

# HARGEISA SYMPOSIUM ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT IN SOMALILAND

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*Remove gender inequality by empowering women.*



Date: 23 September 2017

Time: 8:30 am



# Hargeisa Symposium on Women's Rights and Empowerment in Somaliland 2017

*Remove gender inequality by empowering women.*

## Introduction

Hargeisa Symposium on Women's Rights and Empowerment in Somaliland will be organized by Human Rights Centre and Hangool Foundation assisted by Inspire Group Africa with the support of FORUMSYD. The symposium will take place 23 September 2017 in Hargeisa, the capital of the Republic of Somaliland.

It will bring together government leaders, politicians, civil society representatives, women rights activists and experts to discuss women rights and empowerment to raise awareness on issues, provide opportunities and increase women and girls inclusion of decision making, politics, economic and social activities so they can take part in the development of Somaliland in the upcoming years. The symposium will honour and celebrate the success made by Somaliland women under hard environment dominated by men. It will give women and girls opportunity to raise their issues and set the agenda in an election period where the next president of Somaliland will be elected in November 2017.

The discussion will focus on the development of women in economics and lead the way to political inclusion for further advance in women's empowerment and protect at the same time promoting their rights. The 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goal aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making

and in political, economic and public life, and undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance, and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

This high-level conference signals the strong priority attached to the protection and empowerment of women by Hangool Foundation, Human Rights Centre (HRC), the Somaliland Government and the international community. This event will provide a platform for the Government, organizations and Somaliland women rights activists to outline policy progress and plans on the protection and empowerment of women.

Improving the situation of women is essential for Somaliland's development. Over the last decade, significant improvements have occurred in the lives of women and girls in Somaliland, across the political, economic and social spheres. Nonetheless, the situation of Somali women is fragile. Women in Somaliland face widespread discrimination, human rights abuses, and major barriers to participating in the economy.

The Conference will include two panels, one focusing on the political and human rights of Somaliland women, and the other on their socio-economic situation, allowing for a comprehensive reflection on the challenges and opportunities to empowering Somaliland women.

## Background

Somaliland, a former British Protectorate, gained its independence on 26 June 1960. It was recognized as an independent, sovereign state before it entered into what would become a failed union with Somalia. The people of Somaliland, having suffered a systematic discrimination and violence, decided to dissolve their failed union with Somalia on May 18, 1991, and reclaimed their independence. Since then, Somaliland has achieved peace by means of a bottom up approach. In 2001, Somaliland people overwhelmingly approved a constitution in a referendum. The new constitution required a transition to a democratic process enabling all eligible citizens to vote in universal suffrage. The first election was held in 2002 for local councillors. Since then a number of elections were conducted, despite the failure to hold on time. Women participated

in these elections as voters. However, women elected in office has not increased. Although the constitution and the electoral laws allow women to run for office, there are political, culturally, social and economic barriers hindering women to run and win an office. The Parliament of Somaliland has one female member, and there is no single female mayor. There are only three members of the cabinet. Women are underrepresented in all state institutions.

Despite these challenges, women in the businesses increased since the end of Siad Barre military regime. However, they are involved in small business, suffer under economic hardships and do not have access

to financial institutions. The patriarchy dominates the economy of the country. In absence of conventional banking system, loans are based on networks and kinships. Women do not have access to these sources. The Conference will include two panels, one focusing on the political and human rights of Somaliland women, and the other on their socio-economic situation, allowing for a comprehensive reflection on the challenges and opportunities to empowering Somaliland women. Panelists will include representatives from the Government of Somaliland, the international community, civil society and the Somaliland private sector.

## Objectives

The objective of this international symposium is to raise awareness on women issues, provide opportunities and increase women and girls inclusion of decision making, politics, economic and social activities so that they can partake in the development of Somaliland in the upcoming years.

## Welcome Remarks

Samir Dualeh, Hangoon Foundation

Guled Ahmed Jama, Hargeisa Human Rights Center-Somaliland

Bashir Hashi, Country Manager of Forum Syd

### Opening remarks



Somaliland's First Lady Her Excellency Amina Mohamed Jirde will deliver the official opening remarks outlining the challenges women in Somaliland face the progress they have made over the years to mitigate these challenges. Somaliland Foreign Minister Saad Ali Shire will our second Keynote speaker.



### Panel Discussion

*Focus: The human right to full and equal participation in power and decision-making*

Promoting Somaliland Women's Rights, will focus on the political and human rights dimensions of Somaliland women's empowerment, in particular on efforts to support women's participation in political decision-making, including peace talks, the security and justice sectors.

The panelists will make short presentation and then will take questions and comments from the participants.



