

Gabooye

Profile

Small groups of people known collectively as Gabooye live in Somalia, descendants of hunting peoples believed to have been in the Somali peninsula before the Somali penetration.

History

Gabooye have traditionally been considered distinct and lower-caste groups, and are also called by the derogatory moniker 'Midgan'. There has been an effort by some Somali civic and cultural leaders to discourage use of this term – but this has run up against deeply-entrenched prejudice. Gabooye have traditionally held a client relationship with a patron group working as smiths, barbers and leather workers, as well as medicinal advisers and midwives. Tumul are blacksmiths; Yibir (Yahhar in the south) are traditional doctors; Gabooye women and men perform infibulation and circumcision respectively. Other Gabooye are tailors, singers, and butchers.

Higher caste Somalis are forbidden to intermarry with Gabooye outcaste clans, upon penalty of becoming outcastes themselves. Indeed Somalis from the major clans routinely refuse to eat with Gabooye. Without control of land, Gabooye have faced economic marginalization. Without armed militias, they have been particularly vulnerable to attack by the militias of the larger clans, and Gabooye women face disproportionately greater danger of rape. Following the rise of Hawiye clan leader Mohamed Farah Aideed in 1991, his militia launched brutal assaults on Gabooye, whom Aideed accused of loyalty to ousted dictator Mohamed Siad Barre. Because of their 'outcast' status, none of other powerful clans came to their rescue. In a testimony to Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2002, Professor Asha. A Samad described their treatment during those terrible days, saying, "Large numbers of them perished. The Midgan-Madhiban were routinely raped, expelled from their homes, kidnapped and killed. Large numbers of Midgan-Madhiban simply disappeared." As they are outside the clan systems of arbitration, those who suffered had no opportunity of gaining compensation for their loss.

Current State of Minorities

Without any political representation, and marginalized economically and socially, the Gabooye in Somalia are extremely vulnerable in times of growing strife.

According to Amnesty International, in Somaliland in May 2005, dozens of minority rights activists and supporters were briefly detained at a demonstration in Hargeisa at the trial of a police officer, who was given a prison sentence for killing a 28-year Somali from the Gabooye minority. The murder of Khadar Osman Dhabar was, according to AI, symptomatic of the treatment of the Gabooye, 'against whom human rights abuses are frequently perpetrated with impunity.'