



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of  
the National Academy of Public Administration,  
and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs  
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,  
Princeton University*

Oral History Program

Series:

Governance Traps

Interview no.:

U5

Interviewee: Adan Yusuf Abakor

Interviewer: Richard Bennet and Michael Woldemariam

Date of Interview: 25 October 2010

Location: Hargeisa  
Somaliland

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[www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties](http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties)

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WOLDEMARIAM: This is October 25<sup>th</sup> in Hargeisa, Somaliland. We have the pleasure of being here with Dr. Aden Yusuf Abakor who is country representative for Progressio, a one-time member of the Hargeisa Group and someone who is incredibly well versed in Somaliland's recent history. So if we could begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your own personal background, your personal story, your education.

ABAKOR: *I'm from Hargeisa, I was born here, but I grew up in Aden. It was a British colony at that time, it is now considered to be a part of Yemen. I had -- my schooling was in Aden in a Roman Catholic mission school. I finished my high school, I went to Europe, especially to Warsaw, Poland where I studied medicine. I graduated from Warsaw. And from there I returned to Somalia for the first time and worked as a medical doctor in Mogadishu. After working in Mogadishu, I was transferred to Hargeisa Hospital here, which was the place where my relatives and parents lived. And after some time I became the director of Hargeisa Hospital.*

*Being the director of Hargeisa Hospital, it was a time in late '90s or 1980 when the government oppressed the people from the north. They looked at the people of the north -- that they were somehow rebellious, or rebelling against the government or resisting the government rule. So there was a lot of oppression as far as the north is concerned.*

*The north, which I mean Somaliland now, but previously was the north of Somalia with Hargeisa being the major urban city. As a result of that we started something called a self-help scheme to improve the situation in the hospital, because the hospital situation was very bad and there was no assistance coming from Mogadishu, from the government. We involved professionals who had just returned from abroad and who came back home to start work or business.*

*Then we had a German Emergency Doctors, an NGO (nongovernment organization) who supported us at that time. In our self-help scheme the hospital improved a lot. As a matter of fact it became one of the best in Somalia. And as a result of that we mobilized the people also to contribute, the businessmen to contribute to the hospital. As a matter of fact, the government, the central government in Mogadishu realized that this is a threat to their system. They realized that if we are trying to create an uprising against the government because we are mobilizing people. They have translated differently, being a dictatorship and a system based on scientific socialism, which never encouraged civil society organizations or people's movements or mobilization of people.*

*They realized that this is a sort of uprising or it might lead to an uprising. So the first thing they did is they arrested twenty of us, including myself, twenty professionals. We were taken after four months of interrogation and torture, we were taken to a show trial which was organized. The court was called security court. Actually it was used for political purposes, taking prisoners of conscience —.*

WOLDEMARIAM: It was outside the normal judicial system?

ABAKOR: *Yes, outside the normal judicial system. It was a system where the government provides you the lawyers, you don't have to talk. You're not even allowed to talk in the courts, you're not questioned at the court. It is only the prosecutor brings, along as key witnesses, those who have tortured or interrogated you as the key witness. Three of us were condemned to death and the rest of us to life sentences. Then as a result of that verdict, because it was in Hargeisa, the*

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*people -- especially students who were near the court -- they started throwing stones, rioting, and there was a general riot in town. And then the army came out. Three students were killed at that time. The protesting, the curfew went for a few days. As a result of that the dictator (Mohamed) Siad Barre at that time intervened and changed the verdict for the three of us who were given the death sentence were changed to a life sentence and the rest of us from 25 to 35 years of imprisonment.*

*As a matter of fact, that was not the worst of the story. The worst of the story is when we were taken from Hargeisa on the pretext that we will be pardoned by the President, that we will be taken to Mogadishu to see the President and then he will pardon us, which is the usual process for people who are in prison. We were taken all of us, the twenty were taken to Mogadishu, but instead of pardoning us or taking us to the prison, we were taken to a prison which is called Labaatan Jirow which is a prison famous for solitary confinement. It was only for prisoners of conscience, only the dictator could give the order to take anybody there or could release anybody from that prison. Nobody else had an authority on that.*

