” she says.

“I oversee the radio’s programming covering themes including health, education, protection, agriculture and livestock, gender, youth and employment, environmental protection, culture and governance. And we collaborate with NGOs, UN agencies and other partners on the development of effective programming content.”

#### Advocate

Alongside her work, Ms. Mohamed also raised her voice outside of newsrooms in an attempt to change Somalia’s male-dominated media landscape.







“When I began my career in the media, I found myself without a role model to inspire me. I wanted a mentor or hero in the field who could guide me and show me what was possible. Someone whose stories I could listen to, and I craved a deeper connection and a sense of direction in my career,” she says.

“When I looked around to see women journalists who could set an example for me, I could not find any role model because they were all in lower-level positions, with no management responsibilities, assigned to presenting news and reporting soft stories,” she adds.

It’s a testament to Ms. Mohamed’s drive and tenacity to have reached the heights she has, and it sets a wonderful example

The situation for women is slowly improving. According to the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESoj), of the 1,100 media workers currently employed across Somalia, around 400 are women.

According to the Iftin Foundation, a local NGO dedicated to educational research and development, the number of journalism and media studies graduates across Somalia in 2022 was 92, of which 39 – or 42 per cent – were women.

As with her vocation, Ms. Mohamed started early with her advocacy. In 2014, with a small number of female colleagues, she set up an NGO with this in mind: Somali Women in Media (SOMWIM).

“My goal is to promote gender equality and support women journalists in leadership roles. I wanted to inspire solidarity among female journalists,” she says.

SOMWIM works to enhance the visibility of women in Somali media and promote their leadership in the field, and focuses on building the capacity of female journalists.

Since its inception, sometimes in partnership with other local media associations, SOMWIM has provided training for hundreds of Somali journalists.

“I emphasize ethical journalism and education. Journalistic best practices are based on values and facts, not on the wishes of the journalists, and that’s what I try to instill in them,” Ms. Mohamed says.

“I am determined to continue supporting female journalists with the help of anyone who is willing to assist me. I feel proud to say that I am not the same person I was 13 years ago when I first entered the media and did not understand the challenges that lie ahead,” she continues. “But today, I firmly believe that my efforts, along with other women’s working in the media, will greatly benefit Somalia, particularly in fostering peace and progress.”

#### UN support

The United Nations advocates for the significant role that the press, journalism, access and dissemination of information play in ensuring a sustainable future.

According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), media freedom and access to information feed into the wider development objective of empowering people, and empowerment is a multi-dimensional social and political process that helps people gain control over their own lives. UNESCO goes on to state that this can only be achieved through access to accurate, fair and unbiased information, representing a plurality of opinions, and the means to actively communicate vertically and horizontally, thereby participating in the active life of the community.

In Somalia, the United Nations supports media development through its work with various associations around the country, including SOMWIM, with which it has supported various trainings over recent years.

“The media have an important role to play in Somali society as the country rebuilds, and they are potentially powerful channels of information in a society. The messages they transmit can change or reinforce social mores and behaviours, and mobilize citizens to take progressive actions,” says Ari Gaitanis, the Chief of the Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Group (SCPAG) at the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS).

“And just like in other countries, journalism in Somalia is a dynamic sector and it can also be tough industry for Somali women to break into. It’s not uncommon for those seeking to enter it to have to overcome intense social pressure to become reporters, sometimes even studying in secret or working anonymously,” he adds. “It’s a testament to Ms. Mohamed’s drive and tenacity to have reached the heights she has, and it sets a wonderful example – both through her reporting and her advocacy work – for other Somali women who may be considering entering this important field of work.”



# AADAN YUSUF JAMA

## FROM HUNGER AND ABUSE IN LIBYA TO SMALL BUSINESS OWNER IN HARGEISA

**Hargeisa** – It is a sweltering day in Hargeisa's bustling Waheen Market and Aadan Yusuf Jama stands by his mobile business – a wheelbarrow loaded with clothes and shoes for sale.

A big smile on his face, the 24-year-old ignores the scorching heat and calls on passers-by to buy his goods at the largest market in Somaliland.

