



The recognition of Somaliland

Growing international engagement and backing



Growing body of expert opinion

“In the case of Somaliland, insistence by the African Union on the increasingly abstract notion of the unity and territorial integrity of the Somali Republic, with Somalilanders governed again from Mogadishu, is both unrealistic and unsupported by more than twenty years of state practice. Any attempt to re-impose centralized control by Mogadishu would almost certainly open a new chapter in the Somali civil war.”

Louise Arbor, President & CEO of the International Crisis Group (2011)

There is a growing body of expert opinion backing greater international engagement and changes to the status quo.

- **2003 legal opinion from the South African Department of Foreign Affairs¹**

In 2003, the South African Department of Foreign Affairs issued a legal opinion. It stated that:

- “[I]t is undeniable that Somaliland does indeed qualify for statehood, and it is incumbent on the international community to recognise it. Any efforts to deny or delay would not only put the international community at risk of ignoring the most stable region in the Horn, it would impose untold hardship upon the people of Somaliland due to the denial of foreign assistance that recognition entails.”
- “The interest of world peace and stability require that, where possible, the division or fragmentation of existing states should be managed peacefully and by negotiation. But where this is not possible, as is the case with Somalia, international law accepts that the interests of justice may prevail over the principle of territorial integrity.”

- **2005 African Union fact-finding mission to Somaliland²**

In 2005, the African Union sent a fact-finding mission to Somaliland.

- It reported that Somaliland’s case is a unique one, which should be judged “from an objective historical viewpoint and a moral angle vis-à-vis the aspirations of the people”.
- The mission recommended that the African Union should “find a special method for dealing with Somaliland” and confirmed that Somaliland’s status was “not linked to the notion of opening a Pandora’s Box” in Africa.

- **2006 International Crisis Group report³**

In 2006, the International Crisis Group published a report on Somaliland.

- It stated that Somalilanders consider recognition as an “existential” issue and sovereignty as “a matter of identity”.
- The report warned that “The African Union’s challenge is to provide timely, neutral leadership in order to ensure a just, peaceful and enduring settlement, before confrontation and violence becomes the only option imaginable by both parties.”
- The International Crisis Group recommended that Somaliland should, in the meantime, be given an AU observer “interim status analogous to the observer status it has granted 31 non-African states or the status of the Palestinian Authority at the UN”.

1. The Brenthurst Foundation, *African Game Changer? The Consequences of Somaliland’s International (Non) Recognition* (2011) – A Study Report, Discussion Paper, May 2011, p23

2. African Union, *Resumé, AU Fact-Finding Mission to Somaliland*, 2005

3. International Crisis Group ‘Somaliland: Time for African Union Leadership, Africa Report No 110’, 23 May 2006



- The report also asked whether it is fair to hold “Somaliland hostage to events over which it has very little control”, rather than rewarding the country for “creating stability and democratic governance out of a part of the chaos that is the failed state of Somalia.”
- **2008 African Union fact-finding mission to Somaliland⁴**

In 2008, the African Union sent a follow-up fact-finding mission to Somaliland.

 - The mission found a similar widespread conviction among Somalilanders of their country’s “irreversible” independence and outright rejection of the notion of union with Somalia.
- The mission recommended that “As a peace dividend, the international community should provide institutional capacity building support to Somaliland infrastructure and facilitate its access to the international and regional financial institutions and banking systems.”
- **2011 Brenthurst Foundation Study Report⁵**

In 2011, the Brenthurst Foundation published a Study Report on the consequences of international recognition for Somaliland. It stated that:

 - “Recognition of Somaliland would be a most cost-effective means to ensure security in an otherwise troubled and problematic region.”
 - “At a time when ‘ungoverned spaces’ have emerged as a major source of global concern, not least in this region of the world, it is deeply ironic that the international community deny itself the opportunity to extend the reach of global governance in a way that would be both beneficial to itself, and to the people of Somaliland.”
 - “For Africa, Somaliland’s recognition should not threaten a ‘Pandora’s box’ of secessionist claims in other states. Instead it offers a means to positively change the incentives for better governance, not only for Somaliland, but also in south-central Somalia.”
 - “Recognition would illustrate that African borders, far from being sources of insecurity, can be a source of enhanced state capacity.”

