



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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BENNET: Today is October 24<sup>th</sup> and we're here in Hargeisa with Shukri Ismail who is a former national election commissioner with the first national election commission. We're very pleased. You're also currently the founder and director of Candle Light, is that right?

ISMAIL: Yes.

BENNET: We're very pleased to be here today.

ISMAIL: *You're welcome.*

BENNET: We'd love to start by getting a little bit of your background leading up to this period of time when Somaliland had its first elections, but we'd love to know a little bit more about your background before that time and how you became a commissioner.

ISMAIL: *My name is Shukri Ismail and I'm the chairperson of Candle Light. I am a former commissioner. I have been here in Somaliland for the past fifteen years now. In fact October 15 was fifteen years exact since the foundation of Candle Light. I'm one of those people who went abroad in '88. I went to the United States, as a refugee.*

BENNET: During the bombings?

ISMAIL: *Yes, during the 1988. As you are aware many Somalilanders left the country, and they are all over the globe. I was lucky to go to the United States with my family and stayed there for a few years and came back to Somaliland in 1995. At that time Somaliland was in a war, in a civil war themselves, not outsiders in the south. Somaliland had that problem at that time. There was a war, a civil war in 1994, 1996. During that period I came back to visit with my mom just to see what was going on. At the same time I was trying to do some kind of research on the education system.*

*I think that year was—the year was literally, people were fighting, there was fighting everywhere. There were a lot of casualties and all that. I decided to go to the remote areas where the IDP went from IDPs (internally displaced persons) went from Hargeisa and see what they are doing there, what is the situation over there.*

*I found out that the first day when I went there, I found out that a nine year old was at a check point in Qorilugud District which is in Togdheer region within Somaliland and I was in a checkpoint and he was having a gun as tall as him you could say and was literally shocked to see a nine-year-old carrying a gun. When I asked the people they said, "These kids, they have guns because they are supporting the militia" which at that time was fighting with the government.*

*So from there I decided to come back and do something about it. To do something in fact in education because I said Somaliland has lost a generation already and this is the second generation, so the second generation it is not helping to go like that. So that is why—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: And these IDPs, you went to go visit the IDPs, these were IDPs from the civil war in the north or—?

ISMAIL: *Yes. The civil war in the north from Hargeisa. Half of Hargesia was gone.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So these were not the people who...

ISMAIL: *No, not at that time, not at that time. These were the IDPs from Hargeisa and Toghdeer. So that is when I started thinking I have to do something. So I started, the four of us sat together in Dubai. I went back to Dubai and together with the other airline's manager and another three. So we talked about how could we help and what support we could provide. We came back straight and I started from scratch in that IDP area. I stayed for a year and a half.*

*Then in 1997 the Peace Agreement was signed between the government and the militia we moved to Burao, to capital of Toghdeer, to Burao. We started all over again the education there with the support of a Dutch organization. They supported building two [indecipherable] in fact in building a school, the first school giving us the materials, and everything else.*

*So I started from there and then, with volunteers in fact, nobody was getting anything. We were all volunteers at that time. I was thinking since the peace agreement was signed, I could stay a year or two and then go back, but it never happened. It's like every year there is so much to do and so much, an immense need is there. It took me fifteen years.*

*Somehow since I was in the civil society when they were selecting the commissioner, they were thinking about to nominate a woman and they were looking to Edna [Adan Ismail], Edna was busy, and then so why don't you come and be a commissioner. I had no idea what the commissioners are supposed to do. It took me almost two weeks to think about it to be a commissioner. I had some much in here to do, but eventually I became the commissioner. It was an exciting experience, literally an exciting experience. To be a woman among six men was another thing.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Were you nervous about becoming a commissioner. Tell us why you decided to say yes.

ISMAIL: *In fact they were pushing me so hard because at the beginning. The first day, nobody consulted me if I could be a commissioner. I was at the airport and when somebody called me they said, "We heard your name from the radio." I said, there was a program for Candle Light on the radio. They said you are selected to be a commissioner." A commissioner? Where are they doing it? What are they supposed to do? They said you will be conducting an election. So I said election? So I was thinking and I was thinking immediately the elections in America because there were no elections here. Since my birth. They said elections yes.*

*So what are they doing? Again I asked. Why don't you just come to the parliament office, the parliament building, Deputy Director of the Parliament will tell you what you are supposed to do. In the morning at 9 we went there, all of us, 7 of us and nobody knew anybody, we were all strangers to each other. They gave us the decree from the President. He read the decree and I was like, "No, no, no," I told that to the deputy. I said, "No, this is not for me. I am not going to do it."*

*He said, "Why don't you think about it. You are a woman, if you say—this is the first chance woman got it. If you say no women won't get another chance, why don't you try first?"*

*I said, "Well, I have no experience at all."*

*He said, "No, you don't need experience, it is just like a knife on a melon, a watermelon, you cut it."*

*I said, "It is like that?" It is fuurti, a saying in Somali, means it's just very easy and I was like my goodness. And I said, "Let me think about it." In a week's time I thought and I resigned and said "this is it, I'm going to call somebody else." Again they were pushing me and I consulted with our team here and they said, why don't you go for it.*

*"I said this is five years I have to be away from the office, five years." They said, "No problem, you will be helping us." So that's how we started. The first three months we were working in the building, we had no office, nothing. The first three months we were working in [Indecipherable person's name - Abdi Rahid]'s office. Then the next three weeks, we rented an office. And this was like, we had to bring the chair from here, we had to bring the table from here, you have to write the proposal and it was—and none of the guys, except one, five of them they had no experience in working in—.*

BENNET: Only one?

ISMAIL: *Yes, in civil society. So at least we know you can write a proposal to somebody and ask for money and whatever, the rest it was like different, they came from different—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Who was the guy who had expertise, what was his name?

ISMAIL: *The chairman.*

WOLDEMARIAM: The chairman, Adami.

ISMAIL: *Yes, he was a very good leader I could say. If it is all about the leadership. Since we were all inexperienced, it was about the leadership.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Did you guys have some kind of support staff? Secretary or anything? What was the support staff like?

ISMAIL: *The first few months we had no support staff at all. We were using the support staff of the parliament. But when we rented our own place we in fact hired, started hiring people. You know, an accountant, a secretary, and all that with the funds of the Somaliland government. That was coming from Somaliland. You know the initial starting capital came from Somaliland government.*

*Then the EU (European Union) sent a consultant from Nairobi who was supposed to write a proposal with us so that we could submit to the EU. That proposal took at least two weeks. We put all our input in it. But at least he had some idea, the guy, the consultant had some idea of elections and—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: How was the relationship between the foreign consultant and the Election Commission? Was it a positive relationship? Was there tension?