"I do not have much money yet, as my business is still new," he says, "but I am incredibly happy. There is no place like home, no matter where you go in the world. It is like the saying, 'Haybad waxaad ku leedahay dhulkaaga hooyo.'" [transl.: You can have dignity only in your homeland].

The smile on Mr. Jama's does not solely stem from the prospect of new sales – rather, it also derives from the recent experiences that led to him to this new stage of his life.

Just a year and half ago, he was enduring various setbacks and misfortunes across North Africa as he tried to reach Europe in the hope of finding work to support his family.

### Early challenges

Mr. Jama was born in 2001 in Ali Aadan, a rural area in the Sabowanaag district, about

30 kilometres southeast of Hargeisa in Somaliland. The youngest of 11 siblings – four sisters and six brothers – he was raised in a household of modest means, which meant he could not pursue formal education and received only basic Quranic teaching.

He spent his early years in the countryside before his family moved to Hargeisa when he was nine, in the hope of escaping the hardships of a rural life marked by frequent droughts and a lack of livelihood options.

Eventually, Mr. Jama's father opened a small restaurant which became the family's main source of income.

But when Mr. Jama was 14, his father passed away. Orphaned and expected to contribute to the family's finances, he aspired to become an entrepreneur.

He started by looking for menial jobs at the Waheen Market, and eventually found a job at a tailoring shop.

After a while, using his new tailoring skills, he opened a small business making and selling women's clothes. But, lacking funds, Mr. Jama had a hard time making the venture viable.

"It is difficult to start a business in Somaliland without financial backing or access to loans. Financial institutions

here lend money only to those who are already financially stable. Poor people have no access to such loans," he says. "As the Somali proverb goes, 'Soomaalidu ninkii wax haysta ayay wax ugu daraan.'" [transl.: Somalis give financial support only to the well-off]

Frustrated with his unprofitable clothing business, Mr. Jama became an apprentice in garages owned by relatives and acquaintances. He acquired enough skills to make a living out of his new employment as a mechanic and driver.





“I had no money when I migrated and left nothing for my wife and daughter.”

“I saved a good amount of money and considered investing it in a business, but then I got married, and all the money was spent quickly,” he says, smiling. “I was able to support my wife and child and lived a relatively decent life. But it did not allow me to save for future progress.”

### Perilous journey

One day in 2022, a phone call from a friend who was abroad changed his life.

The friend, who had worked with him as a mechanic, sent news and photos from his successful migration to Europe. Curious, Mr. Jama inquired about following his friend’s example and got connected with a man who promised to help.

“He [the man] immediately called me via WhatsApp. He said he would take me to Libya and that I would not need to pay until I reached there,” he recalls.

Thinking back to that phone call, Mr. Jama has regrets.

“It was the worst phone call of my life, leading me to endure hell on earth for a year and a half, and ruining the assets my parents had built over decades,” he says. “To be honest, I can’t blame poverty alone – my ambitious plans also contributed.”



Starting a difficult 16-day journey a month after that fateful call, Mr. Jama travelled from Ethiopia through the Nubian Desert in northeastern Sudan to Libya.

He endured extreme conditions with inadequate food and water, and faced constant danger from speeding vehicles sharing the road with the pick-up truck he was transported in.

### Libyan wait

Along with other Somalis in his transport, the then-21-year-old Mr. Jama eventually reached Libya.

But his arrival did not mean an end to his hardship.

“I hate to remember what I went through. It was unimaginably grueling. I wanted to change my life, but life changed me negatively,” he says.

Over the subsequent 16 months he spent in Libya he endured hunger, torture, beatings, psychological abuse, imprisonment and the constant threat of death, with the latter including almost drowning in the Mediterranean and being shot by unknown gunmen.

Initially, he was placed in a hidden staging camp run by migration brokers known as “magafe,” for whom beating the irregular immigrants was a regular pastime.

With his daily diet limited to a measly serving of bread and water, Mr. Jama suffered from malnutrition and became so weak that he could hardly move.

It was then that he was presented with the price tag for his journey – \$15,000 – an amount that Mr. Jama did not possess.

