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## Africa Meeting Summary

# Human Development in Post-Transition Somalia

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of Somalia

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## INTRODUCTION

The following document provides a summary of a meeting held at Chatham House on 6 March 2013. The meeting looked at human development in post-transition Somalia, with a particular focus on education and health.

With a portfolio that includes health, education, labour, human rights, youth, women's and social affairs, Dr Maryan Qasim discussed some of her priorities and targets in Somalia's post-transitional administration. Dr Qasim offered her perspective on the challenges Somalia faces as it aims to build a more stable and prosperous future.

The event was held on the record. The following summary is intended to serve as an aide-mémoire for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

## **DR MARYAN QASIM**

Dr Qasim began her presentation by describing the positive changes seen in Somalia in recent years, including the end of transitional government and the liberation of most areas. While Somalia has been at the bottom of all the development rankings, she asserted that things are changing for the better. However, this change only began one and a half years ago and there are numerous and complicated challenges Somalia still faces.

Referring to the humanitarian situation within the country, Dr Qasim stated that one child dies every six minutes from malnutrition and famine. Despite these drastic conditions, Dr Qasim noted that a post-war transition is emerging and the new federal government of Somalia has a list of key priorities drawn up to tackle these issues.

Dr Qasim stated that the main priority is to stabilize the country, which is necessary to lay the groundwork for economic development. After stabilizing the country, the government will be able to provide services to the Somali people, and this is vital to stimulate development.

## **Education**

Education was noted as the main priority for Somalia. Dr Qasim explained that education will be the key to establish stability, reduce poverty and amend gender inequality. Education should be seen as an investment which leads to stability. Crucially, Dr Qasim asserted that a lack of education leads to the potential for violence and thus for a safer Somalia, there needs to be a greater focus on education.

Out of the estimated population of 10 million, it is believed that half are below the age of 18, and about four million children are not in any system of education. Furthermore, there are more than 5,000 children involved in military groups. Dr Qasim pointed out that some of the youth are in education structures that promote radicalism and have links with armed Islamists in the country.

Dr Qasim shared the Somali government's vision for education in Somalia. She highlighted the main priorities, which include: providing high quality, accessible and free education for all children; a safe and secure learning environment and access to teaching and learning materials. The goal of this vision is to produce capable, skilled and empowered citizens.

Dr Qasim noted the current situation on education in Somalia is fragmented and deficient. There is little formal education: the private sector provides for 20 per cent of children, which leaves 80 per cent of children not enrolled in any school system. Disparate private schools have no unified curriculum; therefore children are learning different information. Dr Qasim stated that while these schools provide basic literacy and numeracy skills for these children, there are a lot of improvements that can be made to the education system as a whole.

The Ministry for Human Development and Public Services, which deals with education, is staffed by workers who are currently unpaid, although Dr Qasim expressed the hope that revenue systems will be established soon. She noted that ministry workers are committed to the priority of education.

Dr Qasim stated that the focus of her term would be to create a draft paper on a national education policy and to launch a structured and uniform national curriculum. She added that in May 2013 there will be a National Education Conference held in Somalia, with delegates from international communities invited in order to publicize the new policy. Previously, representatives from the various private education companies met with ministry officials to discuss the possibility of adhering to a national curriculum, and Dr Qasim announced that the representatives were in agreement with the proposed plans. The goal for 2013, she announced, is to establish this unified curriculum, which will consist of one examination board and therefore universal leaving exams and certificates.

Dr Qasim announced the ministry's 'Go to School' initiative, which aims to get one million children into education. As there are over four million without education, Dr Qasim remarked that one million is a realistic and achievable target. This initiative has been developed with UNICEF and other international partners, and is a nationwide campaign.

These education policies are in line with the second Millennium Development Goal: to achieve universal primary education for all children by 2015. Furthermore, Dr Qasim noted that there are many 16–18 year-olds who are out of education, and the ministry is working on a programme to rectify this. Youth education for unemployed under-18 year-olds is one of the most serious challenges, because this group is often targeted by pseudo-educational schemes that promote extremism and Islamic fundamentalism.

Dr Qasim referred to the internal displacement of Somali families, and stated that the government must cater for children forced to move because of conflict. Qur'anic cluster schools have been set up across Somalia for this

purpose and Dr Qasim stated that these will suffice until formal education has been set up.

Dr Qasim stated that this extensive project necessitates the recruitment of teachers, and social mobilization is needed in order to publicize the campaign and ensure maximum effectiveness.

Summarizing, Dr Qasim noted the challenges that the government's ambitious agenda will face. Moving on from a humanitarian security situation to the rebuilding of the country's infrastructure and institutions will be a major challenge, and there will be financial constraints; however Dr Qasim emphasized that the ministry is working on finding innovation means of funding, and having communicated with Somali communities in the diaspora and in the country, she has found a lot of support and commitment to help move the country forward and meet these key goals.

## Health

Dr Qasim stated that education targets were linked to the fundamental problem of healthcare deficiencies across Somalia. One million children in Somalia are not vaccinated against polio, and this number may be reduced if vaccination is included in enrolment in the new formal education system. There are also nutritional, sanitation and access to safe water projects that will be linked to the new education system.

Somalia has one of the highest child and maternal mortality rates worldwide, and Dr Qasim expressed the ambition to drastically reduce this during her ministerial term, keeping in line with Millennium Development Goals four and five to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health. Currently, Somali children are dying from preventable illnesses, and so projects to improve health facilities and access is another key project for the new government.