*So we were there in solitary confinement from 1982 until 1989, about seven years, and one year we were in prison here in Hargeisa, so that is a total of eight years. During our imprisonment, of course we knew nothing of what was going on in the world. We didn't even know of the war which took place here in Hargeisa in 1988, where the whole city was bombed and shelled. That information was only available to us after we were released in 1989. We didn't know what happened to our people here and our people were in refugee camps in Ethiopia. We had no information. But we had no information also that the human rights organizations were actually advocating and fighting for our cause. Among them were Amnesty International, African Watch, and the American Academy of Science -- the human rights branch of the American Academy of Science -- they were the most active. They even sent delegations to Mogadishu in 1988 to meet the authorities and to look for us, but of course Labaatan Jirow where we were in prison was not allowed anybody to visit that prison, so they were not allowed.*

*But at the same time the American Academy of Science was putting a lot of pressure on the American government because the American government was dealing with the dictatorship. As a result of the Cold War, the American government was helping Siad Barre at that time. Before that, of course, the Russians were here, the Russians were in Somalia. But as a result of the Somali – Ethiopian war in 1977, there was a shift of Russians going to Ethiopia and the Americans coming to Somalia and dealing with the Somali government and supporting them in terms of arms.*

*Of course, because of the Cold War, the American government was not paying a lot of attention to human rights organizations and to the American Academy of Science, but in 1989 it was coming to an end. At the time of (Mikhail) Gorbachev I think the Cold War was coming to an end, and then the Americans had to put pressure on Siad Barre at that time because I don't think they needed him any more. So as a result of the pressure, the Americans told the dictator that they will stop giving the Somali government the aid, the financial aid, the money unless he releases all the prisoners of conscience in Somalia.*

*As a result of that we were released, and all the other prisoners of conscience were released in 1989 because Siad Barre was really fighting on several fronts. There was the SNM (Somali National Movement), he was fighting against the*

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*SNM. He was fighting also against some other uprisings like the SSDF (Somali Salvation Democratic Front) and of course the Hawiye liberation movement. So he was losing, actually he was in a very tight situation, so he needed the money badly, and that's why he released all the political prisoners in 1989.*

*Now in 1989 when were released, of course when we were brought to Mogadishu, but then that's the moment we found out what was happening either in the north or what was happening in Somalia. We found out that Hargeisa, Berbera and Burao of the major cities of the north were all ghost cities, nobody was there, it was just rubble, Hargeisa, and that all our relatives and everybody here were in refugee camps. So that's the moment we went to Ethiopia to see our people.*

*Of course, by that time everybody—most of us found out who died and who was alive. So at least every one of us lost some people in his family. I lost my father who died while I was in prison, and my elder brother also died here in Hargeisa during the bombing and shelling in 1988. So all that information came to us suddenly. Actually, it was like you just -- with all the suffering and bad experiences we came through during the solitary confinement, I think the shock we had around the news what happened here and what happened to our people actually, almost was sort of—we never thought about what we came through. We started thinking about that situation, the current situation and then what we can do to help our people.*

*At that time we started forming a relief organization in the refugee camps in Ethiopia so that we can start helping the people. So that helped us also to rehabilitate, actually psychologically, and, you know, forget about what happened. But then also we went to Ethiopia also to join the SNM at that time, the Somali National Movement which was at that time very active in Ethiopia. We went around to see the different fighters in different bases. We visited them all. We actually thanked them, because one of the causes which had started this struggle of the SNM was our imprisonment. That's when the first armed struggle started before SNM, in 1981. It was started one year before our imprisonment but it was the only political organization which was having an office in London. But the actual armed struggle started in Ethiopia when we were imprisoned and when the riots took place in Hargeisa.*

*So we went around, and (Ahmed M.Mahamoud) Silanyo at that time, the current president, was also the chairperson of SNM at that time. Actually that's where our story ends and starts the SNM almost two years before the liberation, before this part of the country was liberated, we were there in 1989. I think as all liberation movements, the SNM also had its own problems. It had internal conflict. It had internal conflict between the civilians who were politicians and the military wing, the political wing and the military wing had some sort—. Silanyo had some groups opposing him at that time, mostly the military ones, those who had a military background and those who were of course fighting in the field.*

*Actually it was -- you can say it was sort of -- it was not a liberation movement in the real sense but it was a movement driven by the people. It was different from other liberation movements either in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Zimbabwe or Namibia, it was quite different. The SNM did not have an ideological, a strong ideological belief or vision based on ideological, like other liberation movements in Africa. Some of them were socialists, some of them were communists, some of them were supported by the socialist block in Eastern Europe, some of them were supported by the Middle East. So even though the liberation movement was supported by Ethiopia, as a result of Ethiopia being -- of course your enemy's*

