

Conference Report



Conference on Peaceful Coexistence, Dialogue and Combating Radicalization

The Venue

The first conference on peaceful coexistence, dialog and combating radicalization was held in Stockholm, Sweden on the 16th and 17th of April 2010 by The Nordic Union of the Somali Peace and Development Organizations.



Somali Ambassador to EU. Amb. Nur Hassan Hussien (Nur Adde).

Conference organizers & the

The objectives of the conference

The conference addressed the phenomenon of radicalization and recruitment of young Somalis living in the Nordic countries to join and fight for the Somali extremist organization Al-shabab. It focused on the fundamental root causes of the phenomenon and how it can be addressed and dealt with. The conference has in this regard brought together several authorities, institutions, organizations, scholars and other individuals with the potential to contribute. It thus provided a forum for discussing relevant issues and making recommendations for future actions.

The delegates were expected to come from the governments of Nordic countries, the Somali communities in these countries, Transitional federal Government of Somalia “TFG” and from other parts of Europe. Unfortunately, official representatives from Denmark, Finland and Norway as well

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as ministers from the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia could not attend the conference due to the volcanic dust from Iceland which hindered their travel.

The issues discussed at the conference were among other things:-

- Why the young Somalis in the Nordic countries are vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups?
- The possibilities of counteracting the phenomenon by employing relevant preventive measures.
- Enhancing and strengthening the cooperation between the aforementioned entities.

Proceedings

The conference commenced at 09:00 as planned with a welcoming and opening speech by Eng. Abdi Ashur Hassan who was chairing the conference in his capacity as the current coordinator of the hosting organization “The Nordic Union of The Somali Peace and Development Organizations”.

In his opening statement, Mr. Hassan clarified the true meaning of Jihad in Islam saying that “in Islam the word Jihad means struggle. You struggle to earn more and give charity, you struggle more and more to help a fellow human being, to feed the poor, to heal the sick and the suffering. The struggle or the jihad does not mean to take away a life but to save lives”.

Mr Hassan also reminded the participants, specially the Somali Diaspora, the noble values that the Somalis have to learn from the Nordic Societies that welcomed them. He said: “We the Somali Diaspora in the Nordic countries have learned from societies that we live in about the true meaning of tolerance and freedom. They shared with us their tolerance and freedom and the respect for tolerance and freedom. We have also learned here in the Nordic countries that Democracy is an absolute good and that tolerance and freedom are basic to democracy. Therefore, we the Somali Diaspora in the Nordic countries have to export these values to our country of origin Somalia and not suicide bombers”.

Mr. Hassan informed the audience that in these days the Somali youth are being targeted for involvement in a campaign of carnage against their country of origin - Somalia. This is done by some extremist groups such as Al-shabab who radicalize vulnerable youngsters through indoctrination and then send them to carry out acts of terrorism. He urged the Somali parent to protect thier children from exploitation by violent extremists.

Mr Hassan concluded his speech by emphasizing that peace, freedom and development are inseparable, and that peace in Somalia will positively reflect on peace in the Nordic countries and the rest of the world. This implies that as long as there is no rule of law in Somalia, criminal

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elements such as terrorists and pirates will flourish there. Solution for the Somali piracy cannot be found at sea alone but has also to be sought on the land. The Somalis and the international community can only eliminate piracy in Somalia by addressing its root causes such as poverty, lack of security and state failure. Finally, Mr Hassan emphasized the need to support peace in Somalia and the role of the Somali Diaspora and the international communities in this regard. Likewise, peace will not come without combating radicalism and terrorism.

Then, the special envoy of the Swedish foreign ministry to the horn of Africa H.E. Amb. Marika Fahlen delivered a statement about the Swedish contribution to peace efforts, humanitarian work and governance in Somalia. In her speech, Mrs. Fahlen also expressed her appreciation of the initiative taken by the Nordic Union of the Somali Peace and Development Organizations and made it clear that Swedish government will continue its support to Somalia. She outlined the long and constructive role which Sweden played in Somalia since early 1970 when it contributed to certain developmental programs such as fishing on coastal areas of Somalia.



Ministry to the horn of Africa, Amb. Marika Fahlen

The special envoy of the Swedish Foreign

She also highlighted how Sweden came to the aid of the Somali people after state collapse in 1991 taking part in humanitarian efforts to save lives while at the same time contributing to all peace and reconciliation efforts to resolve the prolonged conflict in Somalia. She mentioned how Sweden while holding the presidency of the European Union Council pushed for a more active role by the EU in Somalia to help implement the Djibouti agreement of 2009, an effort which still is going on.

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In addition to that, Amb. Fahlen emphasized that Sweden's involvement in Somalia and in the Horn region is motivated and guided by noble principles such as human rights, rule of law, transparency in governance, etc. As a result, Sweden encourages and supports dialogue and compromises in all efforts to resolve the conflict in Somalia to arrive at a win-win solution instead of using violence. An example of such principled approach is Sweden's emphasis on credibility and quality in the EU financed training of Somali security forces currently underway in Uganda.

