

Speech given by Osman Jama Ali at the Caux Forum for Human Security, 12th July 2010

Osman Jama Ali is the former Deputy Prime Minister of Somalia. He is now based in the UK where he is Chairman of Somali Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy

The importance of just governance

Somalis have learnt how vital just governance is. Unjust governance was a principal cause of the collapse of the Somali state. The challenge for us and the international community is how to introduce just governance in a country where there is no state institutions.

Somalia has just marked the 50th anniversary of its Independence on 1st July 1960. From the very beginning there was unjust distribution of national resources, social opportunities, employment, promotions - everything was done in a corrupt way.

This was due to ignorance of state affairs. Those who took over from the colonial powers had no education. Only three of the first parliament of 123 MPs had a first degree, and they were very young and inexperienced. All the others were ordinary elders and businessmen who knew nothing about running a state. We inherited from the colonial power an unjust distribution of political power. For example, the capital Mogadishu which had half a million citizens, had two Members of Parliament. While a small village in the rural interior whose people had supported the colonial power had the same number!

The government just accepted the situation they inherited from the colonial power. But, with nepotism and corruption, it was one of the causes of the military coup in 1969 after 9 years of civilian rule. In doing this, the military had the whole-hearted support of the people. They started well, building schools, hospitals and correcting previous mistakes, but after some years the regime went the same way as the civilian government, and became a harsh dictatorship suppressing basic rights. I have had to apologise many times to Somalis for having stayed so long as a cabinet minister in the military regime which caused so much destruction.

This regime provoked armed opposition groups to form. I finally defected and joined one of the opposition groups in 1989 and the regime fell in 1991. However, because the armed opposition

groups were organized on clan lines, they could not agree on how to form an alternative government, and the result is that the country has suffered nearly 20 years of statelessness.

When the regime fell, there was fighting and chaos, and anyone who had money left. Large numbers managed to reach Europe, North America and Australia as refugees. Everyone was suspicious of people of other clans, and every sub-clan, and even sub-sub clan, established associations of their own. They used to send money back to their clans at home, contributing to the chaos and violence.

Now the situation is different because gradually they are learning from the societies they have been living in. They see people of different social, religious and ethnic backgrounds living side by side.

The Somali diaspora in Britain, which is one of the largest, has received valuable guidance from Initiatives of Change. IofC UK helped organize an NGO called Somali Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy with the aim of reconciling Somalis with each other and with their host communities.

We have organized courses in Dialogue Facilitation for leading figures of different clan backgrounds, and intergenerational dialogues on the theme 'Peace begins at home'. Monthly meetings continue the development of participants of these programmes. Large groups have participated in Caux conferences. We have also translated extracts of 'The Imam and the Pastor' film which have been transmitted on Somali language satellite tv, with a very positive response. These and other activities have contributed to a growing unity among diaspora Somalis who are tired of conflict. Now when there is a gathering of the Somali diaspora they come together in their thousands, whereas before that was not possible.

We also have the long-term aim of persuading skilled Somalis to return to Somalia to participate in reconciliation and reconstruction. This would respond to the real problem for Somalia, which is the total brain-drain. In other African countries the brain-drain is maybe 5 or 10%, but in Somalia the brain-drain is total.

The present situation is that the Somalis in the country are still divided along clan lines. There have been more than 16 peace conferences, but they were all held outside Somalia, and the Somalis didn't consider them as genuine, but imposed from outside, particularly by the neighbouring countries. For this reason, the Somalis didn't give their whole-hearted support to governments created by these conferences. I know this because I served in one from 2000 to 2003. Similarly, international military

interventions are counterproductive, because they are always perceived as taking the side of one or other clan.

The situation is currently worsening, with a huge humanitarian crisis caused by fighting which is displacing large numbers of people and preventing supplies from reaching them.

As the 'top-down' approach has failed, many in the diaspora are considering that the 'bottom-up' approach should be tried. I have written a paper outlining a possible way of implementing this. Instead of sending 20,000 foreign peacekeeping troops, it would be better to send several thousand skilled Somalis to return to the country as facilitators of dialogue, reconciliation and democracy, under the auspices of the UN. These returnees would hold reconciliation conferences in towns and villages, and set up local administrative councils which would establish some measure of law and order. These councils would then send representatives to a national conference, from which a national central authority would be created.

I am now thinking that I should go to different parts of Somalia to express my apology and with others teach about how to create local and state institutions, law and order, and show that the international community is ready to help us.

I wish to express my appreciation for the Caux Forum for Human Security. We are a people who are in great need of this philosophy of international cooperation. I also wish to express my gratitude to lofC in general. The support of their Excellencies Cornelio Sommaruga and Mohamed Sahnoun has been very valuable. They know well the situation in Somalia, and their reputation and name is recognized by everyone. I would also like to express my gratitude to lofC-UK, in particular, Jim Baynard-Smith, the late Fiona Leggat and Peter Riddell. Without their help, none of what has been done would have been possible.

I identified with the Cambodian speakers yesterday. Their country has a similar background of dictatorship and destruction. They said yesterday that they had come out of hell but are not yet a democratic society. We are still in hell, but we hold on to the hope of a better future.

I thank you and ask your prayers for all those in the world who are in distress. God bless you all.

Osman Jama Ali, 11.7.10