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*enemy is your friend -- being the enemy of Siad Barre at that time because of the 1977 war Mengistu (Haile Mariam), who was also another dictator, was there in Ethiopia, he was not better than Siad Barre.*

*But anyway, he helped the SNM because he saw that the SNM could weaken the regime of Siad Barre, and that was in the interest of Mengistu's regime. But what Ethiopia could provide us as an assist was in terms of arms and finance was limited. So the most -- the support, especially the financial support, and the young people who were fighting were actually coming from the Isaaq, which was the majority. It was clan-based you can say, because it was driven by the Isaaq, which is a major clan now here in Somaliland. There were some few members from other clans fighting as fighters, but the support base was from Isaaq. Isaaq were as diaspora living abroad and Isaaq in the rural areas provided livestock and provided guns and provided young people to fight.*

*So that's why the SNM was more democratic than other liberation movements. Other liberation movements had the problem of having a charismatic leader who controlled everything and who stayed in power until liberation and maybe after liberation also like we see in Eritrea now and Ethiopia and in Zimbabwe, Mugabe and all this. But the SNM was different because it was -- from its beginning it was a democratic entity, a democratic movement where they had conferences. They had a central committee and they had a conference and they elected a new chairman. Maybe Silanyo was the fourth, I'm not sure, fourth chairman at that time. After him there was also a new chairman, Abdirahman (Ahmed Ali Tuur), the first president of Somaliland was also the chairman.*

*As a matter of fact I can relate the democratic process now in Somaliland to the democratic process of the SNM. It is somehow related. The question, when people ask: how can a small entity like Somaliland, which is not internationally recognized and which has not got support can be that democratic? I think the answer I always think about is because the background is the SNM. The SNM had ruled this place for two years and after two years handed over the power to civilians which was when (Muhammad Haji Ibrahim) Egal came to power. That peaceful transfer of power is continuing up to now. This which took place on 27<sup>th</sup> July here is just as a result of SNM's transfer of power. [The 27<sup>th</sup> of July 2010 is the date Silanyo's administration officially took power after elections the previous month.]*

*There was a time when SNM was ruled by religious groups. The chairperson and his nearest collaborators were religious groups.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Was this in the early '80s?

ABAKOR: *Early '80s, yes. But they did not last long because the next election, the power was taken by secular people, people who were secular like Silanyo and all those took over. But even that period when the religious group was there, they did not insist to keep the power, because of the culture that which was there, the democratic culture. People could just vote and vote a new group.*

*So that is the continuation I think of the SNM -- though the previous President, President Riyale was not an SNM President and he was a colonel from the national security of Siad Barre .*

*Apply the same system because the system and the culture was there. The people believed in that democratic system. That's why it continued and it will continue hopefully. I don't see anything this year of some people who are*

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*authoritarian or dictatorship is going to take over. Besides, why the SNM became more democratic is because what they suffered through dictatorship is the hunger, the need they have for the democratic process. That was the process because they were fighting against the system which oppressed them as an authoritarian dictatorship. So they were running away from the oppressor, doing the same thing the oppressor was doing. That was something they were trying to avoid.*

*That's what people here in Somaliland still try to avoid. You can see in the newspapers, anybody who, any government, any regime here who shows some signs of the previous regime of dictatorship you will find it in big letters in the newspaper saying, oh, this is what the previous government in Somalia, Siad Barre used to do. So people became so sensitive about it, that kind of, yes—.*

*Sorry I think I won't continue, no that's—.*

BENNET: I'm interested in this period of time when you first arrived in the Ethiopian refugee camps.

ABAKOR: Yes.

BENNET: About the relationship between the traditional clan-based and sub-clan based system of governance and the SNM authority, and specifically I'm looking at this huge refugee population from Hargeisa that had fled to Ethiopia, about the general service provisions and things like that. I mean, as a doctor you must have been concerned with some of these basic needs. Who is providing this and who is managing the sort of operational end of, and logistical end of tending to these, these people, but also supporting the SNM?

