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Responses to Information Requests

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Somalia: The Gabooye (Midgan) people, including the location of their traditional homeland, affiliated clans, and risks they face from other clans

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1. Overview

The Gabooye [also spelled Gaboye, Gabooyo; also known as Midgan], a minority group in Somalia, are an occupational "caste" defined by their traditional professions (*Somalia Report* 18 May 2011; MRG Oct. 2010, 12; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 15). According to a report based on a lecture given as part of a workshop on clans in Somalia organized by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD), by Dr. Joakim Gundel, a political analyst specializing in Somali studies, the occupational groups of Somalia are collectively known as the *sab*, who are "traditionally bondsmen of the pastoralist [majority] clan groups ... [and who] practice various but despised professional skills" (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 15). According to the Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum (SOMRAF), a Nairobi-based not-for-profit human rights, aid and development NGO working in Somalia and other countries (MRG Oct. 2010, ii), non-pastoralist groups are generally considered "inferior or minority groups" in Somalia (SOMRAF 2010).

In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Secretary of the Gabooye Minority Organisation for Europe and North America (Gabooye Organisation), a UK-based NGO that monitors the social, economic and political situation of the Gabooye in East Africa (11 June 2012), explained that the "clan" refers to itself as Gabooye, while other clans use the "rude" term Midgan (6 Nov. 2012). Similarly, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) indicates that, in Somaliland, Gabooye "is a preferred and non-insulting term replacing the historically pejorative associations of 'Midgan' as used by majority clans" (MRG Oct. 2010, 12, 34, note 49). MRG also states that the "commonly accepted term" in Somalia is "Madhiban" (*ibid.*, 30).

According to the ACCORD report on Joakim Gundel's lecture, minority groups in Somalia "are not counted and their languages and cultures are neither accepted nor respected" (Dec. 2009, 14). They are reported to suffer "daily violence and persecution" (*Somalia Report* 18 May 2011). Additionally, MRG writes that minorities across the country experience "denial and abuse of the whole range of basic human rights," including subjection to hate speech, limited access to justice and education, and exclusion from "significant political participation" and employment (Oct. 2010, 3, 14). Further, the ACCORD report indicates that there is no state protection for minorities in Somalia, including in Somaliland and Puntland (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 21).

2. Subgroups, Languages, and Occupations

According to the ACCORD report, the occupational groups may have "segmented lineage systems" similar to the Somali clan system (Dec. 2009, 15). Sources indicate that the Gabooye include the Tumaal [also Tumaal, Tomal] and the Yibr [also Ybre, Yibro], as well as the Madhiban and Musse Deriyo [also Muuse Dhariyo] (Gabooye Organisation 6 Nov. 2012; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 15). The ACCORD report also identifies the Howleh, Hawraar Same, and Habar Yaquup as sub-groups of the Gabooye (*ibid.*). However, MRG writes that,

according to its researchers, although some Gabooye claim that the term Gabooye represents all occupational groups in Somaliland, the Tumul and Yibro generally reject this claim (MRG Oct. 2010, 34, note 49). MRG indicates that the three main occupational groups are the Midgan/Gabooye, the Tumul, and the Yibr, and that the Midgan are subdivided into Madhiban and Musse Deriyo lineages (*ibid.*, 12, 30).

Traditional occupations associated with the Gabooye include:

- hunting (*ibid.*, 12; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 15);
- leatherworking (MRG Oct. 2010, 12) and shoemaking (Gabooye Organisation 6 Nov. 2012; UN 2 July 2010; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 15);
- poison-making (*ibid.*);
- hairdressing (*ibid.*; UN 2 July 2010; Gabooye Organisation 6 Nov. 2012);
- performing male and female circumcision (MRG Oct. 2010, 12);
- arts and crafts (*ibid.*);
- knife-making (*Somalia Report* 18 May 2011); and
- iron-smelting (UN 2 July 2010)

The traditional occupation of the Musse Deriyo is reportedly pottery-making (MRG Oct. 2010, 30). Sources indicate that the Tumul are traditionally blacksmiths (*ibid.*, 12; ACCORD Dec. 2009, 15). The Yibr are described as being "traditionally ritual specialists" (MRG Oct. 2010, 12), having "mythological functions in society," and engaging in "superstitious practice[s]" (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 16). However, the Secretary of the Gabooye Organisation indicated that the names of the various Gabooye sub-groups refer to family lineage rather than occupational differences (6 Nov. 2012).