Strengthening relations with the world

Despite its unrecognised status, Somaliland has entered into informal and formal relationships with a number of other states, and has also achieved de facto recognition from a number of other nations around the world. Somaliland has established offices in the USA, Canada, UK, Sweden, France, Norway, Belgium (Brussels) Ethiopia, Djibouti, Ghana, Kenya, South Sudan, South Africa and Yemen, and people have travelled with the Somaliland passport to South Africa, Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia, Uganda, UK, Sweden, USA.⁶

- **African Union**
 - Somaliland formally applied to join the African Union in 2005 – the application is still pending.
 - In 2005 and 2008, the African Union sent fact-finding missions to Somaliland (details above).

4. African Union, *Resumé, AU Fact-Finding Mission to Somaliland, 2008*

5. The Brenthurst Foundation, *African Game Changer? The Consequences of Somaliland’s International (Non) Recognition – Discussion Paper 2011/05*, (Johannesburg: The Brenthurst Foundation, 2011)

6. Ibid; <http://somalilandgov.com/country-profile/embasies>



In 2010, the African Union Peace and Security Council directed the AU Commission Chairperson to ‘broaden consultations with Somaliland’.⁷

- **The United Nations**

- 22 UN agencies have been physically established in Somaliland, including UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO and WFP.
- The UN Envoy to Somalia has visited Hargeisa on numerous occasions.

- **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)**

- In February 2011, the Executive Secretary of IGAD, Mahboub Maalim, visited Somaliland and met with the President, noting that his visit marked a new era in the relationship between IGAD and Somaliland.

- **European Union**

“The European Union welcomes the contribution that Somaliland is making to peace and good governance in the region. It is an encouraging example of peace, democracy and stability.”

Andris Piebalgs, EU Commissioner for Development (2011)

- In January 2007, the European Union sent a delegation for foreign affairs to Somaliland to discuss future cooperation.
- In November 2007, Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck MEP, President of the European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party introduced a conditional resolution calling on the EU and all its member states to give diplomatic recognition to Somaliland.
- During a visit to Somaliland in July 2011 in which he met with President Silanyo, EU Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs announced additional funds to support economic development, education and governance in Somaliland.
- **Somalia**
 - In 2012, President Ahmad Silanyo held talks with his Somali counterpart, Sharif Sheikh Ahmad in Dubai.
 - The Dubai discussions in June 2012 led to the joint signing of the Dubai Charter to reinforce international efforts for supporting bilateral talks between Somaliland and Somalia”. Ahead of talks, the government managed to persuade Parliament to suspend an existing law that had explicitly forbidden the government from entering a dialogue with Mogadishu.
 - The talks were subsequently held in Ankara, Turkey in April 2013 where President Silanyo was awarded the red carpet reception to meet with his counterpart, Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud. (The Ankara Communique)
 - In July 2013, the talks continued with two technical teams from both countries, among the points signed at this meeting were that both sides agreed” **to establish a bilateral control body in Hargeisa to jointly manage the air traffic control of both sides, and to create a mechanism for equitable revenue-sharing.”**

Ethiopia

7. The African Centre for the Constructive Requisition of Disputes, *A Pocket of Stability: Understanding Somaliland*, 2011



- In June 2007, Ethiopia was the first foreign government to officially refer to Somaliland as a sovereign state and its President as Head of State during a conference.⁸
 - Ethiopia has an established office and diplomatic Counsellor in Hargeisa.
 - Somaliland and Ethiopia have close trade ties – the port at Berbera is the second-most important harbour, after Djibouti, for imports to and exports from landlocked Ethiopia.
 - Ethiopian Airlines has regular scheduled flights to Berbera.
- **Djibouti**
 - On a presidential visit to Djibouti in November 2010, President Silanyo was awarded red carpet status as if he were a recognised head of state.
 - In May 2012, the governments of Somaliland and Djibouti signed agreements to enhance their diplomatic, economic and security relationship.⁹
 - There is a Somaliland liaison office in Djibouti.
 - **South Africa**
 - South Africa has had observation teams present at all four elections in Somaliland.
 - **USA**

“Somaliland is an entity that works.”