Mohamed A. Mahmoud is a PhD candidate in Peace, Governance and development at the United Nations University for Peace, Africa program in Addis Ababa. Mohamed is the Executive Director of Somaliland Non State Actors Forum (SONSAF) the largest civil society policy platform in Somaliland that coordinates all non-state actors.



Baar Saed, the only female elected legislator out of the 164 members of Somaliland parliament



Hinda M Jama is highly experienced expert in designing and implementing core state functions programmes aimed at supporting fragile states with more than 30 years of professional experience in the US and in Somaliland. She has extensive experience in leading and managing high-volume projects in the Horn of Africa, MENA and the US with a particular focus on market research, sales promotion, supply chain management, and business opportunities and strategic partnerships with the donor field, recipient governments, civil society actors, and the private sector.



Salma Abdirahman Sheikh is the Chief Editor of the Somaliland Review. Salma has graduated with BSc in International Politics and Sociology at City University in London, United Kingdom



Ms Nafisa Yusuf, Executive Director of NAGAAD Network. Nafisa is at the forefront of the struggle to introduce a quota for women in Somaliland representative political bodies, as well as more generally in efforts to promote equitable outcomes for Somaliland women.

Ayan Osman is a Gender Specialist and a Human Aid worker.



Chairperson: Yasmin Mohamed Kahin, Executive Director MARWO Development Action. She is a playwright and poet, feels that she and the other young Somaliland women are the first generation of female writers.



## Panel Discussion

### Focus: Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership

The second panel, Socio-economic Empowerment of Somaliland Women, aims to deliver a strong narrative on the critical importance of women's participation in the economy. Women have an essential role to play in building a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive Somaliland economy. The panelists will make short presentation and then will take questions and comments from the participants.



Rhoda J. Elmi, is the founder and Managing Director of ElmiMedic. The company was founded in Sweden, and has offices in both Sweden and Somaliland. The company has partnered up with European Pharmaceutical Companies in order to supply its customers in East Africa with medicine that has been approved by the European Medicines Agency. ElmiMedic are suppliers of branded and generic pharmaceuticals as well as consumer and nutritional products to East Africa.



Sucaad Armiyeh Odowa is a businesswoman and entrepreneur. She is the President AWB (Association for Women in Business) Sucaad is an activist and she had been elected as Chair by the Somaliland community in London both as Leader and the Chair for Somaliland Society in UK. She was also elected by the members Anglo Somali Society as the Chair of the organization.

Aisha Ahmed, is a brand coach specialized in helping female entrepreneurs achieve success Aisha is Founder of Lifestyle networking club (LINC) for female entrepreneurs. Aisha hosted more than 10 networking events in the last 1, 5 year visited by more than 150 female entrepreneurs. One of the bigger events was FEC 2017 | Female Entrepreneurs | Conference. Aisha coached over 10 female entrepreneurs till now to find their purpose and build their (personal) Brand.





Warda Mohomad Abdi holds a Degree in Development studies and International relations and the founder Yagleel Event Management.



Hibak Jama is the founder of HYJ- Recruiting and HR Consulting firm. Hibak has over 10 years industry experience, much of it in advisory roles with private growth-oriented companies in advisory and human resource consulting and project management. After spending many years in HR, Hibak founded HYJ- Recruiting and HR consultancy in East Africa with the first office in Somaliland.

Haboon Deeqa is a businesswomen and the founder of Haboon Deeqa Fashion.



Ahmed Suleiman Omar (Ahmed Guuto) is a Master candidate in International Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid at Kalu Institute -Humanitarian aid studies center. Ahmed is the Country Program Field Officer of Swedish-Somali Business Program (SSBP Program) which Forum SYD implements in Somaliland and Somalia.

**Chairperson: Khadija Abdillahi Sheikh** is a Banker and a Social Entrepreneur. She is Head of Quality Assurance at Dahabshiil Bank International. She is the force behind “Dahabo - Banking for women”, the first women dedicated line of banking services in the region. She founded Hooyonimo, an online blog and shop for mothers. She is also founder of Somali Women Leadership Network (SOWLNET) a network of highly skilled and qualified Somali women and mentorship platform.



# Outcome of

## Hargeisa Symposium on Women's Rights and Empowerment In Somaliland



## Panel discussions



*The participants of the Symposium*

After the opening remarks made by the First Lady and other participants including Guleid Ahmed Jama, the chairperson of Human Rights Centre, Samir Dualeh of Hangool Foundation and Jama Musse Jama, Bashir Hashi of ForumSyd, the director of Hargeysa Cultural Centre, the Symposium was divided into two panels. The panels deeply discussed the issues and gave the participants a platform to raise questions and share their ideas.

