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4 May 2007

SOM102473.E

Somalia: Documentation and other means of identification of Somalis in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps in Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

This Response covers some general information on the registration, documentation and identification of refugees in Africa as well as information specific to Somali refugees in Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya and Yemen.

In a 13 April 2007 telephone interview, a senior external relations officer at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Canada stated that there are different types of registration for refugees (13 Apr. 2007). In an emergency situation, a very quick process is undertaken in order to determine the basic demographics of a refugee population (UN 13 Apr. 2007). Once the emergency situation stabilizes, a more in-depth and thorough registration process occurs (ibid.). Registration includes recording the basic biographical details and family composition of an individual (ibid.).

In a media article, a UNHCR senior regional global registration officer for Southern Africa, responsible for the registration and documentation of refugees and persons seeking asylum, outlines the information that is collected during the registration process:

UNHCR stipulates a number of standards we have to meet in registering refugees: they include - on an individual basis - name, date of birth, country of origin, country of asylum, date of arrival, sex, religion, ethnicity, education level, occupational skills and many more. A photograph is very important for attaching an identity and verifying the record. You need addresses, both in the country of origin and country of asylum (UN 30 Mar. 2007)

The UNHCR Senior External Relations Officer stated that a fingerprint biometric "add-in" to UNHCR's registration process is operating as a pilot project in Djibouti, Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania (13 Apr. 2007).

A study on Somali refugees by the Swiss Forum for Migration and Population Studies (SFM) states that "a deterioration has been observed in registration and access to recognised documentation" and that the registration and ration card process is complicated and very difficult to understand (18 May 2006, 59).

According to the Executive Director of the Somali Centre for Family Services in Ottawa, the language and tribe of an individual is virtually the only way to identify Somalis (12 Apr. 2007). The Executive Director stated that knowing a person's geographical origin could help to identify Somalis because such information could potentially be corroborated by other refugees from the same region (Somali Centre for Family Services 12 Apr. 2007; see also UN 3 Mar. 2006). A news article states that because Somalis from Somalia and ethnic Somalis from Kenya "speak the same language, have a common culture and share the same historical background, it is a nightmare for authorities to distinguish between them" (*The Nation* 8 June 2005).

In Djibouti, UNHCR and the Djiboutian government bear joint responsibility for receiving and registering refugees (SFM 18 May 2006, 27). The SFM explains that while it is simple to gain entry to Djibouti, the processes for registration and identification are either "complicated" or "non-existent" (ibid.). According to the SFM, the office tasked with the registration and identification of refugees is not operating due to mismanagement and corruption (ibid., 27-28). The SFM also notes that since the registration of refugees has not been precisely documented since 1997, ration cards do not reflect the actual number of individuals in a family, resulting in inadequate distribution of food items (ibid., 28). No further information could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate on documentation for and the identification of Somali refugees in Djibouti.

In Egypt, procedures for refugees - except for those of Palestinians - are managed by UNHCR Cairo (ibid., 30). Registration, status determination and interviewing are among those procedures (ibid.). No further information could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate on documentation for and the identification of Somali refugees in Egypt.

According to the SFM, refugee issues in Ethiopia are primarily managed by the Agency of Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), while UNHCR, although significantly engaged financially and otherwise, has observer status (ibid., 34-35). In 1996, a review process was established to help identify, protect and assist "genuine" refugees; however, the initiative was limited to a re-registration of refugees and did not include a revalidation of the refugee population (ibid., 35). As a result, ration cards were not updated to reflect refugees' actual family sizes (ibid.). Various media articles ranging from December 2006 to February 2007 report the arrival of Somali refugees in Ethiopia but note that formal registration had not taken place (AFP 21 Dec. 2006; Reuters 7 Feb. 2007; UN 8 Feb. 2007). No further information could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate on documentation for and the identification of Somali refugees in Ethiopia.

According to the SFM, refugee documents in Kenya have included or include the following:

... alien identity cards for government-registered Convention refugees, Refugee Certificates for mandate refugees living outside camps, movement passes for refugees in need of transit between camps or city, and ration cards for camp-based refugees ... (18 May 2006, 39)

The SFM study notes that not all refugees possess documentation and that UNHCR estimates suggests that only 20 percent do (18 May 2006, 38-39). *The Standard* corroborates this information stating that due to poorly defined

registration procedures, many refugees do not have identification documents (23 June 2006; see also Xinhua News Agency 13 Apr. 2006).

A news article describing life at the Daadab Refugee Camp in Kenya explains that when Somali refugees first arrive at the Liboi border post, they are screened at the Liboi police station before their transfer to the UNHCR processing centre and then to Daadab (*Sunday Standard* 20 Jan. 2007). As part of the screening process, the fingerprints of individuals aged 15 years and older are taken and cross-checked with records in Nairobi in order to prevent Kenyan Somalis from making false refugee claims (UN 3 Nov. 2006; *ibid.* 1 Nov. 2006; *Sunday Standard* 20 Jan. 2007). Those individuals whose fingerprints are not already in the data bank will be registered and transferred to Daadab (UN 3 Nov. 2006).

In April 2007, the United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reported that the Kenyan border with Somalia was closed by the Kenyan government more than three months earlier and that no Somali refugees could gain entry into Kenya (3 Apr. 2007; see also BBC 4 Apr. 2007).

The SFM study states that in Yemen, UNHCR and Yemeni officials registered over 47,000 Somali refugees from June 2002 to May 2003 (18 May 2006, 51). However, according to the study, Somalis who arrived in Yemen after May 2003 are not registered and Somalis registered prior to June 2002 have expired refugee cards (SFM 18 May 2006, 51). The SFM states that there are approximately 77,000 undocumented Somali refugees in Yemen (*ibid.*; see also UN 10 Apr. 2007). In contrast, the UN IRIN reported in June 2006 that UNHCR registered new arrivals to Yemen at a centre in Shabwa where identity cards, food and water were distributed (14 June 2006). UNHCR reports that roughly 16,758 Somalis were registered in a mass registration exercise that occurred from December 2005 until early March 2006 (UN 3 Mar. 2006). Information collected during registration includes "date and place of birth, ethnic origin and arrival date in Yemen, as well as information on work skills and education" (*ibid.*). Refugees receive photo-identity cards that are "valid for two years [and] signed by UNHCR and the Yemeni government" (*ibid.*; see also *ibid.* 14 June 2006).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to reach a representative from the Somali Canadian Association of Etobicoke were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), Freedom House, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Keesing's Reference Systems, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Refugees International, United Kingdom (UK) Home Office, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), United States (US) Department of State.

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