



**DIASPEACE** *News*

## **DIASPORA, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOMALIA**

*Cooperation seminar hosted by the CeSPI in Rome, November 11th, 2009*

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*The Seminar “Diaspora, Peace and Development in Somalia” organised by the think tank Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale (CeSPI), was held in Rome on the 11th of November 2009, in the context of the DIASPEACE research project. The project is funded by the European Commission under the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.*

*The seminar (similarly held in the other countries where fieldwork research was undertaken, namely in Finland, the Netherlands and Germany) concluded a first phase of the field work research, aimed at mapping - in the Italian case - Somali diaspora organisations, while conceptualising their involvement in the Somali peace process. In fact, the event was intended to be an opportunity for CeSPI to share the research results both with diaspora organisations involved in the exercise and relevant stakeholders - actively or potentially - interested in the future of Somalia and in engaging the Somali diaspora in the peace process at home. More so the seminar was intended to be an opportunity for the Somali diaspora organisations to have their voice heard, to enhance the interaction among the different organisations mapped in regional territories as well as with Italian Institutions (governmental as well as non-governmental). More specifically the seminar represented on one hand the occasion for enhancing knowledge among Italian Institutions – central and local - and NGOs on the potential involvement of Somali diaspora groups, and on the other for sensitising diaspora groups on the importance of acting as a constituency for peace and development through projects directed towards the home country.*

## **Opening Session**

The Seminar was opened by Dr. Jose Luis Rhi Sausi, CeSPI’s Director, who gave the floor to H.E Ambassador Nur Hassan Hussein (*Nur Adde*), recently appointed Somali Ambassador in Italy and in the European Union. Mr. Nur Hassan Hussein welcomed the event and expressed his gratitude to CeSPI for having conducted within the EU Diaspeace project research on the Somali diaspora in Italy since in his view knowledge sharing represents the first step for including diaspora organisations in the policy dialogue for peace and development in Somalia.



H.E. Ambassador Nur Adde and Dr. Aden

The first Session of the Seminar highlighted the main research findings. The paper entitled “*Somali Diaspora Associations in Italy: between integration and transnational engagement*” prepared by Petra Mezzetti and Matteo Guglielmo, was presented by Dr. Petra Mezzetti, Diaspeace’s team leader at CeSPI.

## **Somali Diaspora Organisations: Case Studies**

The Seminar gave the opportunity to present and share the experience of the Somali NGO HIRDA (*Himilo Relief & Development Association*) based in the Netherlands. Their case was presented by Hirda’s Director, Ms. Fatumo Farah who explained how the organisation was set up, professionalising the Somali diaspora and the advantages which came through this process for contributing to development and relief in the home-country. HIRDA’s advocacy work towards the Dutch Government regarding the Somali crisis were stressed, together with its engagement for the social use of remittances financing development projects in the home country. A video on HIRDA’s projects in Somalia was shown and provoked deep emotional participation among participants.

HIRDA has adopted a development formula which emphasises the involvement of local communities. It operates in different regions, which are not confined to the “safer” northern regions but includes also South-Central Somalia. The message launched included the following central points:

- Diaspora needs to be supported and strengthened;
- Support diaspora organisations to become established development agents which can provide services to their home countries;
- Consult with diaspora organisations when NGOs and the government changes its policies;
- Use the expertise of the diaspora organisation members.

Three Italian-based Somali diaspora organisations/networks subsequently presented their experiences: the case of the *Associazione Senza Frontiere* from Milan was presented by Ms. Edna Abdirahman Moallin; the experience of the *ADEP* Network (*Associazione Pace*) by Ms. Lul Mohamed Osman and ; and the case of *IIDA-Italy* based in Turin by Ms. Mariam Yassin.

While the diaspora looks at Somalia with a distant glance, which can be helpful for translating needs into project ideas, the fact that the core of any initiatives in the homeland has to take into account the

concrete/real needs of the Somali people living there was stressed. Therefore, local NGOs/Community based organisations must be considered key in any project and must be sustained. The *Associazione Senza Frontiere*, for example, has a local partner based in Nairobi, working in the refugees camps near the city. The importance of establishing networks was highlighted, as initiatives towards the homeland are often the result of scattered individual diaspora members’ contribution to his/her family. The intervention called for forms of coordination within the Somali diaspora, and financial support of the Italian Government could help overcome the fragmentation.