ISMAIL: *Mostly it was positive but sometimes when they ask you a lot of questions, details, you don't know exactly what—and we had no experience. We were all trying. Sometimes you get irritated and say "why don't you do what you can" or write what you can, at least this we don't know how much this and how much that. But the best thing that happened to us was somebody came, a consultant*

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*came from Norway for a group of NGOs (nongovernment organizations). And he was, in fact, giving them some kind of, I think it was some kind of managerial training or something, but he was a lawyer by profession. He was from Kenya. He had some experience with elections too.*

*After the workshop I said do you have any experience with the elections and he said yes, with Kenyan elections. I said, "I will call our group. Can you give us some insight? Can you give us—what goes on in Kenya?"*

*Then he said, "Do you have time tomorrow?" I said yes in the morning. I called all of them and I said, "We're going to have one-day workshop." Mansoor Hotel gave us their hall for free. We went there about 8:30 and left there maybe at 9 p.m. The first concept paper in fact was written in there. We were given a lot of information, getting the background of the country and this and then we had built with that first concept paper.*

BENNET: What year was that?

ISMAIL: *It was 2002.*

BENNET: 2002.

ISMAIL: *So these started to get information from here, from there, from this one, that one. After the proposal was sent to EU, it was approved and the EU sent us two more consultants. One was a financial consultant and one was an election consultant from Germany. That's how it started. And bit by bit we were learning. But at least the most amazing thing that happened to us was—most of us were not really aware of the times going. Of course we set the date. Then the job that we have to do before at that time.*

WOLDEMARIAM: You set the election date?

ISMAIL: *Yes we set the election date and the time was really moving fast and we have so much to accomplish. The consultant from Germany he realized that it was like—these guys are not really ready. He went to the market, to one of the stores and bought a billboard, a kind of a board and he stuck it there, 57, 56, 55, 54, 53, deducted the days [Indecipherable due to background noise].*

BENNET: So did you set the date? Did the NEC set the date or was it parliament who set the date? Who set the date of the 2002 election?

ISMAIL: *We had to say that date because they were asking how long it would take to prepare so we had to say until then and then they will announce the date, like the 27<sup>th</sup> and then they would announce the date.*

BENNET: So to get an idea of just the timeline here, when were you selected to be the commissioner and how soon after that did you have to set the date?

ISMAIL: *We were selected in 2001, December 18<sup>th</sup>, December 19<sup>th</sup> there was an election to be held. In the morning when they told us that there will be an election to be held tomorrow we were all looking at each other and we said, "Elections tomorrow?" Because we knew somehow, from the people that there will be an election. That date was set by the president then, (Muhammad Haji Ibrahim) Egal and the first thing we had to do was say there will be no elections tomorrow, it is postponed until later.*

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WOLDEMARIAM: How could the elections—the next day?

ISMAIL: *The next day because somehow, I don't know, but when we were elected it was 18, 19 there was—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: It was supposed to be the district election?

ISMAIL: *Yes, district election. They said everything is ready. I went "What is ready?"*

WOLDEMARIAM: There weren't even election—.

ISMAIL: *There was no election commission. We were here only for today. We were struggling ourselves whether we would be elected. Like myself, who is going to be a commissioner. The first thing we did was at least to postpone the date until further notice. That took us a year, from December to December.*

BENNET: Then in early 2002 you set the date for December?

ISMAIL: *Yes, for December, after we wrote the proposal, we got the money, acquired all the necessary material and all that and we set the date. But the first one was like, it was like you don't know anything but you are moving with your sense. You had no experience, but you read some books, you read some articles, you read something. So it is like, from you, you have to do what we are supposed, this, this, this. The guy from Germany, he was great, literally great. He was, you know the civic education, how many books you have to do, you have to do this, you have to do this.*

WOLDEMARIAM: What was his name?

ISMAIL: *He had a German name.*

WOLDEMARIAM: It's okay if you can't recall.

ISMAIL: *I will. I know the British guy was Nick, of course, it's easy, yeah.*

BENNET: So we're interested in some of these initial first steps that were taken. There was an electoral code, is that correct?

ISMAIL: *Yes.*

BENNET: Who wrote the code? Was that given to you or did NEC have to come up with the electoral code.

ISMAIL: *No, there is the election law.*

BENNET: There is an election law.

ISMAIL: *Yes, election law number 20. Also, you have to go with the constitution too. Whenever it is not clear you have to go back to the constitution. Don't forget that everybody was new there. The political parties were new.*

BENNET: For the district election there were more than just the three parties at that point right?

ISMAIL: *Yes.*

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BENNET: There were many parties and they had to narrow it to three?

ISMAIL: *Three yes.*

BENNET: So could you maybe talk a little bit about some of that process and what the commission's role was in this whole process, how you were balancing some of these considerations?

ISMAIL: *In fact we were working with the election law. Also there was another law which was only used one time and that was the political party law. There were also other commissioners, they were only hired for six months. In fact, they were the ones who were responsible for looking into the political parties deeply because they were—otherwise there will be so many political parties. But there were restrictions on who could be a political party. You have to follow—there should be—you should follow the criteria.*

*They were doing really well, the parties were like seven or eight political parties.*

WOLDEMARIAM: What was the name of—this was a body? What was the name of this body?

ISMAIL: *The Political Party Commission, they were the commissioners for the political parties.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Who were these people appointed by?

ISMAIL: *By the President.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Okay.

ISMAIL: *By the Parliament and President, yes.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So they decided who was a political party.

ISMAIL: *Yes, following the criteria that was set in the political party system booklet. They were literally looking deeply into who was going to be a political party. Those commissioners, they wrote letters to us, saying this is a political party, this could be a political party. Then we could accommodate them with the symbols, with the ballot paper with the symbols, everything.*

*The political parties at that time they were new, had no prior experience at all. The guys who were the chairpersons were new too. They were literally also trying their best, but we were the ones who were guiding them according to what they would be doing as a political party. But as political parties also they had their own agenda. As a political party they had their own constitution, they had their own thing. But what we were looking into is that they have to follow the rules that we have set for them.*

*We were at that time consulting with them constantly. It's not—they were a part of us literally. We were all the time, sometimes they—. A guy who was from Norway he said, "Are they really guiding you or you are guiding them?" it was like. I said, "We are guiding each other. We try to work together." We were also literally balancing, trying to see balancing also. There are a lot of delicate things you have to look into when you are a commissioner. You have to think about the tribe, the tribal area, you have the regional-wise. You have to think of everything.*

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*So every bit you are taking you have to consider so many other things with each political party. It was like a new system to Somaliland, democratization is all new to the Somali system. So it was going from here and going to there. You have to have so many errors within. But the final thing is that you have to deliver an election that there is no violent, at least no conflict, otherwise you have done nothing.*

*It is like Somalians are mostly very content with going to the tree and solving their problem under a tree. But when it comes to democratization and all those things you have to be very careful, literally very careful, you have to balance.*

BENNET: With the political party commissioners, did you guys have meetings with them to discuss these issues?