The strengthening of the health system is a priority, as the destruction of infrastructure over the last 22 years affected all institutions working for society including healthcare and education. Dr Qasim added that there must be a focus on leadership and governance, and that a health system must be supported by a national finance system, with community participation and contribution.

Another priority talked about by Dr Qasim was the aim to improve the nationwide community health worker project, which would help reach key sanitation and hygiene goals. The aim is to train 9,500 community health

workers in order to reduce child and maternal mortality rates. More midwifery schools are needed, and Dr Qasim noted that the first postgraduate medical hospital in the country is due to be opened in March 2013, with support from international NGOs. One mission is to fast-track training for doctors to learn basic midwifery skills, such as being able to perform caesarean sections. A curriculum for health training is also being developed.

## Conclusion

Dr Qasim highlighted the need to use the current momentum in order to act on health and educational systems, in order to get children into the classroom. Having emerged from 22 years of violent conflict and state collapse, moving on from a humanitarian crisis situation to a state of rebuilding means that now the government can focus on child and youth education. The government is learning from past experiences, for instance the 1970s scheme of national service when newly trained teachers taught in remote rural areas, increasing the literary rate to 98 per cent through this one campaign. These projects have shown that Somali people are motivated and have the capabilities to ensure that education and healthcare priorities are met, and the government hopes to work with international organisations to help reach these goals.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*Questions were taken in sets of three.*

### Questions

Will there be any government support to help teaching organizations in the diaspora return to Somalia and contribute to these plans?

How do you prioritize your policies when your ministerial portfolio is so extensive? Does this lack of focus suggest that the Somali government does not take the issues of education and youth seriously enough?

Has the government got a plan to establish a salary system for ministerial workers, and is the ministry able to access aid funds that have been set aside for improvement to education?

### Dr Maryan Qasim

Keep supporting Somali schools from the diaspora; any assistance is welcome. For the government, health and education is the priority, because after the destruction of the country in the war there was nothing left: no infrastructure; no schooling or hospital systems. There was also a lack of government structures; the federal government is only one year old.

Combining the programmes under the Human Development and Public Services Ministry is more effective than the previous system when there were three ministers for health, education and family matters. The centre of all these projects is the family, and that is the key priority for the ministry. Centralization has aided the smooth running of the projects, and NGO partners have expressed the view that progress has been made easier for them too. The leader of the ministry holds the power to use all the resources possible in order to achieve the government's goals, yet does not have to work alone; efficient delegation enables swift follow-through of projects.

The issue of the salaries is critical to rectify, however it must be remembered that the government has only been in power for a few months, and an inland revenue system is being developed. It is important that transparency is a key part of the financial system and so this may take some time.

## Questions

There are no finances to achieve these goals: is this an impossible task? Is this an institutional problem: does the government need restructuring?

How will you ensure that the national curriculum meets the need to establish a new, common Somali identity in a post-war situation, which incorporates all areas and aspects of Somali culture?

How will the government implement these proposed services in newly liberated areas, in order to prevent local youth from feeling neglected and becoming radicalized?

## Dr Maryan Qasim

There is a committee working on the national curriculum, and the clear goal for this has already been mentioned. The eventual aim is to produce capable, educated, Muslim Somalis. Stabilization in newly liberated areas comes under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry, and there are five or six ministers working to deliver services to these areas.

On the salary question, the first priority is to establish a transparent financial system; otherwise donors will stop providing aid to the country. The government recently passed an inland revenue bill so we will see a financial system being set up soon. These developments must be taken step by step. Everyone in Somalia has a role to play to support the government to achieve these targets that aim to help Somali people.

## Questions

Will the government build links with Somali teachers in the diaspora, in order for those in the diaspora to be able to help with the education project?

Is it possible for the government to establish a system so that remittances can be channelled directly to the government in order to help achieve these goals?

Why was health and education not mentioned at the Somali Conference in the United Kingdom this year?



## Dr Maryan Qasim

There is plenty that the diaspora can do to help the government, whether they assist in a voluntary manner, or through fundraising. Fundraising schemes are being developed by the ministry in order to help with this process. We should not underestimate the number of teachers needed for this project. Teachers from the diaspora will be needed to teach vocational courses and the new curriculum in Somalia. They can also help by supporting the government and the new ministry in its efforts.

The Somali Conference focused more on the judicial and financial security systems, but that does not mean that the areas looked at today are not priorities for the government. Without securitization, it will be impossible to mobilize new education and health systems.

## Questions

You mentioned the tradition in the 1970s of teachers taking a year out to tutor in rural areas, but that was when Somalia was a safer country. How can we ensure that young people going to Somalia now to teach will be safe?

How can the dual influences of tribalism and radical Islamist ideologies be avoided in a new national curriculum?

Somalia has a low female representation rate in parliament. What are you doing to improve this?

## Dr Maryan Qasim

The problem of low rates of female representation and participation in politics has been a traditional and cultural issue. Change here must be gradual; the health and education initiatives are aimed at empowering women and educating girls. There needs to be more female teachers in particular. Education is more effective than creating quotas for women in parliament because it will enable them to find their own way there.

We must join our efforts together in order to improve security. The war consisted of Somalis fighting Somalis and therefore there needs to be an increase in cooperation between clans. Meanwhile, the government is doing its best to do whatever is possible to achieve stability.

On the question of the philosophy of the national curriculum, the government consulted with the heads of the private schools and Qua'ranic cluster schools, and everyone agreed to educational unification in order to protect Somali children. A unified educated system will lead to a unified Somali people.