
amnesty international

Human rights in Somaliland: Awareness and action

Report of workshop

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SUMMARY

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Amnesty International held this three-day workshop on human rights awareness and action for non-government organizations (NGOs) in Hargeisa, Somaliland in October 1998. It was jointly sponsored and facilitated by Amnesty International and International Cooperation for Development (ICD).

The workshop had developed out of requests from Somaliland for human rights training for NGOs. It was the first human rights workshop in the self-declared Somaliland Republic, which emerged in the northwest after the collapse of the state of Somalia in 1991.

31 people attended from local NGOs, including women's groups, development associations, human rights monitoring groups, minority associations, a youth association, journalists, and parliamentary and government representatives.

The aims of the workshop were to increase participants' human rights awareness, develop their skills and knowledge in human rights in whatever field of activity, and for them to use and pass on to their organizations and others what they learnt. Human rights were presented in a broad integrated and inter-connected sense, ranging from civil and political rights to development and cultural rights.

Sessions were held on:

- What are human rights? Links between universal standards and Somali values
- The human rights background and the current situation in Somaliland
- Investigating human rights
- Campaigning for human rights
- Building the credibility of your organization
- Integrating human rights into the work of the different organizations
- Evaluation and follow-up

Much of the work was done in small groups, where the main workshop project, mixing up people of different organizations, was to select and develop an NGO human rights project. The five priority subjects selected were women's rights, children's rights, minority rights, justice and prison conditions, and human rights awareness.

Amnesty International's representatives also met UN agencies, minority organizations and *Jamhuriya* newspaper, whose owner and reporters had been detained at various times. They were taken to see the mass graves of thousands of victims of the massive human rights violations by the former Siad Barre regime (1969-1991), and also visited the Central Prison and the Central Police Station. At the International Conference on Somaliland Reconstruction, which was being held during their visit, they spoke on the importance of human rights in reconstruction and development.

Amnesty International's visit was also an opportunity to meet for the first time with the Somaliland government. The delegates met President Mohamed Ibrahim Egal and other members of the Somaliland government. The meeting covered several areas of human rights. Amnesty International pressed for the establishment of an effective and independent judiciary, the right not to be arbitrarily detained, humane treatment of prisoners, and the abolition of the death penalty. They raised issues of press freedom

President Egal expressed support for Amnesty International's worldwide campaign for the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He invited the delegation to a cabinet meeting where he and all members of his government signed the Amnesty International "Pledge" - "*I will do everything in my power to ensure that the rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights become a reality throughout the world*". The pledge books were also signed or thumb-printed by over 200 other men and women in Hargeisa from all walks of life.

This summarizes a 50-page document (24,484 words): *Human rights in Somaliland: Awareness and Action - Report of a workshop held in Hargeisa, Somaliland in October 1998* (AI Index: AFR 52/01/99) issued by Amnesty International in December 1999. The full report is published in special format which cannot be accessed electronically. Copies are available by mail from the International Secretariat of Amnesty International and can be ordered from the address below or by email to the Somalia team, amnestyis@amnesty.org.

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