ISMAIL: *Yes, every, practically every day. In fact, they had selected three or four people, each party selected three people who can work with us and who we could consult with.*

BENNET: Oh so these commissioners came from the parties themselves?

ISMAIL: *No, the parties usually nominate or select two or three people who can work with the commission. Whenever we want to call, we used to call these people and each conveyed the message back to their political party, used to convey the message back to the political party. But sometimes when there is a big decision to be taken, the political party leader should be there.*

*There were times when the three political parties were not good at each other and you are trying to harmonize the situation that was there. It is difficult during the working hours that they have to come together. So there was some kind of chat [a narcotic chewable leaf] session, sitting, one or two or three people from the commission would be sitting with the three political parties and they are talking and they are talking and they are talking and then a decision. It took seven months at one point to bring them together at the table. They would be coming together but they would never agree on anything. So it was just bringing together, agreeing on an issue it takes time. Specifically Kulmiye and UDub. They were far apart, UCID is almost, used to be in the middle, the two others were in two different directions. So bringing together agreeing on the same issue used to take a long time. But we have to be patient also.*

*You know we were thinking if we fail, the elections fail, it is the whole process fails, the democratization process of Somaliland has failed and people will say we don't want any democracy or anything, we just want to have a peaceful country without death.*

BENNET: What were some examples of those issues that parties were very far apart on, I mean that you had to build consensus?

ISMAIL: *The trust was not there. The problem is the trust. Whether it is—the smallest thing they wouldn't be agreeing on. The smallest think like the paper would be green and the other one would say it would be blue. The smallest thing they wouldn't be agreeing. The opposition was also very strong opposition I could say. The government was also the same.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So these negotiations are happening after the district elections right? This is happening after—?

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ISMAIL: *The first election people were learning, we were all learning together what will come out of it. People were thinking of peaceful situation, let us do this peacefully, let us not create a conflict, let the parties not—people plan the parties. At the same time the community, the population of Somaliland were looking at us and at the political parties. If something happened they would immediately review where they are balanced, whether they are religious groups, whether they are practical. People are trying, this is the first thing. It was like everybody was embracing trying to go and move on.*

WOLDEMAIRAM: Now these three parties—before the district elections there are many parties, right?

ISMAIL: Yes.

WOLDEMARIAM: There are many. But after—.

ISMAIL: *After the election there are three.*

WOLDEMARIAM: There are three, and this is where the real negotiations—?

ISMAIL: *Negotiation, exactly, yes specifically the presidential, before the presidential.*

WOLDEMARIAM: This idea of involving the political parties, so if you decide registration will happen like this and you bring the parties together and try and talk with them, whose idea was it to do it like this, to bring the parties and actually negotiate about these issues instead of the commission just saying this is how it will be.

ISMAIL: *You cannot—Somaliland is unlike any other country or Somalians by nature. You have to—because the consensus building. People usually—this peace agreement, this peace and consensus all the time. It is not something that, you know, the clan was dictating. It was the, the peace process of Somaliland came in conception from each and every clan, whether it is small or whether it is a big clan, in 1992, '94. All the conferences that happened before which were leading by the leaders and the elders, it was usually with consensus.*

*Still we have to do it with consensus because otherwise one group will go and say this is not for us.*

ISMAIL: *So what we had to do is everybody should know what we are doing, transparency was also number one priority as a commissioner. We have to be very transparent in everything. We don't have to take—we will not go to a party or a lunch with any group. If we were going to a lunch we were going seven of us.*

BENNET: With all the parties?

ISMAIL: *Not usually, we said, please don't invite us. I am the one who usually said, "If we are invited by this political party, next time somebody will be inviting at the gate. This is Africa, you never know what will happen. I said, "No way." We have to be very transparent, very clean in coming out because we are the first election commissioners and whatever we built, the country will follow that rule. If we are corrupt then the next group will be corrupt. But we have to show the people; we have to be doing a very good job.*

WOLDEMARIAM: You had mentioned you had to build consensus, the NEC, the commission had to build consensus with these parties.

ISMAIL: Yes.

WOLDEMARIAM: What issues, or one or two issues in your mind, did you get very worried about. You said, "Oh this is very difficult to build consensus." What were the real issues, the issues that were really disputed between the parties? Was it the registration? Was it—?

ISMAIL: *It was nominating, nominating the election staff at the regional and district level. Who is going to be a commissioner? Who will be the chairperson, the commissioner in that region. Where is he from, from which clan? His background? Was he sympathetic to Kulmiye, this, that, the staff, how would you—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: The staff—?

ISMAIL: *The party agents, their training, who is going—how will they be trained? How will you tell these people to be fair, to these people, you never know. Since we are based in clan—I am from that clan, your assurance was that clan.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So was NEC's job to appoint this staff, the local?

ISMAIL: *Yes. So they have to agree with you and then one will be saying no. He will be leaving, he will be calling me, what, why? Then you have to be changing, this will be changed. Sometimes it take a whole day, a whole day, one whole day. You are in a region, you are in a hotel, and you are negotiating for this person to be the chairperson or to be the vice-chair. So you have to have the patience, you have to have the tolerance. You have to have the expertise. At least some of our guys had very good experts in negotiating. Like two of us, the chairmen and another guy they were the best in negotiating because they used to sit under the trees to solve problems. They were very good at it; they were patient. They would be talking and they would take one out, you're talking to him outside, bring him back, take the other side out, bring him out.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So you had to go to each region and you had to say, you had to negotiate, you had to go to the region and say this is—?

ISMAIL: *Like four or five of us used to go to each region. Three to the Western region. Those three who were going to the western regions were originally from the western region, and those who were going to the eastern regions were originally from the eastern regions, three, and I am always in the middle, I am from Hargeisa area.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So the idea was you guys were from those areas so you can negotiate better.

ISMAIL: *Yes. Somebody from here or from Awdal we are not going to send you to the east because you have to know the root of everything. They have to have the custom.*

BENNET: I'm interested in knowing a little bit more about this time period between the district elections and the presidential election because it is very short, yes? This is only a few months between December 2002 and was it March 2003, is that right?

ISMAIL: Yes.

BENNET: So what was happening during that time? What was the commission doing during that time? There must have been this initial election and then lots to learn from that initial election and then in just a short period of time was the presidential.

