

# Somalia

<b>Response to Information Request Number:</b>	SOM01002.ZAR
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<b>Subject:</b>	Somalia: Information on repatriation of Somali refugees
<b>From:</b>	INS Resource Information Center, Washington, DC
<b>Keywords:</b>	Somalia / Basic needs / Country of origin / Displaced persons / Host country / Non-refoulement/ Refugee camps / Refugee-assisting organizations / Repatriation / Right to protection / Right to security of the person

## Query:

According to reliable sources (UK Home Office, UNHCR, UN IRIN) over 100,000 Somalis have been repatriated from Ethiopia and Kenya.

- What clans have been repatriated?
- Are repatriations forced or voluntary?
- Is it safe to repatriate to southern Somalia?
- Would certain clans be able to safely relocate within Somalia?
- Are there clans who could not safely relocate within Somalia?

## Response:

### **Background on Somali refugees and asylum seekers**

About 425, 000 Somali refugees and asylum seekers lived in about two-dozen countries at the end of 1999. An estimated 170,000 were refugees in Ethiopia, some 160,000 in Kenya, about 50,000 in Yemen, more than 20,000 in Djibouti, 3,000 in Tanzania, nearly 3,000 in Egypt, nearly 3,000 in Libya, about 2,000 in Eritrea, 1,000 in Uganda, and some 14,000 new asylum seekers in various European countries. An estimated 350,000 Somalis were internally displaced. Tens of thousands of Somalis also fled their homes in the southern part of the country in 1999 (USCR 2000, p 115).

### **Repatriation of Somali refugees**

UNHCR began voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees in February 1997. UNHCR assisted a total of 45,000 Somalis with repatriation during 2000. This brought the total number of Somali repatriates from northwest Somalia to 115,000. The 130,000 Somali refugees in eight camps in eastern Ethiopia are mostly from north and northwestern areas of Somalia, although some southern Somalis are found in Ethiopia's Jijiga camp. UNHCR stated in September 2000, that "We are waiting for conditions to improve in southern Somalia before facilitating the return of another 140,000 Somalis still in Kenyan camps" (UNHCR 3 Nov. 2000; UN OCHA 8 Sept. 2000).

In 1999 approximately 25,000 Somali refugees repatriated, mostly from Ethiopia and Yemen to Somaliland (USCR 2000, p 115-116).

At the beginning of 2000, UNCHR repatriated 1,000 Somali refugees living in the Kakuma and Dadaab camps in Kenya to Bosasso in Puntland and to Berbera in Somaliland. Nearly

140,000 Somali refugees, mainly from southern Somalia, remain in camps in Kenya (AFP 16 Feb. 2000).

Repatriations of Somali refugees under UNHCR's auspices have been voluntary. In a recent report on minority groups in Somalia a distinction is made by UNHCR's Head of Somali Operations between "promoted returns" and "facilitated returns." UNHCR's current policy on repatriation of Somali refugees is that repatriation can be promoted for those from the north (the self-declared states of "Somaliland" and "Puntland") because UNHCR is convinced that the areas of origin are relatively peaceful and stable. Returnees to northern Somalia received food packages or financial subsidies to last several months, household items such as blankets and water containers, and travel allowances to reach their homes from transit centers in northern Somalia (DIS, UK Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p 18; UN Resident Coordinator, 13 Nov. 2000; USCR 2000, p 116).

"Facilitated returns" occur on an individual basis. For these returns UNHCR provides basic assistance and fully informs those who express the wish to return of the risks inherent in return. Facilitation usually involves transportation arranged by UNHCR, but without the material assistance given when UNHCR assumes full responsibility for organized repatriation to the northern regions of Somalia. UNHCR repatriation to southern Somalia is only "facilitated" by UNCHR for those who insist on returning to the southern regions of Somalia (DIS, US Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p.18; UN Resident Coordinator, 13 Nov. 2000).

In mid-December 2000, repatriation of southern Somali refugees from the Obock refugee camp in Djibouti resumed. As many as 624 Somali refugees were repatriated to Mogadishu. The operation was interrupted due to lack of funding and is scheduled to be completed in January 2001. No further information on these repatriations having been completed was located among the sources consulted by the RIC. The repatriations to Mogadishu were facilitated and not promoted by the UNCHR. At the end of September 2000, UNHCR facilitated the repatriation of 44 returnees from Yemen to Mogadishu (UN Coordination Unit 30 Sept. 2000; UNHCR 15 Dec. 2000).

The UNHCR Head of Somali Operation states that to UNHCR's knowledge no Somali who is recognized as a refugee in Kenya has been deported to Somalia. However, he was unable to completely rule out the possibility of this having happened in the past (DIS, US Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p. 27).

