

Somalia

Response to Information Request Number:	SOM99001.ZLA
Date:	25 August 1999
Subject:	Somalia: Somali National Movement from its inception through the present.
From:	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, D.C.
Keywords:	Somalia/Somaliland/Somali National Movement/Isaaq Clan/President Mohamed Ibrahim Egal

Query:

What is the history of the Somali National Movement?

Response:

One of the first and most important organized guerilla groups opposed to the Siad Barre regime, the Somali National Movement was created in 1981 in the United Kingdom by Isaaq Clan exiles from the northwestern part of Somalia. In 1988, fearing a decisive assault by Barre forces, the SNM launched its own all-or-nothing attack. Though not a military success, the SNM strike catalyzed a vicious cycle of clan warfare throughout Somalia that over the next several years eviscerated Barre's power. In January 1991 Barre was forced to flee. By then the SNM had acquired control over the whole of the former British Somaliland (the former provinces of Northwest, Togdher, Sanag, and part of Nugal). In May 1991 the SNM declared its secession from Somalia and the establishment of the independent state of Somaliland (Prunier 1995). Subsequently the international community has refused recognition, despite Somaliland's being the only part of what was known as the country of Somalia that has maintained a functioning government (AP 7 April 1996; Flint 1993).

The SNM includes non-Isaaq members but its core leadership operates along Isaaq Clan lines (Press 1 March 1993). Mohamed Ibrahim Egal has been President of Somaliland since May 1993, winning elections among clan elders in 1993, 1995, and 1997 (AFP 20 Apr. 1995; AP 24 Feb. 1997). According to the Somalia Desk Officer at the Department of State, the SNM views Egal as its legitimate leader (DOS 25 Aug. 1999).

Egal, a former Somali Prime Minister ousted and imprisoned by Siad Barre, presides over a Pennsylvania-size patch of scrub with approximately 1.2 million people (AP 7 April 1996). His ascension to office resulted from a clan elders' compromise to defuse internal clan disputes over the port of Berbera, which almost degenerated into a Somaliland civil war in 1992 (Flint 1993). SNM factions opposed to Egal, however, continued to resist his authority and have undertaken sporadic but occasionally significant armed attacks against his government. In 1994 rebels threatened control of Somaliland's capital, Hargeysa. By various estimates the fighting displaced tens to hundreds of thousands of people (Somali News Update 1, 14 December 1994). In 1995 rebels again pressed Hargeysa, particularly around the airport (BBC 21 Aug. 1995). The most prominent rebel leader, Abdurahman Ali Tour (Tur), the first president of Somaliland whom Egal succeeded, was put on trial for treason in October 1995, for "leading a guerilla movement against the present government" and for "opposing Somaliland's self-declared independence (Radio Hargeisa 6 June 1995)." The issue of Somaliland's relations with the remainder of Somalia and whether there should be any attempt at reunification is particularly sensitive. Tour and his

associates, by having allied themselves with General Mohamed Farah Aideed's unrecognized government in Mogadishu (Aideed is now deceased), compounded the allegations of treason. More recently, in August 1999 members of an SNM executive committee strongly criticized the Egal government for its proposed changes to the Somaliland constitution (*Jamhuuriya* 15 Aug. 1999).

A search of Lexis back through 1981 and the entire FBIS database failed to turn up articles directly associating the SNM or Somaliland government with persecutions, a lack of evidence in marked contrast to many articles on abuses by clans in other parts of the former Somalia. Apart from the 1995 treason trials, which appear to have been properly conducted and legally justified, two indirect mentions of abuses appear in the record. The BBC and other sources reported clashes between Somaliland armed forces and the Issa clan (a sub-clan of the Dir) in a small area bordering Djibouti in August 1995 (Radio France International 10 Aug. 1995). The Issa, according to Radio France, suspect the Isaaq of attempting to suppress their political rights. And in a 1996 report to the Canadian Documentation, Information and Research Branch an expert on Somalia stated that the Midgan clan was no longer being targeted for earlier actions against the SNM and "are now living peacefully and intermingled in [the] North Somali community (IRB 8 Oct. 1996)." All of which is not to say the SNM or Somaliland government are boy scouts but, as the Somalia Desk Officer put it, "We have no knowledge of repression."

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the RIC within time constraints. This response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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