A 2008 research paper published by the Africa Research Group of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and cited in the UK Border Agency's January 2012 country of origin information report on Somalia notes that Somalis belonging to the occupational groups "may no longer exclusively practice the occupation with which they are traditionally identified" (17 Jan. 2012, para. 19.24). MRG indicates that occupational minorities have lost their monopoly of their traditional tasks and have often been unable to find other work (Oct. 2010, 12). It adds that most members of occupational groups work in manual and service jobs such as "market-selling and trading, butcheries, domestic work, cooking and selling tea" (MRG Oct. 2010, 12).

Similarly, the Somaliland National Human Rights Commission (SNHRC) wrote in 2010 that

[m]embers of minority clans can only work in most undesirable jobs. They can only obtain jobs as street sweepers or janitors, shoe maker/shoe mender, shoe polishing, blacksmith, potter, and circumcision practitioner. These jobs are low paying jobs; with an income from these jobs they cannot afford to live a decent life. (Somaliland 1 Nov. 2010)

According to the ACCORD report, the occupational castes are traditionally forbidden from owning land and livestock and participating in local business, the market economy, or politics (Dec. 2009, 15). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to MRG, members of the occupational groups speak local dialects of the Somali language (Oct. 2010, 12). Occupational groups are also reported to speak their own languages (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 15).

3. Location of Gabooye/Madhiban in Somalia

According to the Secretary of the Gabooye Organisation, the Gabooye are primarily located in the north of Somalia [Somaliland], although some reside in Mogadishu (6 Nov. 2012). The ACCORD report indicates that the Gabooye and its sub-groups are found in the north of the country and are also "scattered in Southern Somalia" (Dec. 2009, 15). MRG states that the occupational groups are located throughout Somalia and are the principal minority in Somaliland (Oct. 2010, 12). However, it notes that due to conflict and the loss of traditional livelihoods, many occupational minorities have relocated to urban areas or camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), as well as to refugee camps in other countries (MRG Oct. 2010, 12). An article published by the UN's Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) indicates that the Daami district of Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland, is home to 8,000 Gabooye families, comprising approximately 48,000 people (UN 2 July 2010). Further or corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

4. Affiliated Clans and Risks Faced

According to the Gabooye Organisation secretary, the Gabooye are "not really allied" with any major clans in Somalia, but are reported to be on good terms with other minority groups (6 Nov. 2012). In contrast, a report by the UK Border Agency indicates that there are members of the Midgan, Tumul and Yibr groups that "have assimilated into major clan or sub-clan groups" (23 Oct. 2012, para. 3.10.6). Further or corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Various sources indicate that the minority Gabooye face "cultural stigma" (*ibid.*, para. 3.10.2) and "discrimination" (UN 2 July 2010; *Somalia Report* 18 May 2011). Further, according to *Somalia Report*, a "privately funded, non-partisan website that hires Western editors to work with ... Somali journalists inside the country" (n.d.), discrimination against minorities such as the Gabooye "has been aggravated by the breakdown of law and order taking away any kind of redress or avenue for justice" (*Somalia Report* 18 May 2011). A Madhiban elder interviewed by MRG stated that minorities in south and central Somalia are "considered sub-human and live under constant mistreatment by the so-called majority clans" (Oct. 2010, 21). MRG notes, however, that all civilians in the conflict region, including majorities and minorities, experience "gross human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian and human rights law" daily (Oct. 2010, 22). The Secretary of the Gabooye Organisation similarly indicated that discrimination against Gabooye in the south exists but that "generalized insecurity" is a greater risk than targeted persecution (6 Nov. 2012).