Robert Gates, US Secretary of Defense 2006-2011 (2008)

- Former US Assistant Secretary of State, Jendayei Frazer visited Somaliland in February 2008.
 - Former Somaliland President Dahir Riyale Kahin was warmly received on a visit to the US in April 2008 to broaden support towards the goal of recognition.
 - In May 2012, Somaliland Foreign Minister Mohamed Omar led a high-level delegation including cabinet members, members of parliament and representatives of Somaliland’s business, media and academic communities visited the US.
 - US military officials, including Navy Capt. Bob Wright, head of strategic communication for the Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa, have said they are eager to engage Somaliland.
 - The USA was one of the 35 countries that formally recognised the state of Somaliland when it declared independence for five days in 1960.
 - In April 2013, The President, Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo, visited the USA and held talks with the state department, defence department, USAID and members of congress.
- **UK**

“The UK is proud of its historical ties to Somaliland, and we are keen to maintain and strengthen our very close bilateral relationship.”

Henry Bellingham, UK Africa Minister (November 2011)

8. AllAfrica, AU’s Non-Recognition of Somaliland Undermines NEPAD, 2 July 2007

9. BBC Monitoring, Somaliland, Djibouti sign diplomatic, security pact, 19 May 2012



“The people of Somaliland have worked extremely hard to rebuild their country and community, and they deserve our help and support.”

Sir Tony Baldry MP, former UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office Undersecretary of State (2004)

- Chris Mullin, then Foreign Minister in charge of African Affairs, visited Somaliland in 29 October 2004 and gave a speech to a joint session of both Houses of Parliament in which he stated: “In a region torn by war and chaos Somaliland stands out as a beacon of stability and progress...In the long term, however, sustainable development and prosperity in Somaliland will only be possible if there is peace and stability throughout the region...Let me assure you, however, that the British government will never be party to an agreement that pushes you – against your will – into a forced marriage with the South.”¹⁰
 - In early 2006, the Welsh National Assembly extended an official invitation to the Somaliland government to attend the royal opening of the Senedd in Cardiff. The move was seen as an act of recognition by the Assembly of Somaliland’s legitimacy.
 - In 2008, members of the Somaliland parliament were invited to participate in a meeting of Commonwealth Parliamentarians in London.
 - Following a meeting in London between President Silanyo and Africa Minister Henry Bellingham in November 2010, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth office issued an official statement saying: “The UK is committed to supporting Somaliland’s development and cooperating in a reas of shared interest to ensure a positive and sustainable future for Somaliland and the region.”
 - There have been a number of high-level visits to Hargeisa, including Africa Minister, Henry Bellingham in 2011. In February 2011 Andrew Mitchell was the first UK cabinet minister to visit Somaliland.
 - In February 2012, President Silanyo was accorded the status of Head of State at the London Conference on Somalia.
 - The UK has strong links to Somaliland through members of the diaspora, many of whom contribute positively to Somaliland’s development as well as to communities across the UK.
 - The UK was one of the 35 countries that formally recognised the state of Somaliland when it declared independence for five days in 1960.
- **France**
 - In 2008, Somaliland opened a representative liaison office in Paris.
 - France has sent diplomats from its embassy in Djibouti to Hargeisa on several occasions to create cultural links with Somaliland.
 - France was one of the 35 countries that formally recognised the state of Somaliland when it declared independence for five days in 1960.
 - **Sweden**
 - In February 2007, the Swedish government officially recognised Somaliland as a self-governing region in terms of development co-operation.
 - The Somaliland President visited Sweden in June 2007 and met members of the Swedish parliament, Foreign Affairs committee, Director General of Swedish International Development Co-operation, State Secretary for Development Co-operation and officials from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Speaker of Somaliland’s House of Representative has visited Sweden several times.

10. Panapress, British minister addresses Somaliland Parliament, 26 October 2012



- Somaliland has a representative in Sweden, and there is co-operation between various NGOs and political parties. The countries also co-operate on a range of areas such as development, trade investment and culture.
- Interest from Swedish investors is increasing in a number of areas.
- **Switzerland**
 - Swiss Ambassador to East Africa Mr Jacques Pitteloud visited Hargeisa in 2011.
- **South Africa**
 - South Africa has had observation teams present at all four elections in Somaliland.



GOVERNMENT