

EDITOR'S NOTE

This special volume has a complicated history, and its release has been long in coming. The distant hinterland includes many months of preparation and discussion to form what became the National Civic Forum (NCF). Twenty-seven Somalis, made up of a mixture of scholars, senior professionals, and highly experienced national figures, assembled in Nairobi, Kenya, in late 2004 to start a disciplined exploration of the Somali conditions and what might possibly be done about them. That initial and successful retreat led to a public and widely circulated press release that underscored a nonpartisan commitment to the well-being of the Somali people through ideas that stress unity, peace, freedom, and constitutional civic life.

A year later, in early 2005, we returned to Nairobi to continue our work. The results of the weeklong meeting included the following: (a) the formal creation of a Charter for the National Civic Forum (included in this volume); (b) the election of officers of the organization; (c) the commissioning of six essays examining crucial aspects of the challenges of the transition; (d) the formal registration of the NCF as a non-profit organization in the United States; (e) the opening of an operational office in Mogadishu; (f) the recruiting of a few more meritorious members; and (g) the producing, in video/DVD form, of high quality discussion programs on pivotal topics in the Somali language, and their distribution inside the country and among concentrated diasporic locations.

Our last meeting in Nairobi was held in August 2006. The first drafts of the commissioned essays were delivered and thoroughly discussed. Among the presenters (not a member of the NCF) was the historian and congenial Somalist, Professor Lee Cassanelli of the University of Pennsylvania. Also in attendance as a major contributor was our African comrade, Professor Janis Grobbelaar of the University of Pretoria. She was kind enough to bring relevant insights and lessons from the South African experience to a post-conflict Somali transition. The conversations were at once very intense and civilized. There was a real attempt made to combine scholarly temper and relevance to the acute needs of the civic moment in Somalia. We agreed that the necessary modifications would be made by the respective authors with the aim of publishing the essays by early 2007. The last two days of the retreat were spent in recording the discussion on the same themes: security and reconciliation; governance and leadership; education; and eco-

conomic reconstruction. Produced in high visual resolution and audio clarity, the first two programs (each around 80 minutes) were shown by the NCF in large public gatherings in Mogadishu. They were used as triggers for open community discussions about sensitive but unavoidable topics germane to a transition to a resurrective human order in the country. The reports that followed documented the success of this endeavor, including the airing of the two programs on one of the major private television and radio networks in Mogadishu. On the diaspora side, all four programs have been well distributed, including being shown in many local community centers in North America, Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Egypt, South Africa, Australia, and the United Arab Emirates. The final agreement in Nairobi was to convene the 2007 annual National Civic Forum meeting in Mogadishu. The plan included, among them, five days of scholarly presentations and outstanding cultural displays that would revolve around the theme of national and civic revival.

But the ambition to invest the bulk of the National Civic Forum's work inside the country was quickly threatened and is now put on hold by the invasion of Ethiopian troops and the occupation of Mogadishu. As I pen these notes, the city is in flames and new lines of bloody confrontations have been drawn. The key actors are the Ethiopian troops and their allies, the Transitional Federal Government militia, on one side, and a growing resistance movement mainly composed of the citizens of Mogadishu and its geographic zone. Where these new developments will lead is an open question. However, one thing is for certain: Somalia's primarily self-inflicted agony has entered a new and more ghastly stage—underscoring the urgent need for novel civic ideas, organizations, and leadership that are qualitatively different from what are on offer.

We hope these essays help in this most difficult search. Though one would wish otherwise, hardly any project associated with the Somali people of the present is solely facilitated through self-reliance. This is one of the dire costs of the vaporization of civic solidarity. The NCF's context is no exception. Consequently, we want to register our profound gratitude to the following: the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the European Union Office for Somalia, and the United Nations Development Program for Somalia. Within the Heinrich Böll Foundation a special salute goes to the then Director Ms. Asgedech Ghirmaziou, and within the UNDP we single out the sympathetic and intellectual energy of Dr. Abdisalam Haji Omer. In addition, I want to express

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deep gratitude to Macalester College and the staff of the Institute for Global Citizenship, particularly Margaret Beegle, and students Erin Gullikson, Cassie Veach, and Urvashi Wattal.

On behalf of the Somali Civic Forum and the authors I trust our readers will find value in these essays.