ABAKOR: *Now there are two eras of SNM. The era of SNM which was before the war here in the north, 1988, and the era of SNM after 1988. The era of SNM before 1988, it was a pure organization based on structures and people who are activists and members of that and fighters who were fighting in the first. That means—and people who were supporting either from the diaspora or the local people in Somalia at that time.*

*But by 1988, when everybody left this part of the country in the north and went to the refugee camps the SNM has changed a little bit. They changed because people -- before SNM was fighting to liberate the people, now the people came to SNM. They came to Ethiopia, so the people were with SNM. As a result of that there was an influence of these people who were in refugee camps on the SNM. That means the SNM has taken somehow the shape of clanism also. That means those who were fighting, the units who were fighting were before SNM units. Later, after the 1988, they became sub-clan's units. They took the name of sub-clans because they got a lot of supporters from that sub-clan, young people fighting, and the position where they were actually -- because as you know, even in Ethiopia, part of the Somali region and inside here, every part is settled by certain subclans. There are even borders between them which is invisible borders. So those sub-clans started organizing their units for fighting for SNM against Siad Barre.*

*The other change which took place at that time, that means they were a lot of—which everybody considered it was negative, was that influence of clannism. Before it was pure organizational liberation movement, but then later on a lot of influence—and that brought some friction and some competition and all that. But then later on also, that is the moment also that the Guurti, the elders, were for the*

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*first time formed. These elders who are now here called the House of Guurti were actually formed in Ethiopia by the liberation movement, by SNM. This was after '88, after the war of '88.*

*Those elders who escaped from here and moved to join SNM and started helping us in mobilization and all this. Then they decided to form sort of a Guurti, which is actually the traditional system in the north, not in all Somalia, but in the north since before the British came. We have this traditional system of elders getting involved. But this time they were rather getting involved, not in peace and reconciliation, which is their main mandate now, but here they were rather mobilizing for war, for liberation.*

*So they had two mandates, previously liberation and after the liberation when Somaliland was declared, the same Guurti elders helped with bringing other clans who live in this part of the country, that means the Isaaq of SNM and then you have the Daarood which is a Harti group. Not the whole Daarood but only the Harti, which live here. Then you have the Gadabuursi, a previous President and his clan. So these two clans which are considered a minority in the north, they were not fighting against the Siad Barre, but they were rather friendly with the Siad Barre government.*

*But once the government in Mogadishu collapsed and Siad Barre left, the traditional leaders, the Guurti, have organized a grand conference in Burao to bring everybody together on board, so now their role has changed, from that during the SNM mobilizing people to fight, into now mobilizing people to come together in a grand conference and live together peacefully, you know, coexisting peacefully. That's where the grand conference where everybody signed and agreed that they forget the past. As a matter of fact that also has had its disadvantage, because that's where the impunity came. That's where the impunity came. Those who committed crimes now have got protection under the clan. The different clans in Somalia. So that's where they got the impunity. People can walk on the streets. A person who is known for torturing people, for killing people during the Siad Barre regime can still walk on the streets of Hargeisa without being harmed because they have impunity, they agreed at that grand conference that there won't be any taking people into—.*

*Because if you try to deal with one person then the clans say, "Why, why do you deal with ours? Why don't you deal with others?" because in every clan there were people who committed crimes. There were the people during Siad Barre, because they were part of these systems of security or military or whatever. So there were some military people, colonels and majors and generals and captains who were fighting and shelling the city during the war but later on they can live peacefully here. So they belonged here or they belonged to a certain clan. So that was the difference.*

*As far as services was concerned you are right. The services were provided first because people were in refugee camps and since they are in refugee camps, UNHCR and other organizations, SCF (Save the Children's Fund) and other I-NGOs [international NGOs] were taking care of the people. But in terms of mobilizing themselves, especially the traditional leaders again were active, because every sub-clan has got an aaqil, a chief. Now there is the smallest sub-clan is called a diya-paying group. That is the group which pays the blood money together when somebody is hurt or somebody is killed. Then the compensation money has to—. So that smallest unit is called the diya-paying group. They have got one aaqil. So all these aaqils which are in the British time or in other African countries they call it chief, used to also participate -- during the refugee camps.*

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*All the people were not in refugee camps as a matter of fact, they were also IDPs (internally displaced persons), they were displaced. So they were in the rural areas.*

*Now the difference between Mogadishu in the south and here, urban areas in the north or in Somaliland, is that people here have got relatives in the rural areas who have camels and sheep and all this. So if anything happens and you escape, there is even a civil war here in Hargeisa and people escape, they always have got some people to join in the rural areas who have got their livestock and camels and they can live with them. So not all the people were in refugee camps, some of the people were in refugee camps. Other people live in the rural areas as displaced. By that time, the major cities were ruins, were ghost cities and only the Siad Barre military were around.*

*That means the rest of the country was controlled under the SNM. So people lived peacefully in the rural areas from 1988 up to 1991 when the fall of Siad Barre and the liberation of this part of the country. I hope that answers your question.*

BENNET: It does.