ISMAIL: *We knew that the second election would be contested very furiously, very very intensity in that election, then the presidential election. Then the other thing because of the time constraint, we have to prepare everything on time. So it was like working day and night, literally working day and night.*

*Immediately after that election, in January, we started the next election, preparing for the next election and we did not rest a day. I remember, for the last one month in the presidential election, just before the presidential election, I had a small mattress in the commission. My home is not far, just 3 km from the commission, but still I had a mattress to sleep there. The whole time I was there. Because, you know, most of the time, the regions are calling, for this, for that, for this, whether it is communication, whether it is transportation, whatever is there. The offices are calling.*

*So there should be somebody who can be a decision maker in there. I was there for that month. It is like, the other thing was like, whenever they call and they need something, my job was that they have to get it in the next 24 hours, otherwise we will be delayed. You know, the men are usually a bit—"I'm going here, I'm there." Maybe women are more -- take a lot of responsibility. My fear was that we will fail.*

*On my shoulders is that. I have to call them. "Are you awake? Come on, come in. There is this problem, we have to do this."*

WOLDEMARIAM: You're really taking care of the logistics.

ISMAIL: *The logistics that they should have and also with the fundraising, at least, going to Nairobi and crying over them. "We have to succeed, we want to do some kind of democratization of this nation."*

*Because, for one thing, the southerners had to look upon us. Puntland the same. If we fail in Somaliland, Somalia will fail. I used to say that. This is our opportunity. We have to show that we can do. We have to build. We built it already but we are going in the right direction and be part of the world. So I was like—. In fact, that period was so intense that the group who was also working with us, who were the consultants, four of them—there were two before, but there were four again, they were all also working.*

*I remember an American guy, he is called Jerry, he is the head of—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Jerry McCain?

ISMAIL: Yes.

WOLDEMARIAM: We know him.

ISMAIL: *He is great and his wife Elizabeth, the group, the guy from Denmark, he was also a very nice guy, a guy who was also, left Somaliland. He was kicked out from Somaliland, I didn't want to use that word, but he was a great guy also. He was from [Organization name-indecipherable] professional lawyer, constitution*

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*lawyer. That group, they did good. I remember the last few nights, we had in Sanaag, which is the other side of Somalia, the boxes should reach in that time. If they don't reach in that time then we have a big problem.*

*We were late for a few hours and I remember, we anticipated that we would be late in that region. I remember that night Jerry had a shirt and tie and everybody was—he and his wife, we were all inside the big store and packing and packing and packing and loading, packing and loading and sending. They left the middle of the night. I reached there about 9 in the morning. It was 12-hour drive from here to Sanaag.*

*By the time I left there it was 10 p.m. and 9 a.m. I reached there and I had to start all over again. I didn't sleep that whole day. The next one 4 o'clock I was right there. I was like a plastic, I was not feeling my body I swear to God. So you see, it was, unlike this commission here. They hear that they start with training, they have funding, enough funding. They had the expertise through the international community. They had practically --. But for ourselves it was different, it was in another era of proving something, trying to prove something. Because of the sensitivity of the ground.*

*Also democracy, with democratization, who wants to be a democrat. This is a foreign word, this is a western word. So it was like—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: In this period were there people—I mean who were the people who were trying to—I don't want to say sabotage the process, but were there people who didn't who weren't really in favor of these elections? Were there people who didn't like the idea?

ISMAIL: *Very much so, the South, yes the Somalians. They would fail, they will fight, they will fail and fight.*

*So at least if something is, we are in a very tight position, immediately the elders, the religious groups, the business people, everybody will intervene. They will immediately call for a meeting and they will form a committee and that committee will be talking to this group, talking to this group, pushing with us. So it was not a glory for the commission, the first commission, the third commission. It was a glory for all Somalilanders. Every Somalilander when it comes so tight, in a very difficult position, they will travail. They will say this is not working, let's sit together and see what we can do. So they will be negotiating, a lot of negotiating with people.*

*There in the nights in September last year. We had a problem. There was a bit of with the Somaliland government and Kulmiye. So we were in a very tight situation, the 15<sup>th</sup> of September I think. We were in a very, very tight position. As a Somaliland ruler who thinks this will fail. But a lot of negotiations and a lot of people were trying hard. [Inaudible]*

BENNET: Can you give us an idea of what it was like on election day in 2003 with the presidential election? What was the general public's mood and what were you as the commission doing that day? What was the process of voting and then counting the votes? How long did it take with the results? It is such a close election, can you give us an idea of what happened?

ISMAIL: *It was so close. In fact, you know, the best thing we did was as commissioners at that time, we set separate dates for the different political parties, specifically when they will campaign. We said Kulmiye will campaign this day, tomorrow the*

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*other one will campaign, the third day, UDUB. Because, if they campaign all at the same day, you never know what they will do now. What we said is every political party has a day. That day the other political parties should not be seen at all, at all. No flags, nothing. We were very strict with that.*

*And the police, the three commanders of the police who worked with us plus the commander of the military, they were all. They did a great job. That was a plus for us. But you can imagine, every political party in the same room would be we are winners, we are winning, they are talking to people.*

*There is a custom and a kind of custom in this country. Today everyone will come out for their political party and they are coming to listen. Each political party will take all these people who will be voting, these people come out for them. But it is, somehow, you know, everyone wants to listen to what each political party is saying because it is something new. People will be standing there and they said they will be doing this thing. They will be paving the way with gold, they will be doing this, they will be this, this. People usually come out, the used to come out for listening. But the last seven days were so, so very, very hectic because each political party will be saying so-and-so did so-and-so in that area. You have to call, you have to come. No, they did that, no, they said this. The last one was a bit tense, I went to Britain twice, three times. I went two times to London, one time to Britain to bring the ballot papers. I was the only one they trusted—not trust, but at least I had a passport.*

BENNET: To bring the ballots over there?

ISMAIL: *Yeah, there were three other guys who had a British passport but I had a American passport so it was easy for me also to travel. But somehow they said you have to go. Maybe they trusted me.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So they brought in big containers?

ISMAIL: *Yes, by flight two from—.*

BENNET: And they wanted it to be printed outside of the country?

ISMAIL: *Yes, because you never know. If you bring machines they will not be trusted. So also when I went they all trusted, the three political parties. Luckily the design was there, a very good design. It was expensive. A very good design, which had security features. Six security features on each election, different security features. So we had to—if somebody tries to duplicate it, do something illegal, we had that, we have to look and see those features.*

*The company, the British company that we were working with was a great company, really a great company. They were giving us a lot o, since it was, we were new, they were giving us lots of security advice, what to do. I stayed there at least seven days to see until the last—we were also showing, we were not telling the features but we were showing the political parties every time. Do you agree with this? Do you want to change anything? Is this—*

*So every time I was consulting with Mustafa. Mustafa reviewed it and he would send it back and we would sent it and would send it, and finally until they said that's the last of them we don't print—.*

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*Iran was before and it was like—I know Iran and other African countries, they were printing in the same week. So it was amazing also to see, you know [inaudible].*

WOLDEMARIAM: Were you expecting how close, was the commission expecting how close this election would be? Because Kulmiye I think doubled its vote share almost from the district elections to the presidential. I mean it really improved its vote share. Were you expecting—?

