

My reflections on the Somaliland community engagement meeting in London



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At the end of the last month, November 2021, the Somaliland Mission in the UK held an important meeting in London at the Diamond Hotel. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Somaliland Diaspora in the UK regions. The meeting was also attended by a delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Somaliland Dr. Isse Keyd. Other members of the delegation included Edna Adan (special envoy for Somaliland/Somalia talks/former foreign minister) and Abdulkadir Mohamed Sheikh (Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Why I write this summary

1. The speeches made by the delegates including those of UK friends of Somaliland were touching.
2. The other reason I am writing this is that the meeting titled '**Community engagement**' reminded me of the great meetings we used to hold in the past.

The meeting was well attended. It was something to be thankful for to the head of Somaliland Mission his Excellency Abdi Abdullahi, his staff and volunteers who spent their valuable time to make the meeting success.

For various reasons this meeting was of great significance. It was the first meeting of its kind for the Somaliland Diaspora in UK to come together since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The meeting offered the participants the opportunity to exchange information about Somaliland and network.

The meeting was addressed by the delegates from Somaliland, UK friends of Somaliland, some representatives of the Somaliland Diaspora as well as Somaliland Mission in the UK. I apologise for not being able to cover in this brief note all the speeches made.

The following is a summary of the speeches delivered by some of the speakers:

Abdi Abdullahi Hersi (Head of Somaliland Mission in UK) opened the event by first providing brief aims of the meeting, welcomed the guest speakers and thanked the organisers of the event for their hard work and dedication. He particularly expressed his thanks to the delegates from London, Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, Bristol, Cardiff etc.

The Introductory address was delivered by Councillor Dr. **Abdullahi Gulaid** (Former Mayor of Ealing). In his introductory address, he gave a brief overview and history of the Somali Community within Ealing as well as London. He then introduced to the floor the other speakers of the event in order to share their speeches with the participants.

Speech delivered by the Minister of foreign Affairs & International Cooperation

Dr. IsseKeyd (Somaliland Foreign Minister). The Minister begun his speech by stating that he and his delegation returned from an official visit to the United States two days ago. He noted that during his visit to the United States he met with high level Government officials and discussed the case of Somaliland and shared with them the success stories of Somaliland. The Minister also mentioned that his visit to the United States was very beneficial and hoped that it would yield positive results. He then spoke about the current situation in Somaliland, which he described as very stable compared to what is happening in neighbouring countries. He also highlighted Somaliland's potential and the bright future ahead. He took as an example, that the economy in Somaliland is based on free market. The minister mentioned that many development projects are underway like the Berbera port and corridor as well as the free zone and Berbera Airport, which has already been completed. The minister also spoke about Somaliland's budget and how it covers government expenditures.



Finally, the minister (Dr. IsseKeyd) concluded his remarks on the importance and vital role of the Diaspora in Somaliland's quest for international recognition.

He noted that thousands of Somalilanders in the Diaspora are needed to come up with initiatives to lobby Somaliland recognition by making strong links with their MP's and other British politicians in the UK. The Minister strongly emphasises that the Diaspora should not underestimate their role and takes advantage of the opportunities available in the countries they work and live in. He urged the Diaspora to use wisely their resources, connections

and to work closely with the government of Somaliland to gain recognition from the international community. He noted in his speech that the recognition of Somaliland is not the responsibility of the government only, but it is indeed a common duty of all Somalilanders to work together more closely.

He emphasised by the need to have a good conducive and credible environment in which different stakeholders of Somaliland could work together.

My question is how to set goals that practically achieve this important relationship or partnership in order to create a positive result in how Somaliland's profile can be enhanced or strengthened. How this kind of collaboration among the Ministry of foreign Affairs, Missions of Somaliland, Diaspora organisations and Diaspora agency could create a force to work together to achieve Somaliland's goal of gaining international recognition.

Remarks of Edna Adan: Special envoy for Somaliland/Somalia talks/former foreign minister

Edna Adan began her keynote speech by saying that she is delighted to be visiting the United Kingdom again and that it is a great honour for her. She thanked the Somaliland mission in the UK for organising the meeting. In her keynote speech, Edna gave a brief overview of her history in the UK. Her first arrival in the UK was in 1954 at the age of seventeen. She shared with the meeting participants that she was one of eight students who came to the UK on a training scholarship funded by British taxpayers.