“I had no money when I migrated and left nothing for my wife and daughter. I thought the trip would take only a month. That was poor judgement on my part,” he says.

“To make matters worse, they would call my mother almost daily,” he says. “They let her hear my cries during beatings and threatened her, saying they would take my life and throw my body to animals if she failed to send \$15,000 urgently. And they meant it. I know many inmates who died after their families failed to send the money.”

His family ended up selling all of its possessions, including farming plots and livestock, to gather the money required by the brokers. Overall, they spent more than \$19,000 in his attempt to reach Europe – on top of the \$15,000 fee, there was an







additional \$4,000 required for other costs incurred during his time in North Africa.

While in Libya, Mr. Jama made three attempts to reach Italy.

“Anyone who migrates faces problems, but it seemed that I faced more than others. I went on a boat three times, and each time it sank near Libyan waters. Some of us were rescued and returned to Libya, while others drowned. I escaped from illegal migration camps in Tripoli twice but was apprehended both times and returned to the same camp once and, the second time, to a police station,” he says.

“I even narrowly escaped being shot by a gunman. I learned that the migration brokers and the police were collaborators,” he adds.

### UN support

While in the police station, he requested that the police to contact United Nations agencies to support his voluntary return to Hargeisa.

“I had given up on life, but then I was visited in prison by officers from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and diplomats from the Embassy of Somalia in Tripoli. I was overjoyed and requested voluntary repatriation. They sent me back home, and I was reunited with my wife and daughter,” he says.

Along with another 89 young migrants, Mr. Jama benefited from the European Union and IOM’s Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration.

Launched in December 2016 with funding from the European Union’s Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration

is a comprehensive programme to save lives, protect and assist migrants along key migration routes in Africa.

The programme enables migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin to do so in a safe and dignified way, in full respect of international human rights standards and. In Somaliland, it is carried out in collaboration with local displacement authorities and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Over the last two decades, irregular migration has become a common phenomenon in Somaliland, where more than 70 per cent of the population is under the age of 35. Exceptionally high unemployment rates – up to 70 per cent of urban population – drive many youths to risk their lives for a new, more auspicious beginning through ‘tahriib,’ as the perilous journey that young Somalis undertake is commonly known.

On their journeys, many of them are unable or unwilling to remain in host or transit countries and wish to return voluntarily to their places of origin. In Somaliland, since 2018, IOM in collaboration with others, has provided administrative, logistical and financial support to 5,056 people for their safe and dignified return and reintegration.

### New dreams

Mr. Jama finally returned to Hargeisa in January 2024 to his family’s welcome embrace. But the challenge of providing for his family remained.

That also changed thanks to IOM, with the UN’s migration agency providing a business grant of \$1,280 which led to Mr. Jama starting his current business venture last year.





"Although the grant was for \$1,280, to me it is worth tens of thousands of dollars because it revived my dream of becoming an entrepreneur. For the first time in ages, I feel hopeful about building a successful business," he says. "IOM helped me restart my life and rekindle my ambition to become an entrepreneur. I don't know how to thank them."

Mr. Jama's Case Manager at IOM, Faiza Barre Ahmed, has high hopes for the budding entrepreneur.

"In my brief interaction with Aadan, I found him to be resilient, open-minded and optimistic. Whenever you see him, he's energetic, busy and smiling," she says. "He has positive entrepreneurship characteristics and I'm confident that he will be able to grow his business and make his dreams come true."

Mr. Jama's new business brings in about \$10 a day. It is a starting point he is grateful for and plans to build on for his future – a

future which he sees centred in his home turf and not abroad.

"Never again - even if I received an official invitation from European governments. My message to the youth in Somaliland is that they should never consider migrating,"

he says. "There is no better life than the one you have in your own homeland. It is better to face hardship where you are than to risk your life at sea. There is no good reason to risk your life in dangerous migration attempts."



## FEATURED PHOTO

The UN is committed to strengthening water access, investing in sustainable solutions, and improving resilience against climate shocks. Shown here, a mother and her daughter fetch water from a well supported by UNICEF in Puntland.



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