## Panel 1: Women's participation in politics and decision making



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The First Panel discussed women's participation in politics and decision making. Experts discussed the issued and the participants expressed their opinions and asked questions. The Panel was chaired by Yasmin Mohamed Kahin, Executive Director MARWO Development Action. She is a playwright and poet.

- ﷲ Salma Abdirahman Sheikh is the Chief Editor of the Somaliland Review. Salma has graduated with BSc in International Politics and Sociology at City University in London, United Kingdom
- Ø Mohamed A. Mahmoud is a Ph.D. candidate in Peace, Governance, and development at the United Nations University for Peace, Africa program in Addis Ababa. Mohamed is the Executive Director of Somaliland Non-State Actors Forum (SONSAF) the largest civil society policy platform in Somaliland that coordinates all non-state actors.
- Ø Sucaad Armiyeh Odowa is a businesswoman and entrepreneur. She is the President AWB (Association for Women in Business) Sucaad is an activist and she had been elected as Chair by the Somaliland community in London both as Leader and the Chair for Somaliland Society in the UK. She was also elected by the members Anglo Somali Society as the Chair of the organization.

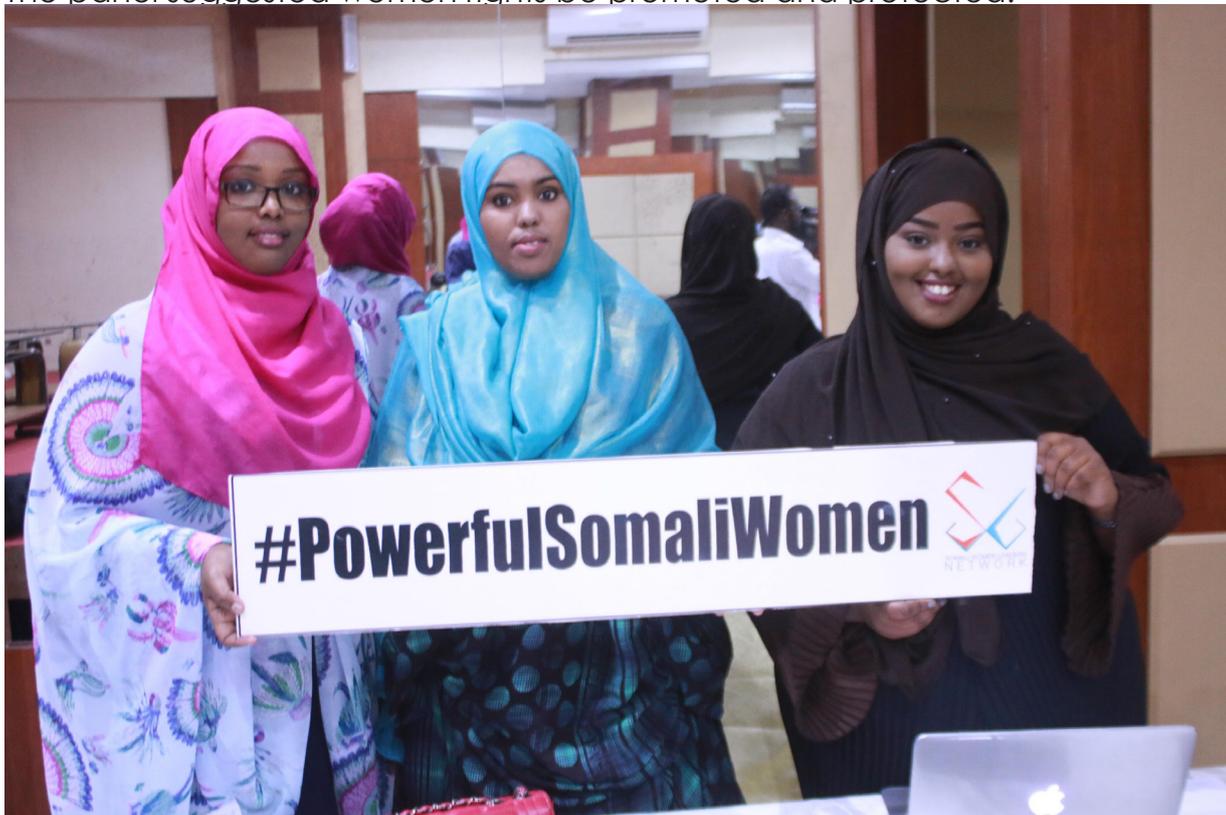
The participants discussed the existence of gender discrimination and inequality. The bicameral parliament of Somaliland consisting of 164 members has only one female member whereas the female cabinet members are only three out of about 70 ministers. The same disparity exists in all the other agencies of the government. The political parties are also male-dominated institutions that do not put forward or support female candidates.