As she was the only female of eight students, she was trained as a nurse midwife and returned to Somaliland in 1961, at a time when Somaliland desperately needed the knowledge and training that Edna had acquired. After that Edna spoke briefly about the history of Somaliland and said that Somaliland was the first territory to gain independence in 1960 compared to other territories where Somalis live in horn of Africa. She also mentioned that 42 African countries which have a seat today in the AU were all under colony when Somaliland gained its independence in 1960.

For the benefit of those Somaliland friends who do not know the true history of Somaliland, Edna highlighted the History of Somaliland from 1981 to 1991. She shared with the meeting participants the oppression and genocide perpetrated by Siyad Barre's forces on the people of Somaliland and the



destruction of 95% of the cities and towns of Somaliland. Edna Adan, while still recounting the circumstances surrounding the struggle, noted that when the SNM won the battle, they did not commit to kill Siyad Bare Regime's forces in Somaliland but instead gave them a save corridor. They showed mercy and said to them we do not want to have a blood on our hands and be like you. We are asking you only to go back to your families and get out of Somaliland. This shows the high morale of the SNM forces. Their struggle was based on high value with dignity and humanity.

Her remarks also included that the people of Somaliland have rebuilt the country from scratch alone without outside help. She added that she would like to send a message to Britain which is as follows (when the British were fighting for justice, ours sons were fighting alongside the British Army. For example my grandfather fought alongside the British Army as he was awarded for the crown service. My father also fought alongside the British Army and was decorated with a British Empire Medal. So today we are asking Britain to fight alongside us. We are asking for the rights we deserve. Somaliland has been waiting for justice from the international community for 30 years. Somaliland's struggle will continue even if it takes another 300 years to get justice.

Today Somaliland and its people govern the country the way they wish to run, with justice and democracy. After that she shared an appeal with the Somaliland people who attended

the meeting which is as follows (You are all from a great country called Somaliland and you have to be proud of it). My appeal is to continue the good work you are doing in UK and elsewhere. Continue to educate your young people and also continue to be role models for other Somalis. It is your duty to show the world the good qualities and value of the Somaliland people. Some of the words Edna Adan concluded her long speech with was that Somaliland is waiting for the skills and knowledge of the Diaspora. Finally Edna Adan reminded the Diaspora of the need for unity among the people of Somaliland and the need to hold hands together.

Personally, Edna's speech was very eloquent and the audience of the meeting listened attentively and calmly. The speech also covered the situations that Somaliland has gone through as a whole and also the historical relationship between Somaliland and the UK. It seemed to me that the aim of Edna's speech was about making people aware Somaliland's existence as a country and what has been achieved as a country without recognition.

One of the other things that impressed me the most was the diversity and inclusion of the meeting. The meeting was also attended by some Somaliland's friends in the UK. Guest speakers included **Gavin Williamson**, South Staffordshire (MP), **Virendra Kumar Sharma** EalingSouthall (MP) and **Norman Baker**.

Gavin Williamson speech (South Staffordshire MP)

Former Secretary of state for education/former defence Secretary **Gavin Williamson** began his speech by expressing his delight at his visit to Somaliland a few years ago. He acknowledged that when he visited Somaliland he saw a lot of progress in his eyes. In-order for Somaliland to overcome the challenges faced by the people of Somaliland, they had to have made great sacrifices.



Because of these sacrifices Somaliland become a country that is able to offer peace, stability and also created opportunities for so many people in Somaliland. Although Somaliland has not been recognised for 30 years, the nation is still working together with cohesion and unity. The politicians always make promises and I am not going to do that this evening but it is definitely important to recognise Somaliland as a country.

Gavin Williamson stated that whether there is Conservative politician or Labour politician, there is a desire and will to make sure that the recognition of Somaliland becomes a reality.

He added that Somaliland is a **beacon of hope**. The great example of this is what Somaliland has achieved despite the chaos and difficulties existing in the region. Somaliland still stands proud as a nation and showed the world that Somaliland can deliver so much more. During his speech he highlighted the need to stand side by side and described Somaliland as friends and brothers living in a nation far away but bonded with so many common ties. He also mentioned in his remarks that he recalls from his visit to Hargeisa seeing so many people who are doing such an amazing job. One of the people he met during his visit was a young man who had a West London accent and was giving his contribution to Somaliland where his parents came from. It was great for me to see these things in Somaliland that gives you hope and optimism and now is the time that the British Government needs to do more.