ISMAIL: *No we were not. Not really expecting. This maybe, Kulmiye we were expecting maybe Kulmiye would come out, that expectation was that. But we know the government was also, they had a strong base, a literally strong base. At least the thing that, it was a shock, practically, literally a shock to us when Mustafa gave out the papers and I looked at it and I say 80 votes, it was right. We are training. In Africa an 80. I have seen the United States like four or five in Virginia somewhere, there's a difference very close. I never imagined in here it would be, you know. So we thought something was wrong.*

*You know, if somebody wants us to do some kind it is only in the polling station, if some kind of fraud is happening, it is in that area. But all the way, whatever, you know, comes from there. I'm passing the region, the district, coming all the way to. Finally after calculations and calculations it is 80. The IT people were like, they were looking at our faces. Then we said why don't—we can't announce this immediately. We sat together, we said no, you can't announce it. You have to look back, you have to go back and check again.*

*We checked it and rechecked it and rechecked it and it is 80. Then who is going to tell to Kulmiye that you lost by 80 votes? Who? I was like, I swear to God I was like shivering. Then there was also—people were expecting the media was there, everybody was there, we have to announce it. Then when we announce it, nothing, they were like—people were like "What's happening in there?" People were asking, "What's happening?"*

*Then we have to sit again together. I know that today that at least six from the parliament were saying, at least we have to postpone the elections. The reason for announcing the results, three or four days because there was a grievance card came from all the political parties. They were not happy with one box, two boxes that were canceled. We have cancelled 14 boxes which belonged to Hargeisa.*

BENNET: He canceled it, what were—

ISMAIL: *They were agreed, it as some kind of—*

BENNET: Something was wrong.

ISMAIL: *UDUB were saying those were our boxes or our constituents area, you know the people who were following them in that area. So those boxes were from a certain area which UDUB was expecting to win in a landslide. And they were cancelled because of some problems and UDUB were literally on the top of two boxes. They went to the parliament and submitted a grievance and six top parliamentarians came to us, the chair people and vice chair and all. They came. They were telling us to look into those boxes because the UDUB were complaining, literally complaining.*

WOLDEMARIAM: But nobody knew the results at this time.

ISMAIL: *Nobody. We said, if we postponed it then another one will come up, another party will come up with another problem and then they will go. And this will be a cycle. So we have to say this is it, it is counted, it's counted. We were literally expecting the counting to be finished at 6 o'clock, 4 o'clock in the morning. It ended at 4.*

BENNET: This is right after the election day?

ISMAIL: *No, it was seven days later.*

BENNET: You received the results, the 80 votes, seven days later.

ISMAIL: *From each region, but we were looking to the general.*

BENNET: It is now seven days after.

WOLDEMARIAM: So tell me, how did you guys break this to Kulmiye, that they had lost the election? How did you go about doing it?

ISMAIL: *And in the morning Kulmiye were thinking that they are the winners, that was another problem. They were literally celebrating in many parts of the country, in many areas. It was a shock to all of us. We said, "You know, this is it. If we don't say it, this is the result, then we will be doomed and the country will be doomed. Whatever comes out, this is the result."*

*We sat together, seven of us only. Then we said, if we don't say it people will say we have done something or we have taken some bribe, or somebody came to us or this or that. We have to say it, it's the truth, it's the truth. This is it, 80, 80.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So you announced it publicly.

ISMAIL: *Yes, the media were there. In the morning the whole city of Hargeisa was in front of the commission. When we looked outside and said, this is ridiculous, it is specifically Kulmiye, people were outside. Both, the two big political parties, the people were there literally. They said, tomorrow, we won't leave this building alive. So we said we would postpone it until this afternoon. Two o'clock somehow, there was no cloud, nothing. God was protecting us I think, no clouds in the sky at the end of the day. Two o'clock somehow there was heavy rain, literally heavy rain. We were so relieved.*

WOLDEMARIAM: The crowds had to go.

ISMAIL: *They had to disperse.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Otherwise there could have been a riot.

ISMAIL: *Could have been a riot. We looked, only a few people were sitting under trees. We called the media by the phone, come now, come now, come now. They came, wet, drenched. We said, look into this, look into this, these are the results. They said, "No." We said, "Yes, these are the results." We said, "The results were distributed, the papers." We said, "Everybody should go as fast as they could to their own areas, and then we went home.*

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*To my surprise the next morning I was the only one who came to the office and I was like, "Where's everybody." They said, "You have to go to your-- don't come until tomorrow, at least two or three days."*

*Then Adami was talking to Kulmiye, they said something happening with this and then Adami said, "You know what, this is it, this is what happened." Nobody, there were no fraud, nothing. Because the difference was, to my imagination, the difference was the boxes that were canceled.*

BENNET: If those would have gone to UDUB, the margin would have been larger if they had cancelled those.

ISMAIL: Yes, at least 10,000 votes, 8-10.

WOLDEMARIAM: Why did Kulmiye, why did they think they were going to win the election, why were the expectations so high, why did they think. There was no polling beforehand of course. So why did they—

ISMAIL: *Because Ahmed is a great man. He has done quite a lot for the country, the current President. He was, is chairman of SNM at that time, he was one of the guys who built this nation. So it was not like two or three people who are unknown running. He had a broad base and people were supportive. But still, there were some people who were supporting the government or thinking that maybe this time should give it to Awdal, the guy who is from Awdal, from a minority and Somaliland will be—people will see us as Somaliland, not an Isaaq kind of state. Also the parliament, the head of the parliament was from Sool so they were trying to balance hopefully. I think.*

*There were so many people who were thinking that maybe it is better for this guy to continue for another five years. But it was a shock to us and something they have to accept it. The other people will say you have to accept it. If you don't accept that Kulmiye—they were thinking there was some kind of fraud, but Adami who is a supporter of Kulmiye—most of us they were saying, they are supporting, the government was saying they were supporters of Kulmiye.*

*But to be frank we were very near trouble. Looking back at that time, we were very near trouble because we were very new and we were thinking we had to be neutral. You lose the credibility if you are—people say he is with that or she is with that.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So Adami himself, was he SNM?

ISMAIL: *Who?*

WOLDEMARIAM: Adami.

ISMAIL: *No, Adami, he was not SNM.*

WOLDEMARIAM: But he was an SNM supporter.

ISMAIL: *Some people from the Haarti they support UDUB. They used to say he was a Kulmiye supporter. And UDUB used to say all of us are Kulmiye supporters. Some of Kulmiye would say, some of us were but Adami is a minister now.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Minister of Defense.

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BENNET: Given that credibility issue, how did you, as being so new, this new commission, without a lot of experience, what gave you legitimacy and authority in the eyes of these people as you were announcing this close result. I mean, it seems that without a lot of election experience it is just seven people—what makes you special compared to everyone else? Why did you have authority?