The ADEP - a network of women’s associations - was designed with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the UN-INSTRAW and 25 Somali NGOs in the framework of the UN Security Council 1325 Resolution on Women and peace and security. Although clan identity created difficulties in the dialogue among diaspora associations, the initiative had the positive effect of showing the importance of the various civil society organisations active in Somalia - and women’s organisations in particular.

Relevant experiences can also be found in Somalia, and “imported” from the South. IIDA-Somalia is an organisation founded 18 years ago in Somalia: an autonomous Italian branch of IIDA was



Ms. Fatumo Farah, Director of Hirida  
(2nd from left, front row)



Panelists Mariam Yassin (IIDA-Italia) and  
Lul Mohamed Osman (ADEP)

recently created in support of the well-established initiative in Somalia, and represents this sort of 2<sup>nd</sup> generation of association born out of the experience in the South.

In the discussion it was critically noted that often the diaspora has a crystallised vision of the Somali context, in particular of the conflict, and lacks a clear idea of the dynamics occurring at present among Somali clans. The subsequent panel debate highlighted the existence of conflict among diaspora groups which reflect the conflict in the homeland. The acknowledgement of these conflicts is the first step to overcome barriers for potential collaborations. It was suggested that developing a *division of labour* among diaspora organisations could provide a way to



Some of the seminar participants

go beyond competition. One step could be to set up specialised organisations on the basis of the specific capacities of the diaspora, e.g. health, management, education or women empowerment, taking into account the needs of the Somali population. This way each diaspora organisation could play a role in the reconstruction process at home without competing with the others.

It was also noted that Somalia has experienced a deep change in customs and daily life and that diaspora organisations should make an effort to develop the necessary tools to analyse and interpret the changes. Somalia today is significantly different from Somalia twenty years ago: a specific mention was made concerning “talibanisation” of young girls in school. The discussion then called upon the need to adhere to a common agenda and to speak with one voice in order to have an impact on the Somali situation, as suggested by the current Prime Minister. If the diaspora fails to achieve unity outside the country, it will be difficult to promote a lasting peace within the country. The need to streamline the positive role of the Somali diaspora in Italy by e.g. creating an *umbrella organisation* to bring together the various contributions of diaspora (individual and in organisations) to peace and development in Somalia was highlighted. This could start from compiling a roster of Somali professionals living abroad.

### **Virtuous Exchanges between Diaspora Organisations and Institutions at Different Levels**

The panel discussion after the coffee break focused on the role of institutions and civil society organisations in Italy, with active participation of Italian institutions and organisations such as the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Mr. Andrea Senatori), the Ministry of Interior (Mr. Mario Ciclosi), Italian NGOs (Mr. Nino Sergi), local authorities/universities (Mr. Marco Meyer), the OIM (Ms. Tana Anglana), as well as diaspora representatives (Mr. Mohamed Aden-Sheikh). The Panel was presided by Dr. Andrea Stocchiero from CeSPI.



During the introductory speech, Mr. Mario Raffaelli, Peace Process Expert in the Horn of Africa, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, defined Somalia a “globalised” country, referring e.g. to the role remittances play in the Somali society and in the conflict. In fact, the economic impact of

remittances on the Somali society shows the remarkable capacity of the diaspora in financing family groups, while substantial amounts are also directed towards business. The positive impact at the economic, humanitarian and developmental level of the diaspora through its huge and often under-utilised human capital was highlighted. On the other hand, it was noted that interventions at the political level can be more controversial, as these can be positive but can also contribute in creating or deepening problems. It was thus stated that caution must be adopted regarding the role the diaspora in the reconciliation and peace processes. The experience shows that clan homogeneity has facilitated the positive impact of diaspora interventions in Somaliland and Puntland, along with shared interests of the business community.

Examples of cooperation between the Somali diaspora and Italian institutions exist (albeit on a small scale), such as the Somali Women Conference hosted and organised in June 2007 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In general, however, such links are weak. The debate was therefore centred around the provocative but relevant question on how to improve such links? From an Italian and institutional point of view, it was noted that diaspora organisations need to meet certain standards with regard to accountability, transparency, positive objectives, existing counterparts in Somalia, as well as networking abilities in Italy and at the EU level.