Gavin Williamson also shared with the participants the need to recognise the political reality on the ground. Somaliland is a democratic country, which is a safe place for people to be able to go to work, be able to educate and to be able to practice the religion etc. It is something to be proud of what the people of Somaliland have achieved against all the odds. Finally, he concludes his speech with the following words (What I can promise is we fight with heart and passion in order to pull the argument for Somaliland recognition and change the agenda and also change the government approach).

Virendra Kumar Sharma speech (EalingSouthall MP)

Virendra started his speech by saying that it is his honour to welcome the attendees of the meeting to his constituency and is delighted to work with our community in his area. He expressed his delight at the fact that he had been working with the community in his area for a long time on social and political life issues. He also spoke of the need to work together to improve living conditions of the local community in the area. He briefly shared his experience of the need to adapt to new life and work in the UK. He used his brother as an example, who came to the UK in 1956 and planned to work for five years in the UK and then return home with the money he earned. He said his brother never went back.

This is an example of how you need to be realistic and adapt to the life in this country. He spoke of his experience on the need for the community to actively get involved in the local political system in this country. He also noted the importance of local communities to have representation



in local politics. Finally, he conveyed the meeting with a message from his friends the Somaliland Parliamentary Group (The group will continue to support Somaliland and fight for Somaliland's case in the parliament).

He concluded his speech in wishing for Somaliland to become successful and achieve great progress.

Norman Baker (Former Minister of state for Transport of the United Kingdom)

One of Somaliland's other friend who gave a short but memorable speech was **Norman Baker**. He is a Liberal Democratic politician. In his speech, he said that he shared the same views with the two colleagues from the other parties in the UK. Norman's remarks included the following words:

"I am great believer in the right of self-determination and how people have the right to self-determination and decide their own future. What Somaliland wants to achieve some other countries may not be happy with. The fact of the matter is the right of the people and individual countries to decide their own way forward. This is what is required and should be respected by other nations. I particularly want to say that I am admired by the commitment you have made to democracy, to justice and to build what is really a difficult foundation for Somaliland."



Speaking to the Somaliland Diaspora, Norman also expressed his deep appreciation for the contribution of the Diaspora and said that they are the ones **who keep the flame alive**. He also mentioned the diversity and the values of this country which is what makes the UK richer and a more interesting country. He added that the UK shares with Somaliland a very historical connection both recently and in the past. One of the other things that Norman talked about

during the meeting was that he is conscious of the climate change impact and vaccination issues. He also shared with the meeting participants that the climate change summit was recently held in Glasgow.

According to him, African countries are in a situation where they are very vulnerable and Norman hopes that the outcome of the Glasgow summit will give African countries a chance to improve their environment. He concluded his speech by saying that he would like to see Somaliland using renewable energy such as wind and solar energy. The use of these two energies is of great benefit to the environment and human life in general.



Fredo Rockwell (Independent Journalist & You tuber)

Fredo's speech was mainly based on his view on Somaliland. It was only recently when he released a widely watched video clip on the difference between the electoral system in Somaliland and Somalia. Speaking on the electoral process in Somaliland, he uses the elections held on 31 May 2021 as an example. He was impressed by the patience shown by the Somaliland voters during the long queues despite difficult circumstances during Election Day.

Mohamed Sheikh (Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and **Qaasim Saleban** (member of Somaliland parliament: foreign committee, were among those invited by the Somaliland mission to the meeting. Both of them have made brief remarks about Somaliland's development.

Diaspora remarks

Cllr. **Safia Berbarawi** (Sheffield) and Cllr. **Rakia Ismail** (Islington) explained the importance and the role that the Somaliland Diaspora can play in recognising Somaliland as a sovereign country. They also emphasised the importance of working together for both Somaliland communities in the UK and those back home. Cllr. Safia noted in particular that the city of Sheffield has become the first city in the world to officially recognise Somaliland as an independent nation. This is a good example of the positive contributions of the Somaliland Diaspora in the UK to Somaliland's efforts to gain international recognition. They also highlighted during their speeches the strong need for the community to work hand in hand.