WOLDEMARIAM: So it was basically the clan elders that were providing services.

ABAKOR: Yes.

WOLDEMARIAM: Not the SNM per se.

ABAKOR: No, not the SNM, because the SNM was busy with the liberation movement.

BENNET: But the SNM was the one who—they brought the Guurti together in the first place.

ABAKOR: Yes, yes, they were the ones who brought the Guurti.

WOLDEMARIAM: So it was almost outsourcing these—.

ABAKOR: *Yes, but the SNM also had their own activists and organizers within the refugee camps and within the displaced because they themselves have to mobilize resources and mobilize people to fight. So they had a strong hold also on the refugee camps as well as in the IDPs, the internally displaced people. Well you can say everybody claimed to be SNM, so it is very difficult to say who is SNM, who is not. Once you belong to that clan then you become automatically an SNM. It is not like other liberation movements, where you have certain people belonging to that and the rest, you know, they are just, you know—.*

BENNET: But the core leadership wasn't organizing these services?

ABAKOR: *They had a branch which was a relief branch. But practically I would say it was not very active. It was active in the major cities like Dire Dawa [Ethiopia], that was the base for SNM, or Harar and Dire Dawa and all this. They could raise funds and they could communicate with some of the I-NGOs and UNHCR and all this. But they were not really where the people were gathering, communities and the refugee camps and the IDPs, they were not that really active, they were not that active. For example other liberation movements like—if you look at the Eritrea Liberation Movement had a very, very strong relief branch which is active up to now. They call it ERA, Eritrea Relief Agency, it was at that time called and*

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*still it is active here in Eritrea. The same thing I think the other liberation movements in Ethiopia also had. But the SNM didn't have that strong relief wing of the movement. They were more of fighting and political rather than—. Because they were not prepared for the sudden influx of people. Suddenly a population living in urban areas here within a few days found themselves either displaced or in Ethiopia. So SNM had no experience and no preparation for really helping that number. But in the beginning, when they were settling them down, SNM was helping them. When of course SNM was fighting here. So when the people escaped of course SNM also was going out. So because they knew Ethiopia and they were there earlier, so they were helping people to settle and they were setting them down, because I knew some of them were active SNM fighters but at the same time during the mid '80s when the fighting took place the young people were there, especially those who had some medical background who could really organize. So people were quite active.*

*Later on, I think it was in the hands of the agencies, UNHCR, other agencies and of course every clan had their own traditional leaders who were helping.*

BENNET: And that continued on in 1991? What happened in 1991 when you returned to Hargeisa? Did you immediately go to Hargeisa in 1991?

ABAKOR: *Yes, I was in 1991 in Sanaag region because we had, as an organization, relief organization, we had communication with our previous partner which was called the German Emergency Doctors, who used to help us at the hospital. They sent a ship with relief, with rations and drugs. But at that time the Hargeisa port was still under the Siad Barre forces. So the only liberated port was the one at Sanaag region called Maydh, it is rather far in the east. Then we had a rendezvous there, we had to meet the ship there so we could take the relief and distribute to the people. While we were there, then the liberation already was starting in Hargeisa and Berbera and Sanaag region, all these regions.*

*By the time we left Sanaag with the food and the drugs, already the major cities were liberated and those forces, some of the Siad Barre forces had already left. So we brought some of that food to Berbera, and from Berbera it was distributed. Then from Berbera with the ship there was one German doctor, a woman, and a nurse also and the drugs.*

*So we opened a center also where we had feeding centers for children who were malnourished and in the Sanaag region. Then we moved into Berbera and then into Hargeisa. The day in 1991 we came to Hargeisa together with that German team. The German doctor started crying and I couldn't stop her from crying when we were in Hargeisa. This placed looked like something unimaginable.*

*Then when I asked her why she was crying, then she told me she was four years old during the second world war and she lived in Dresden. She said this place looked worse than Dresden. If you know the history, Dresden was bombed by the Allied forces during the second world war. So that memory came back of this place completely – you know, Hargeisa -- I don't know whether you have seen the picture? Did anybody show you how this place looked?*

WOLDERMARIAM: We're actually looking at the videos, APD. We're going to look at some of them.