The Gabooye Organisation secretary stated that, although the Somaliland government claims that the situation has improved, discrimination against the Gabooye in Somaliland is "bad" and violence against them continues to occur (6 Nov. 2012). In 2011, a sultan of the Gabooye, at a ceremonial event in Hargeisa, entreated Somalis, and the Isaq [also Issaq, Isaaq] clan in particular, to stop their discriminatory practices against the Gabooye (*Somaliland Times* 24 Dec. 2011). The Isaq are reportedly the dominant clan in Somaliland (ACCORD Dec. 2009, 13). According to MRG, there is a "more tolerant atmosphere" for minorities in Somaliland than in the rest of Somalia, but progress has been limited because of lack of government action and persistent societal prejudices (Oct. 2010, 3).

The Secretary of the Gabooye Organisation indicated that there had been "a few recent incidents" in Somaliland that were "very clear cases of ethnic or clan discrimination" against Gabooye people because of the severity of their treatment (6 Nov. 2012). She provided the example of two elderly women who were gang-raped in public, jailed, and beaten in 2011 (*ibid.*). In another incident, the entire extended family of a Gabooye girl was reportedly imprisoned for 10 months because her fiancé, a member of a majority clan, had committed suicide after her family refused to consent to their marriage (*ibid.*). The Secretary indicated that the family was held responsible for the boy's suicide and, as of October 2012, two members of the family had reportedly been sentenced to death, while the rest had been released from prison (*ibid.*). According to the Secretary, the Somaliland media rarely reports on incidents of discrimination or violence against the Gabooye because they do not want to come into conflict with members of the majority clan, who dominate the government and courts (*ibid.*). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that majority clans prohibit intermarriage with a member of a minority group (MRG Oct. 2010, 15; UN 2 July 2010; see also *Somaliland Times* 24 Dec. 2011). A Gabooye elder from Hargeisa interviewed by IRIN states that a couple entering into a mixed marriage would be killed (*ibid.*). MRG reports on mixed couples who were variously forced to divorce, beaten, and shot at by majority clan relatives (Oct. 2010, 15, 18). Similarly, in a 2011 article, *Somalia Report* interviewed a majority woman whose family members physically abused her and threatened to kill her and her son due to her marriage to a Gabooye man, who was himself forced to flee the country (18 May 2011).

The UNHCR reports that minority IDPs across the country are at risk of physical assault, killings, and theft, and have no legal recourse through formal or informal channels (UN 5 May 2010, 16). The UNHCR adds that minority IDPs are vulnerable to human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence (*ibid.*, 35). MRG says similarly that minority women, and in particular minority IDP women, are at high risk of gender-based abuses (Oct. 2010, 19). MRG researchers visiting IDP camps in Bosasso in 2009 reported "a disturbing and persistent pattern of rape of minority women [including Madhiban and Midgan women], perpetrated by majority men and sometimes by members of the Puntland police, army, or security service" (Oct. 2010, 20).

According to the Secretary of the Gabooye Organisation, the majority of Gabooye are not permitted to go to school with other Somali children (6 Nov. 2012). This statement is corroborated by the Somaliland National Human Rights Commission, which states that minority children do not go to school because they cannot afford the fees and especially because they risk mistreatment by other children (1 Nov. 2010). MRG

similarly indicates that poverty and fear of discrimination and segregation prevents minority children from going to school (Oct. 2010, 17).

The Gabooye elder interviewed by IRIN stated that, in the Gabooye community of Daami in Hargeisa, there are no facilities for maternal and child health (UN 2 July 2010). The Somaliland National Human Rights Commission reported that minority group members live in "sub-standard accommodation" in "slums" and lack access to sanitation facilities and services such as garbage collection and latrines (1 Nov. 2010).

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 sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: The Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum was unable to provide information within the time constraints of this Response.

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