Listening to the speeches of the two councillors it reminded me of the importance of involving local and national politics in the UK and how this can give you the opportunity to contribute to your community here in UK as well as to your people back home in Somaliland.

During the meeting there were also short speeches made by some members of the Somaliland Diaspora community representatives in the UK. Speakers of this session included representatives from Sheffield **Adam Yussuf** and **Diana**, Birmingham (**Abdirahman**), **Nur** (SSUK London), **Abdirahman Awliyo** (Greater Manchester). Adam Yussuf from Sheffield shared an anecdote with an element of surprise, which was that Diana was born in Hargeisa when Edna was the midwife in the Hargeisa Hospital. As an example of community contribution **Abdirahman** from Birmingham mentioned in his speech the coordination they have done as a community so far to respond to the Covid 19 campaign. Working very closely with Somaliland mission in the UK they got a laboratory that they have sent to Somaliland to combat the health challenges in Somaliland.

The speeches made at the event were focused on how and ways the diaspora can contribute effectively to the development of Somaliland. They also pointed out that there are many opportunities in the UK and the need for the Somaliland diaspora to work together for the benefit of their country.

The community representative's speeches also covered how the Somaliland diaspora can unite their efforts in order to collectively work together to strengthen the strategies to promote or make widely known the case of Somaliland recognition. They also briefly highlighted some of the activities their organisations do in the UK.

All of those who spoke on behalf of their community organisations in the UK expressed their views that the Diaspora plays a vital role and will continue to play a huge role in Somaliland's progress. The most important thing in their speeches was their readiness to strengthen the unity of the Somaliland people in the UK.

Panel discussion (Investment and Economic potential in Somaliland)

In addition to the speeches, there was also a panel discussion on Investment & Economic potential in the country. This session began with a brief presentation by **Mohamed Warsama Boss** on behalf of the Somaliland Mission in the UK. The speakers on the panel included **Eid Ali Salan, Ahmed Yusuf, Hamze Samatar** and **Bashir Omar**.

The panel discussed in detail the things that make it attractive to invest in Somaliland. One of the things the panel speakers were excited about was:

- (1) Somaliland's abundant natural resources and the country being one of the fastest growing developing country.
- (2) Somaliland is strategically located at the point connecting Asia, Europe and Africa and is a gateway to a number of landlocked countries such as Ethiopia with a market of over one hundred million people.
- (3) Somaliland is in state of peace and stability. Politically, Somaliland is also a stable country.
- (4) Another positive factor for investing in Somaliland is that the country has a coast of 850 km next to the Suez Canal. The speakers also added during their speeches that the market environment in Somaliland is conducive to starting a business and that the people of Somaliland are open and friendly.



The other important point raised by the panel was how the Somaliland Central Bank could operate in an efficient Banking and financial system guided by prudential regulations so that Somaliland Banking system would gain confidence and more importantly for the foreign Banks to see that there is a viable system that they can invest in. One of the panel members stressed the importance of common economic interest. Common recognition of Somaliland can only be achieved if for example, the Central Bank of Somaliland drives the economic stability of the country.

Finally, the panel spoke about what Somaliland can offer to the world. One example that was used by the panel is that Somaliland has imported 20 billion dollars' worth of goods of the past twenty years. The business and economic opportunities in Somaliland are huge and need to be shared with the world in order to find ways improve those opportunities.

In conclusion, the meeting brought back plenty of positive memories of what Somaliland has achieved during the last 30 years. It created an atmosphere **of unity and solidarity** and the need to work together for the cause of Somaliland to help this young nation achieve its **aspirations**. The event was concluded with patriotic songs from two of the most favoured artists **NimoYasin & NuurDaalacay**.

Words of Thanks

I would like to thank all the staff and volunteers of Somaliland mission in the UK for their excellent preparation of this event which was very important in many respects.

My special thanks goes out to the head of Somaliland mission in UK **Abdi Abdullahi Hersi** and **Yurub Qalib** (Community Affairs Consular) who invited me to attend the event. It was a lovely event in which I met many members of the Somaliland Diaspora in the UK who we had not seen each other for a long time. Events like this are an important step in raising the profile for Somaliland. I look forward to seeing events like this again in the near future.



Abdi Abdullahi Jibril (Awliyo)
UK