ABAKOR: *The place was completely destroyed.*

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WOLDEMARIAM: Can I ask, at this time, you made this rendezvous with the German organization that brought the goods in, was there any coordination going on with the SNM at this level or was this something completely on your own initiatives in terms of getting—?

ABAKOR: *The relief?*

WOLDEMARIAM: Yes, in terms of getting the relief, moving it into these cities and actually conducting the operations.

ABAKOR: *That's—as I mentioned before, ourselves as an organization we were formed at that time, everybody is considered SNM. So whatever work we're doing, we're doing under the name of SNM and they're relying on us. Silanyo, the organization, were relying on us.*

BENNET: They weren't directing you?

ABAKOR: *No, no, no they were not. We considered ourselves as part of them.*

BENNET: Okay.

ABAKOR: *Most of the time that is the strange thing about SNM, that everyone who was doing something was feeling he was doing it on behalf of SNM. These parts of and he was part of the struggle. So this was the commitment from the people. Of course, it is very difficult to organize such a number of people with SNM having very meager resources, limited resources. So the SNM was relying on their own people in terms of organization, in terms of mobilization. It was absolutely something—it is very difficult to separate the two.*

BENNET: Sure.

ABAKOR: *When you ask the question, what are you doing in the name of—it is very difficult to say, everybody, mentally everybody felt he was an SNM and everybody is in the process of struggle, whether you are taking the gun, whether somebody is doing relief or somebody is doing a political campaign. Everybody thought, was under the impression he was doing it for one cause, which is the SNM and the liberation of the country.*

BENNET: So even then the liberation was in your mind as far as an independent Somaliland?

ABAKOR: *Yes. That's another tricky question because it was not part of the vision of SNM and the SNM leadership to announce Somaliland or to secede or to retrieve the independence of 1960. It was not. It all happened as a de facto. It was because of the political situation in the south and because those people announced -- without consulting SNM, they announced the government in Mogadishu, the people who were supported, because the Hawiye clan, which was the --.*

WOLDEMARIAM: United Somali Courts?

ABAKOR: *Yeah. They were helped by SNM. They started late and they were in Ethiopia and Mengistu and his government said, we don't know these people, and then they had to come through the SNM. They were introduced by the SNM. Ethiopia started to help them as a result of being part of the SNM. So one of the things, if you look back into the Eritrean and the liberation and the war, those liberation movements in Ethiopia and Eritrea, though they have that collaboration, in the*

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*end Eritreans had a lot of influence on the liberation of Addis because they were involved also. Also they had a say. But in the case of the SNM helped the Hawiye liberation movement which controlled Mogadishu at that time. They did not consult SNM. They did not wait for the SNM to come and then they said okay, we are here, all the liberation movements -- there was SPU, there were other liberation movements. So let's now sit down and have a dialog how to form this government. -- Bilaterally they just announced a government.*

*That put SNM and the people here in a situation where they said, what's this, are we going to be again ruled by a bunch of groups in Mogadishu, to be again ruled here? Then they organized this grand conference in Burao and then there was a lot of pressure coming from the young fighters who were carrying guns. They were the ones who were demanding rather as the liberation of the Somaliland, the announcement of Somaliland Republic. So it was something which spontaneously happened as a result of de facto what happened in the south and as a result of the whole state of Somalia collapsing. There was no Somali state. So de facto, it came. But actually it was not something in the ideology or in the vision of SNM. The vision of SNM was to overthrow Siad Barre and his regime, not to—.*

**BENNET:** What is your impression of this transition period where the SNM has control for two years? What were some of the challenges involved just from a logistics standpoint? Perhaps you could tell us a little bit about your experience in those two years?