### **The situation faced by returnees/repatriates**

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the south were generally worse off than town residents in the north, however, the returnees faced severe problems as well. Both IDPs and returnees face problems in terms of integration within the depressed local economy. The current Saudi ban on the sale of livestock, has furthered the decline of the local economy, especially in the north. IDPs around Bosasso face risks in terms of sanitation and health. The shelter available is meager and vulnerable to fires. Insecurity of land tenure and ownership is of primary concern (DIS, US Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p.18; UN Resident Coordinator 13 Nov. 2000).

Detailed information on the specific clan membership of repatriates could not be found among the sources consulted by the RIC. Individual will be most secure in an area in which their clan is dominant and able to provide them protection (UK Home Office Oct.2000, Section 5.11), however, the information below does provide some idea of the situation of some clans which have either repatriated or relocated to the northern areas of Somalia.

### **Situation of various clans in Somaliland**

In Isaaq-dominated Somaliland, authorities have been tolerant of non-Isaaq clan members living in their territory. The SNM administration in Somaliland has allowed Somalis who originate from the north-west and minorities such as the Bantu to settle in its territory (UK Home Office Oct. 2000, Sections 5.11, 5.19, 5.36).

"Occupational castes" such as the Midgan, Tumal, and Yibir, who are referred to collectively as *sab*, traditionally lived in areas of the four main nomadic clan families of Darod, Isaaq, Dir and Hawiye in northern and central Somalia. In the last few decades many members of these groups migrated to the cities. In 1998, some 2,000 Midgan, Tumal, Yibir returned from Ethiopia to Hargeisa in Somaliland. Once there, they found recovery from the civil war especially difficult. Economically they fill mostly menial jobs, and feel insecure to conduct business, fearing other clans could confiscate their possessions (DIS, US Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p. 61-62).

The Digil and Mirifle (Rahanweyn), who have fled their homes since 1995 when Aideed's forces captured Baidoa, are a visible minority in Somaliland. Although initially they were well-received, they are no longer welcome as they are seen by the Somaliland population as aggressive beggars. They live in very poor slum-like conditions and there is no place for them in society. They form the lowest socio-economic layer, although they are not systematically threatened (DIS, US Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p. 68-69).

### **Situation of various clans in Puntland**

The authorities of Majerteen-dominated Puntland have been willing to allow thousands of people from other clans and minorities to live in territory they administer. Members of the Midgan (or Gaboye) minority have been able to settle in Puntland (UK Home Office Oct. 2000, Sections 5.11, 5.19, 5.36).

The Ashraf (or Asharaf) are a minority religious clan, but they do not support armed Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Al-Ittihad. Because they fear Al-Ittihad, the Ashraf prefer not to relocate within Puntland, where Al-Ittihad has had influence in recent years (DIS, UK Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p. 52, 62, & 69).

A Dutch mission to Somaliland and Puntland in November 1999 found that Reer Hamar and Reer Brava minorities have resettled in Puntland, but in small numbers. They live in IDP camps. Although they are not unsafe or persecuted, they face discrimination and their socio-economic position is tenuous. Rahanweyn (Digil and Mirifle) are present in Puntland, however they are very poor and often live from begging (DIS, UK Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p. 52, 62, & 69).

Two international aid groups suspended their operations in Puntland in May and June 2000 in response to death threats and an attempted grenade attack against one of the agencies (USCR 28 Aug. 2000).

### **Freedom of travel/ability to relocate**

There is relatively free movement between Puntland and Somaliland. Freedom of movement also exists between Puntland and the neighboring USC/SNA controlled areas to the south, and in the Hiran and Galgadud regions. Air services are reliably operating to Puntland and Somaliland from Djibouti. The ability to travel in central and southern Somalia, however, is generally restricted (UK Home Office Oct. 2000, Section 5.34).

As the security improves, refugees and IDPs will continue to return to their homes, however, their properties, which were forcibly occupied during the early 1990's, remain in the hands of those other than the pre-war owners (UK Home Office Oct. 2000, Sections 5.37).

## **Possibilities for the future**

Political developments in Somalia have sparked hope among Somali refugees that they may be able to return home in the near future. The election of a Transitional National Assembly (TNA) and Abdiqassim Salad Hassan as president was widely celebrated by refugees. In an effort to judge refugee interest in returning to Somalia a survey was conducted in all three Dadaab camps in Kenya. The survey results indicated that 71% of the Somali refugees surveyed were willing to repatriate voluntarily. This is the first time that there has been such an expression of willingness to return to Somalia on the part of refugees. UNHCR has observed some refugee families sending one or two family/clan members to home areas in Somalia on fact finding missions. Although an optimistic attitude seems to now exist among Somali refugees who have lived outside their country for nearly a decade, the new TNA faces numerous and serious obstacles to the establishing a real sense of state order (DIS, UK Home Office, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Dec. 2000, p. 15; UN Resident Coordinator, 13 Nov. 2000).

Given the numerous dimensions of any individual asylum applicant's personal circumstances, the RIC is unable to categorically conclude which clans could or could not return to or relocate within Somalia. 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 or asylum status.

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