Although the Constitution provides equality, women are still underrepresented in Somaliland policies and decision-making forums including the civil society. The patriarchy structures are strongly resisting women's involvement in politics. Cultural and religious understandings and limited access to financial resources include the barriers blocking women. These challenges shall be deeply addressed. Unless the root causes are addressed and eliminated, the marginalization will persist. Hence authentic policies are needed to be made and implemented.

A proposal of quota for women in the Lower House of the Parliament was rejected by the Parliament. The participants underscored the necessity to pass the quota and extend it to the other branches of the state including the executive and the judiciary. The number of women participating in the decision-making to increase, an affirmative action shall be taken to cover all the areas where women are not currently involved. Such quota shall be fully supported by all the political parties.



The participants emphasized the relations between education, culture, and politics. Therefore, women issues need to be faced in a comprehensive manner that is inclusive and takes into account all the aspects. An isolated action cannot deliver the dramatic change that is required to be taken to increase gender parity and women's political participation. The panel suggested women rights be promoted and protected.



The panel also emphasized the need of a campaign for “executive positions” for women. As they all agreed the creation of lobbyist group from different political parties and influential politicians whom can drive this campaign. “Its time equal participation of women in politics and executive government is needed, as each of the three political party leaders can put more women in the government when they get elected” noted Suad Armiye.

**Panel 2: Enhancing women’s economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and business leadership.**



The second panel was chaired by Khadija Abdillahi Sheikh, a Banker, and a Social Entrepreneur. She is Head of Quality Assurance at Dahabshiil Bank International. She founded Hooyonimo, an online blog and shop for mothers. She is also the founder of Somali Women Leadership Network (SOWLNET) a network of highly skilled and qualified Somali women and mentorship platform.

The Panellists were:

Ø Hinda M Jama is a highly experienced expert in designing and implementing core state functions programmes aimed at supporting fragile states with more than 30 years of professional experience in the US and in Somaliland. She has extensive experience in leading and managing high-volume projects in the Horn of Africa, MENA and the US with a particular focus on market research, sales promotion, supply chain management, and business opportunities and strategic partnerships with the donor field, recipient governments, civil society actors, and the private sector.

- Ø Rhoda J. Elmi, the founder and Managing Director of ElmiMedic. The company has partnered up with European Pharmaceutical Companies in order to supply its customers in East Africa with medicine that has been approved by the European Medicines Agency. ElmiMedic is suppliers of branded and generic pharmaceuticals as well as consumer and nutritional products in East Africa.
- Ø Aisha Ahmed is a brand coach specialized in helping female entrepreneurs achieve success. She is the Founder of Lifestyle Networking Club (LINC) for female entrepreneurs. Aisha hosted more than 10 networking events visited by more than 150 female entrepreneurs.
- Ø HibakJama is the founder of HYJ- Recruiting and HR Consulting firm. Hibak has over 10 years industry experience, much of it in advisory roles with private growth-oriented companies in advisory and human resource consulting and project management.
- Ø HaboonDeeqa is a businesswoman and the founder of HaboonDeeqa Fashion.
- Ø AhmedSuleiman Omar (Ahmed Guuto) is a Master candidate in International Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid at Kalu Institute - Humanitarian aid studies center. Ahmed is the Country Program Field Officer of Swedish- Somali Business Program (SSBP Program) which Forum SYD implements in Somaliland and Somalia.

The panel discussed the economic challenges women face in Somaliland. The participants discussed the inaccessibility to financing due to the absence of financial banking system. Women cannot access to the informal clan or other networks that provide finances to businessmen. Limited financial resources and male-dominated employment are also noted as a challenge that commonly faces women in the business. Although the number of women running small businesses is increasing, the medium and large scale businesses are still run by men.

Starting a new business is mentioned to be very difficult in Somaliland. The panelists recommended the government, in particular, the Ministry of Trade and Investment to remove difficulties and facilitate starting up a new business in Somaliland. The Panel members shared their experience in starting a business in Somaliland, the challenges and the ways they overcome and mitigate these challenges. The panel recognizes also the need of more women in the management roles, as this requires an active campaign to big and small companies in Somaliland.

Well known media channels covered the event, including Voice of America - <https://www.facebook.com/voasomali1/videos/1577879565567772>

The event was also live on our [facebook page](#) and gained more than 6 thousand viewers. It also became trending on twitter with #HERSOMALILAND hashtag

## Group discussions

The participants will be divided into smaller groups to discuss the challenges and present solutions and plan. The participants will listen each group's proposal and a declaration outlined what is agreed by the participants will be released at the end of the meeting.



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