ISMAIL: *In fact, the authority, from the beginning the authority came from the election law. So the election law was read all Somalilanders. They knew their election and they are independent. The word independent election commission was in their mind. So every time we exercised something we have to remind them that we are independent. We are not with the government, we are not with the political party, we are an independent unit. We have our own saying.*

*The other thing is that because we have been in the court and because we have sworn, what you call, when you put your hand on the tome of the Koran that you are, you have taken responsibility, you have to be fair. Fairness should be there. It will come to you, whatever you do it will come to you, that is what we believe.*

BENNET: Right.

ISMAIL: *So as a Muslim, if you do something wrong it will come to you or it will come to your family, it won't leave you. When you take the Koran like this. So we were in the court.*

BENNET: And what was the impression of the election law. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the law?

ISMAIL: *There were a lot of strengths. There were also gray areas. Those gray areas, when you look back into the constitution and it is not clear, then you go back to the parliament and inform them of the problem. Then we sit together and we say this is the best way possible to manage. There are a lot of issues that we managed that were not in the election law. Sometimes it is in the gray area.*

BENNET: Do you have examples of some—?

ISMAIL: *One of the gray areas was, for example, one of the gray areas was also damage to our work in fact. It is like when the party agents should be there, the three party agents should be there, they have to sign at the end of the counting.*

BENNET: At the polling stations?

ISMAIL: *At the polling stations. If one is missing, if one or two are missing, even if they were there in the morning, at noon, at the evening. If they were there the whole time and they missed that last chance of signing then it is not on board. And that was bad because so many people were standing on queue and stand for a long, long time, you know they were in the queue and at the end if you say they did not sign and that box is canceled, it was very bad.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So there was nothing in the law to meet that?

ISMAIL: *Yes, that was one great mistake. Yes, and ten boxes, more than fourteen boxes were gone like that.*

BENNET: [inaudible]

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ISMAIL: *Yes, because the guys were not there. They were there in the morning, at lunch, in the evening, but at the end of signing two or three of them were missing so it is like—.*

ISMAIL: *They have been there in the queue the whole the morning and then the paper was canceled because somebody who just left. It was very unfair, but we could not help it, there was nothing—.*

BENNET: And these were things that you tried to improve in 2005?

ISMAIL: *Yes, we drove it in the next one, the next election.*

ISMAIL: *They came in the morning, signed, there is one, he could sign and that's it. Their responsibilities with the group with the other group were there.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Before we move to the parliamentary election the one thing we've heard about in some of our other conversations was the unity, you can dispute, if you disagree with this that's fine, that the unity of the commission was really important. When you told people the results you had a united front, there was no person on the commission saying I disagree with it.

I don't know if you could comment on why the commission was so united, why you were able to speak with one voice, why you seem to have been able to get along? Were there any disputes within the commission that were relevant?

ISMAIL: *Yes, in fact, when we came in we had written a paper. We have agreed on certain points. We said this is the paper we are going to work with.*

WOLDEMARIAM: From the beginning?

ISMAIL: *Yes, from the beginning, among ourselves. We asked ourselves, what should we write in here? How will we work together? Who is going to be the chairperson, how should we nominate the chairperson.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So the chairperson was nominated by you guys.

ISMAIL: *Yes, by us, among us. First, in the beginning we said it should be rotated, every three months somebody else should be the chairperson. Then in the first two we said this is not working. People will be confused. People who deal with the new chairperson is starting all over again, why don't we just give it to Hajj Adami who was the eldest at the time. Not eldest—*

BENNET: The most senior?

ISMAIL: *The most senior. Why don't we give it to Hajj Adami so we gave it to Hajj Adami. We wrote an agreement among ourselves saying this is number one, how we are working together and whoever does something wrong, the first, he will be given a warning, the second time, the third we will be writing to the President saying we can't work with this guy because of one or two or this lady because of one or two or three.*

*We had that agreement from the beginning. Every time you have to look back. The other thing we agreed was whenever we can agree we can do it with consensus, whatever we can reach on consensus will be our priority. If it comes to voting, that should be the last option that we will vote for something. As far as I remember well, we only voted three times.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Really?

ISMAIL: *Yes for that almost six years we only voted three times. The rest was consensus.*

WOLDEMARIAM: And the chairman facilitated the consensus.

ISMAIL: *Yes, he is the one—but most of the time four or five of us will be more or less on the same ideas. If one or two say something, then we have to vote, the others. So the best thing was that from the first day, the first three months, we tried to know each other. Even the first day when we came to the parliament to be briefed, after the deputy briefed nobody was talking and I was the one who said, “Can we introduce ourselves to each other.”*

BENNET: So none of you guys knew each other.

ISMAIL: *Maybe some of them knew each other but to me they were all new. I said, can we introduced ourselves and our background at least. They were like, the lady when we went back today, the lady immediately said, can you tell your background and where are you from and all that. Look at the civil society people. It was like everybody was quiet and I said, “Can we introduce ourselves?” I’m so-and-so and I’m from that organization. Then everybody started. It was like ice-breaking. We were all laughing at one of our fellow colleagues who was starting from when he was young and he was looking after his cattle, he’s from the west, from Gabile. He started from when he was young rearing the cattle and promoting to this and that. It was ice-breaking. After that we set an agenda.*

*We said tomorrow will be an election. At that time Adami was not there, but six of us were there, we said tomorrow is an election day, we have to postpone it. That is the first letter we drafted and gave to the secretary who was working with the parliament she typed it for us, in fact it was a he, he typed it for us and we sent it to the radio, Hargeisa radio, for the 2 p.m. announcement on the news. It went out very well and everybody was like, “What are you going to do?” “What is this?” “What’s that?” “What’s a commission.”*

*You know as a women also, being a Somalian, you just, can’t talk when you are with men. You can’t be very open. You can’t—I was always the last one to talk after I listened to all of them. When it is my turn I can say something and if they disagreed with something then I was the only -- all the time trying to bring them together. If somebody goes out, go after them, please come back. Then say to the rest of the staff, “Go, you are off today.” You know, if the discussion is very heated we don’t want anybody around to listen to us. Sometimes we used to lock the front door and take the key after I say nobody is going out. So it was like—.*

BENNET: That’s very interesting. The breakdown between the clans in the commission was pretty broad based, was that correct?

ISMAIL: Yes.

BENNET: With Isaaq and non-Isaaq, there was both, correct?

ISMAIL: Yes, very well done.

BENNET: As I understand it, the three-party system was created, in some sense, to try and break it away from just this traditional clan structure.

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WOLDEMARIAM: And to have too many parties.

BENNET: When we move to the 2005 elections, what are some of the transitions that happen? I mean, it seems that there is a reassertion of the clans in some sense. What were some of the issues involved with the period between 2003 and 2005 as you started to draft—I mean as parliament started to draft this new election law. What were some of the challenges with getting that law passed?