After the Swedish envoy, the Somali ambassador to EU H.E. Amb. Nur Hassan Hussien, representing the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia "TFG" gave a statement about the current situation in Somalia including the phenomenon of radicalization as well as the role of the Somali Diaspora communities and international communities in promoting dialogue and peace in Somalia.



Hassan Hussien (Nur Adde).

The Somali Ambassador to EU. H.E. Nur

The ambassador warned about the negative consequences of continued recruitment of young Somalis in the Nordic countries and elsewhere for peace not only in Somalia but also for the Somali Diaspora communities and the societies in these countries. He stressed the importance of cooperation between Nordic governments, the TFG and the Somalis communities in Europe to counter this challenge and its root causes.

Afterwards, the chairman of Muslim council in Denmark, Dr. Asmat Mujaddedi, gave his presentation on the role of Islamic religious leaders about combating radicalization. Dr. Mojaddedi

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pointed out that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance. He added that terrorism, violence and intolerance of other people's standpoints are misinterpretation and misguidance of Islam.



Dr. Asmat Mujaddedi, Chairman of the Muslim Council in Denmark

Then, Mr. Abdullahi Tarabi speaking on behalf of the youth presented the relationship between the parents, the system and the youth. He pointed out that the future of the youth depends on the kind of relationship and cooperation the parents have with the system and their children.

Thereafter, several speakers representing the four Nordic organizations as well as other individuals from the Somali communities made their presentations on the topic of the conference.

Workshops

Workshop sessions have followed the above mentioned presentations by delegates. The participants were divided into four groups to discuss the following issues.

- What motivates young Somalis in Nordic countries to be radicalized and recruited to fight side by side extremist groups?
- Who are recruiters and what methods they use?
- What are the best strategies to prevent and counteract the phenomenon of radicalization?

Findings

Based on the vision and objectives developed by organizers, presentations and group works in the workshop sessions, the conference participants came up with the following findings:-

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- The Failure of Nordic authorities to meet the youngster's need by offering them opportunities for productive life which resulted lack of integration, failed schooling and drop outs, Identity crises, unemployment, isolation and lack of hope.
- Failure of authorities to initiate policy actions concerning the youth in cooperation with responsible and capable members of the Somali communities.
- Cultural misfit between parents and children/youth who were either born or grew up in Nordic countries.
- Misinterpretation of Islamic teachings by extremist new schools of Islamic thought which encourages intolerance.
- Propaganda by extremist groups in Somalia through the internet, direct contacts, and via their networks.
- The youths' feeling of perceived injustices against fellow Muslims around the world by regional and international actors which results in anger and frustration.

Strategies and key recommendations

The conference participants recommend that:

- Nordic authorities should in cooperation with Somali communities develop coordinated and tailor-made strategies that better suit the needs of the youth. For instance, create vocational training, job opportunities, leisure activities, etc.
- Nordic authorities should in cooperation with Somali communities facilitate seminars, conferences and courses about inter-cultural, civic education, the legal system and topics to counter the ideology of intolerance and extremism.
- Parents should be aware of where their children go to learn religion and whom they contact.
- Nordic authorities should in consultation with Somali communities help educate those Muslim preachers who are not up to their responsibilities due to their narrow knowledge of Islam as well as the legal, culture and social systems in the democratic countries.
- Authorities in Nordic countries should cooperate with TFG and regional administration in Somalia to track the movements and actions by extremist groups and individuals.

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- Another conference should be convened in the near future, preferably within the next three months in one of the three countries whose governmental delegates could not attend the conference due to the volcanic dust from Iceland [i.e. Denmark, Finland and Norway official delegates]



Participants and delegates of the conference on the 16 April 2010 (above) and 17 April 2010 (below)

Closing remarks

Mr. Abdi Ashur Hassan thanked all delegates and the conference organizers for their active participation as well as their contributions to discussion forums which raised a number of key issues and came up with some useful recommendations that are worth to be followed up.

Finally, Mrs. Amina Said one of the key organizers of the conference came to the podium thanked the delegates and the key speakers. She said “I want to thank all for your speeches, discussions as well as active participants – you have done an outstanding job sharing with us your valuable

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knowledge, insight and experiences on the issues raised in this conference. The recommendations to be produced from this conference will be a vital input for the issues raised in this conference

Our responsibility is to carry these recommendations resolutely forward and ensure that they are placed high up on the relevant institutions, communities and governments.

With these words, let me – once again – express my sincere thanks to all of you for coming and for contributing to your time and thoughts, and with these words I officially close the Conference on Peaceful Coexistence, Dialogue and Combating radicalization.