What can then be contribution of Italian institutions? The following points were highlighted:

- Sustain and help the Embassy in Rome as a reference point for the diaspora;
- Improve the conditions of Somalis in Italy;
- Strengthen partnerships between NGOs and Somali diaspora associations via institutions at various levels;
- Favour the coordination of initiatives at the local level and more specifically the collaboration with Italian local authorities.

The representative of Italian Development Cooperation noted the lack of *direct* collaboration with any diaspora groups. In the Somali case, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can either finance projects implemented by Italian NGOs associated with Somali diaspora organisations or through multilateral funds, such as the MIDA-Somalia Programme managed by the IOM.

In its intervention, the Ministry of Interior clarified that is in charge of the status of Somalis who do not have Italian citizenship. The *Consigli Territoriali* (Territorial Councils, where they exist) are important instruments to be utilised by the diaspora in their interactions with national authorities. Placed within the Municipal administration, they can gather all the contributions of immigrants willing to participate in local planning.

The representative of local authorities stressed that diaspora contribution to Somalia may be positive but also negative. He called for an efficient coordination system in Italy to streamline the diaspora's positive contribution to Somalia. A recent proposal from the Emilia Romagna Region was mentioned, promoting inter-regional coordination for initiatives addressing the Somali crisis, and supporting initiatives undertaken by the Somali Women Agenda.

Italian NGOs also regretted the lack of unity among the diaspora, suggesting the creation of an *Association of Somalis in Italy* in order to facilitate the interaction with Somali diaspora organisations, Italian national and local authorities and NGOs.

Some observations on the current situation in Somalia pointed out that both clan and Islam are factors of crisis/instability. It was also noted that the security issue must be solved before serious engagement of the Somalia diaspora in the peace process is possible. While clan seems to continue

being very relevant in the crisis (as well as for the Somali identity), exogenous interests also play a role in the Somali crisis. Increasing influence of divergent lines within Islam was also mentioned as an obstacles to reconciliation. The Somali diaspora was well represented by women's organisations, reflecting both the composition of immigration to Italy, as well as research results, which found women's organisations especially active among the Somali. Consequently, the discussion focused on issues related to barriers to peace and stability/civilian security faced by women in Somalia.

According to diaspora representatives, interest towards Somalia should not be confined to "episodic" seminars: more durable structures are needed to establish constructive dialogue with all stakeholders involved, take action etc.

### **Conclusions: a call for making Somalia a "Special Case"**

The shared vision of Italian institutions convened in the need of making Somalia a *special case* for Italian foreign policy, to be translated in a renewed commitment both at the international level within the Contact Group and at the domestic level by developing consistent institutional engagement with the Somali diaspora. This should include issues in Italy, notably improvement of the status of Somalis in Italy.

Considering Somalia a special case also means increased commitment by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for building peace initiatives. In the conclusions, the Director General for the Sub Saharan African Division, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Giuseppe Morabito confirmed Italy's interest towards Somalia due to both historic reasons and the strategic geo-political role of the Horn of Africa. Italy considers itself an active member of the international community in issues regarding Somalia, having invested considerably in institution-building by supporting the current Transitional Government. The recent appointment of the



Director General for the Sub Saharan African Division, Mr. Giuseppe Morabito, 3rd from the left

Ambassador Nur Hassan Hussein is seen as an opportunity for strengthening collaboration between the Somali Government and Italian institutions.

Consensus was reached during the seminar on the need to launch discussions on how to better build a joint and unified umbrella organisation of the Somali diaspora in Italy. Italian institutions welcomed the positive potential that a unified body representing the Somali community in Italy would play, while reiterating their interest in contributing to solving the Somali crises. The seminar ended with a call for a renewed role of the diaspora in furthering peace at home. The participants emphasised the need to invert the paradigm by which the conflict is reflected on the divisions and fragmentation of the diaspora. The diaspora should take the lead, make a considerable effort to eradicate divisions within the diaspora itself and find a common voice, thus proving that harmony is possible. If this holds true in the diaspora, it can also be "exported" to the home country.