ISMAIL: *I think it was a challenge literally. That law, I don't know, somehow, why they in fact moved from the law that we had for the local election. The parliamentary elections were, I could say, there were a lot of things that were done not the right way I could say. It was like going back into the clan system. It is saying that the political parties had their party list and they were the people who were responsible for item number one, number two, number three, number four. And if number one is so-and-so tribe number two is so and so tribe. It was like a balance kind of. But this was like, you are on your own.*

*Each one, people are not rich in this country. When somebody is running for parliament he has to spend a lot of money. He is not getting there and they are also not getting some kind of funds from their people. It is like the parliamentarians, the person who is running should spend a lot. If you spend a lot, who is going to help you, it's your own tribe only. Somebody from your tribe will be giving you some money. Who is backing you? That was bad.*

BENNET: So there was lots of clan money?

ISMAIL: *Yes, they were supporting with cash, the clan, so many things. That was not good. If the party, the previous one party was supporting a lot of people, it was a party system and you are affiliated with that party. When you are that tribe, you are that tribe, you are affiliated with this and they will be supporting you. But if your family is supporting you, you are working for your family, you are from that family. And that was what we were trying to move from. But in the parliamentary elections we went back a step I could say. But it happened like that. I hope these coming elections should give weight to the political party so it should be more, it should not be any more on a clan basis kind of system. It was difficult. So many parliamentarians and everybody spending money, selling the house, selling this and this. At the end we lost them.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Do you understand the parliamentary election law?

BENNET: Yes.

ISMAIL: *Yes, it wasn't like that. I was not impressed.*

BENNET: Maybe you can explain, while we're talking about it, some of the details of the law.

WOLDEMARIAM: *Yes, we want to make sure we understand the law properly.*

ISMAIL: *Well, if I say, I can't—.*

BENNET: As far as the commission was concerned.

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ISMAIL: *It was a law that was saying—the law was saying, it is the political party, people should, they were not in a list. It is like the political party will say so-and-so will be from our political party. So-and-so will come from us.*

BENNET: For each district.

ISMAIL: *For each district. So it is not—they don't have that number, you are number one, you are number two, you are number three, no. It is like, okay, ten of them are running from the same tribe, ten of them are running from one tribe. One will be coming out or none of them are coming out, because it will go deep into to the sub, sub, sub clan. Each sub clan will have one. Instead of having one or two that they can support. Some of them, the big, big, big tribes, there are no parliamentarians they have at the moment, they have none, because four or five of them were running and they were going down, down, down.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Prior to this it was the party who—?

ISMAIL: *Yes, the party was giving the list. So they were just thinking okay, so-and-so will have one, so-and-so will have one second. Number one will be from that tribe, number two will be from a different tribe, number three from different, number four will be—. It is not like five or six from the same tribe will be run from a party, no. In each district, each sub-district.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So this new law encouraged clan—?

ISMAIL: *It literally encouraged. People were losing and losing left and right. Whoever had money, really money to campaign was coming out.*

BENNET: What were some of the things the NEC learned from 2003 and tried to improve for 2005? I mean you mentioned the signing at the polling stations.

ISMAIL: *Each one had its own, each election had its own problem. In the last election people were using, the ballot paper we were using had symbols and the name of the person, a symbol. That symbol probably somebody will have a fan, somebody else will have a comma somebody else will have this, somebody will have this. A tribe that has so many running for and so many symbols, people got confused.*

*Each person should spend so much money and so much time to educate the people on his symbol. Yours will be a sparrow so look for the sparrow. Yours will be a container, look for that kind of container, milk container. Somalians have something called deel which is a milk container. Deel, mine will be deel, so you have to look for this. So it took a lot of time and effort for the voters' education. They were literally educating the people on their own, it took a lot of time.*

BENNET: What were some of the things that were done to educate the people? It was the parties who were doing this?

ISMAIL: *No, the parties were doing their own at the same time the commission was doing it.*

BENNET: So what were some of the programs that you did to help educate the people?

ISMAIL: *There were two kinds, one was voter education and the other was general civic education. That it is your responsibility to go out and vote. The other was like, the*

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*civic education was your rights and your right as a citizen and your responsibilities as a citizen. That was one.*

BENNET: This was classes or was there video?

*ISMAIL: In the media, a lot in the media and a lot on drama, on plays, different kinds of education. Voter education was specific. This is how you vote, coming from there, going to the booth, taking the paper, and that. They themselves, the parliamentarians, they did quite a lot also. When you come in you do this, mine is this. So it was a very good program. The program set was a good program, but how far it reached was another question because Radio Hargeisa was only reaching certain areas. It wasn't reaching all of the country and we had no money to hire the BBC or Voice of America. But we were depending on people who were going there, to remote areas and giving the civic education. There were a lot of posters, a lot of material.*

BENNET: Sure.

*ISMAIL: Visual aid material.*

BENNET: Who was staff at this point? How large was the staff that the NEC was employing before the election?

*ISMAIL: A lot, a lot of staff, thousands of people were working, thousands.*

BENNET: And you had to train them.

*ISMAIL: We had to train them. The training, at the beginning when we set the training material, there were experts who were working with us from the EU. We set together, in Somali context, you have to develop everything differently to have our own context. So we set the context together. Most of the training took in the university, Burao University, Hargeisa University. At the same time the people who were working for us were mostly young guys who were from the universities as well as the government people. The Minister of Education was also one of our partners, the teachers were also our partners.*

*We wanted people who were responsible that you can teach. Some things happen in a certain area that you can say, they're from that university. You have to know their background, the people who are hired. The first election was a learning experience. The two others it was, like, specific, we have to have that kind of people.*

BENNET: I know, we don't want to take up too much more of your time. Just a couple of quick questions. Voter registration is a big challenge, how did you deal with this challenge, particularly given that these are the initial elections and some of the areas are very remote. What were some of the challenges that you faced?

*ISMAIL: In fact the challenge is—it is in the election law that we have to conduct registration. In our time, we tried our best but we did not succeed in time. People were taking thousands—each one was taking hundreds of cards and the system was not a system. This is a computerized system. Ours was like giving the card and they would be coming back to you again and saying—in the same area they might be taking two, three, four. The people also, they had misconception about registration at all. It is the kind of consensus. People are—my tribe is bigger than yours or we are more than you. So to show that people were thinking now in the election you have to be more. The people who are trying to support should come*

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*out faster than that. So people had so many misconceptions about the registration. In fact we stopped it in the first one week. We said this is not working.*

BENNET: So what year was it that you—?

*ISMAIL: The flood was so much that we could not control it. We had some kind of small problems when we were, during the election. People were not registered but comparing to this it was immense so we stopped it and said this isn't working.*

BENNET: Right.

*ISMAIL: But we set the whole thing before we left. In fact we set the whole program, the registration program with the experts who were with us. When we left, we left the whole system there and left. The next commission they did not succeed halfway, they left. Then the third commission, they did their part also. But in Somaliland, you know what we need is, if we want to clean the system, we have to have a very clean, effective system that, like in the US. You only vote once, that day. You can't go and vote in another—use the card. We need some kind of system which can clean—be clear.*

BENNET: So what safeguards were put into place to try to prevent fraud? If there was no voter registration what was—?

*ISMAIL: It was the announcement, we announced that if you were caught twice you would be in jail for two years. So that was very strict, very, very strict. We are not kidding, we said. We will put you in jail if you are caught.*

*There were also so many, we had the testers. You had some kind of an ink that showed somebody added a vote. In certain areas people should see you, you have certain equipment to look at. So we had big glasses, kind of glasses and you put it on the top and you say oh, they have something to look at you, don't do it. Come, come, sometimes when I'm going around I will say, you two, come here.*

BENNET: With a magnifying glass.

*ISMAIL: Yes, they would say no and they will leave, it happened to me in [Indecipherable place name]. I had that, you two, please come here.*

WOLDEMARIAM: So it wasn't that it was effective but people thought it was effective.

*ISMAIL: It will show you that a kind of had voted already. You say come here—and they say no, no, no, we were just talking to the people, we were not in the queue and they will leave, they will tell the other people don't go to that polling station they have equipment.*

*But what we were expecting also, we have to limit the—we will have the time also to say you have from 6 to 6 p.m. so many minutes that each person can vote. You have so many people in that location, the probability 720. Give and take, if they are fast, 900, we'll put 900 in the box. Beyond that we'll say it's empty. Usually we used to say after three, people come back, but the first, up to 3 p.m. there would be a line but after 3 p.m. or 4 they might come back.*

BENNET: In a lot of the countries we work, they face a lot of similar problems and challenges. If you were to write a handbook for this period of time from 2002 to

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2005, your time in the commission, what would you include in it? What are some of the lessons that you learned in your time as a commissioner?

*ISMAIL: I'm wondering if there is any country like Somaliland? I doubt. In this whole world, I think, because although we are trying our best we are not as sensible here also. So what would I say, the law should be very clear. It should be followed directly, the law should be. The constitution, it should be clear in the constitution, it should be clear in the laws. The other thing is the people who will be the commissioners they should be very fair. They should be fair.*

*One of our best things, as a group, even if we were broke, we didn't have a penny, we will never ask a penny from anyone. If the office is zero, we don't take anything. It is like sitting there and trying not to favor, not to favor anybody.*

*The other thing is the staff. They should be trained well, they should be trained well.*

BENNET: What would you include in the training? What is important in the training?

*ISMAIL: People should be—their background should be looked at, the people you are literally sending and being judges, who are judging, you should know their background, very important. As an election commission you have to trust each other. Trust is number one. You have to trust each other.*

BENNET: I'm interested in your impressions of any efforts that were made during this transition from the first to the second commission, and your impression of the second and the third commission [loud noise] recent election given your expertise.

*ISMAIL: Can you say that again.*

BENNET: Sorry, the second commission and the third commission, I know they have a lot of different qualities. Given your expertise, I was interested in your impressions of them and of the 2010 election as well.

*ISMAIL: First of all as commissioners we're used to listening to what people are saying, to what the government is saying, to what the political party says. We have to listen to parliamentarians, we have to listen and analyze that. The second commission, I don't know if you're aware, but the first commission, being the first commission after we finished our five years, we were not good with the President. We had to leave the office after the five years. There were somehow the government did not like us to come back because of those fourteen boxes. They were thinking that we did not do well. That's my assumption, what I hear from different people also who were close to him.*

*But, and we were literally not taking many orders from the government. We were very strict, being neutral, very, very neutral. So when we left, we finished our term, we wrote a letter to the President saying you need the new commission to be nominated. So if someone of us wants to stay as a commissioner for the next term, at least three people were willing to stay. But he said your term has ended and it is my responsibility to be the primary responsibility to nominate the others. We'd like you to give us the keys when you leave.*

*We tried our best to say we have the documents, we have everything. We need commissioners to come in maybe tomorrow, maybe in two months time, you never know. And he said no, we'll be responsible. He in fact nominated the few*

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*people who can take care of it. They went and they took over. They didn't take over from us. They went there, closed everything.*

*I was at that time coming from the States and I was in transit to Dubai coming back here. In the morning when I came here they told me that the whole area was closed. We were driving like four or five cars that belonged to the commission that were small cars. They said we have to bring all the cars in. I had mine. They took also the numbers from us the numbers in the phone. My phone was paid usually by Candle Light because I used it for both so it was paid by Candle Light.*

*In the morning when the driver did not come to the airport somebody told me at the airport that the cars were collected. Candle Light cars were sent to me there to the airport and that was it. I never, never went back to the government, to the presidential building. I went back once I think to the commission and that day I was given our experience and challenges to the new commissioners, to this commission, 2010. I was presenting a paper.*

BENNET: But not to the second.

ISMAIL: *Not to the second because they were told by the government not to associate with us. They were thinking that if you associate with them, then they will be for Kulmiye or something because they were pro-government mostly.*

WOLDERMARIAM: When you were selected was Egal still alive?

ISMAIL: *He was still alive, he was alive and I remember because once we visited him in the office and he was complaining about his ministers that they are not doing a good job and all that and I had that mentality of the US. I said, if the Minister is not doing his job why don't you just sack him? He said, yes, you come back from America I heard? I said yes. He said, it's not so easy as you think. You have that, if the guy is not doing his job why is he there I was saying. He was thinking, he was balancing tribal and this and that. It wasn't easy.*

BENNET: Of course. Thank you so much for your time, is there anything else we left out that is important to include?

WOLDERMARIAM: Is there anything you'd like to say?

ISMAIL: *One thing is, we had taken a multi-party system and I'm always, in case we want to be, to fulfill our obligation to be a democratic nation and be with the democratic people on earth, we have to, since we have built from the ground, we have to really maintain, we have to maintain. In order to maintain we have to work with the international community. The international community should look at Somaliland in a different way because we are an example to the Horn I could say, whether it is Djibouti, whether it is Ethiopia, you know, we are trying our best as a nation to be a democratic nation.*

*So maybe I don't know if you will see one day, the State Department if you, you know—maybe you could tell them, this is what we are trying to do. If this is not built from the ground, it will collapse, it will literally collapse. Since you have so many forces around us at the moment, so many different forces. We are fragile still, we are not strong, as we should have been. It is just twenty years now. We are trying our best. I am here for fifteen years. I am looking back and seeing, thinking where I myself started from in a number of IDPs. Today at least sitting here. We have come a long way.*

*At some point you will be tired if not supported from different sides.*

BENNET: Thank you so much for your time, we really appreciate it.