**ABAKOR:** *I think the challenge was that SNM was not prepared to rule. The other liberation movements in other countries, they have practiced this exercise of ruling, of having a structure and ruling the members of the liberation movement or even the people who are with them. They were prepared, they were prepared to take over the country and rule it. The SNM was not preparing for that. It was something that suddenly happened because they were overthrowing Siad Barre, but they were not preparing to really rule the country and take over the power. That's what the challenge which SNM had to face.*

*Suddenly they found themselves from a liberation movement into a government, into an administration which was supposed to rule a country and people. So that's the challenge it actually had. It took over the power and it became the—. The chairman became the President and the central committee became a parliament. Then suddenly there was a lot of mess going on. It was more of a people's movement rather than an organization which had all ... [LOUD BURST OF SOUND SHOULD BE EDITED OUT OF FINAL AUDIO 44:12].*

*So suddenly there was again the clan, the sub-clan conference. Because the problem with clans in Somalia, the clan doesn't stop there, doesn't say, I'm from that clan. It goes down into sub-clan and sub-clan and then the disputes are within the sub-clans.*

*Then there was—the other thing that I'll tell you which was a fact, between Somalia, the south, and the north, why now conflict did not stop in the south and it continues on and why it stopped early here—of course I've mentioned some of the reasons why the conflict, the peace established, took place here, is because there are less resources here in the north than in the south. In the south there are more resources than here.*

*In any fighting going on—I think most of the fighting going on in Africa is mostly about resources. So the only resource we had here when SNM took over was the*

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*port of Berbera where things come in, exports and imports and then there are revenues collected. So the first fighting took place about the port of Berbera between clans. Through the clan that already lived there and settled there in Berbera and of course the President, which also belonged to another clan, is from another. So that's where the first conflict started.*

*Then there was reconciliation. Every time there was fighting, there was a sort of reconciliation process that takes place. But then that reconciliation process was not sustainable. Again another problem starts somewhere else. It was once in Berbera, then again in Burao. But at the same time the traditional leaders or the Guurti were very active to bring that conflict into an end every time.*

*But the agreement was from the beginning that SNM would rule for two years. But those two years, the rule of SNM, was spent on conflict mostly and arrest of disturbances. As a result after two years, then the second grand conference was organized in Borama in 1993 and that's where Egal was again elected. Egal who had nothing to do with SNM, nothing to do with the struggle. He just, simply because of his previous history, being the last prime minister, constitutional prime minister, democratically elected in Somalia.*

**BENNET:** That was actually my next question, which is with all the challenge that Tuur was facing in asserting authority for the government, how did Egal go about trying to build that legitimacy and that authority in the face of the clan system. What were some of the things that he did, and what were some of the first steps that he took to try to break that cycle of fighting and then the reconciliation and then concessions on the part of the government? How did he go about that?

**ABAKOR:** *I think Egal, because of his long experience, he was--you could say he was an expert in clan politics, he knew how to deal with clan politics. He knew how to really bring traditional leaders and clans to join him in his own—he has got his own, an experience which the other ones, even those where were in SNM did not have. The other thing is that once Egal came, the issue of SNM was out of the way. The conflict and everything which were in the division between the SNM were removed. Completely Egal then brought on board the troublemakers, the real troublemakers of the SNM. He put them in his government as ministers. He was very clever to think of that. He looked at the troublemakers who really gave Tuur -- Abdirahman Tuur, the previous President -- trouble. So he just took those troublemakers and he put them in the cabinet.*

*Everybody was surprised and everybody who advised him -- including our group, Hargeisa Group, because he consulted us -- we told him to isolate those people who were troublemakers. But he disagreed, he put them in the government. He put them in the cabinet so he could get rid of them one by one. He was very clever because he knew that these people were hungry for power so he brought them on board. He put them in the cabinet. He gave them important ministerial posts, minister of Interior, minister of defense, he gave them the most—and one of them was already the Vice President, Abdirahman Aw Ali (Farah) from Boroma, he is one of the fighters of SNM.*

*So what he did was to get rid of them one by one. But while he was getting rid of them one by one, the other team, the other members of the group did not really reject, did not say anything. Everybody thought that he is going to stay, so why should he care about his friend going out. So he got rid of them, leaving the most, the strongest ones till the end.*

**WOLDEMARIAM:** So when you say he got rid of them you mean he just fired them?

**ABAKOR:** *First them. He always found a reason to fire them. But that was his policy from the beginning. Everybody realized this later on, but he had this plan from the beginning. Because he knew that if he left them out of the equation, they would do the same thing to him that they did to the previous -- And because he also said they deserved it because these are the liberation movement, these are the fighters, those are people who created the country. So he was justified, they deserved to be cabinet. But he had a different plan, a hidden agenda which nobody knew which everybody realized later on, after a few years, that his plan was to make them passive in the first place and then later on, just, you know—.*

**WOLDEMARIAM:** Who were some of these people, these ministers who were marginalized?

**ABAKOR:** *The head of the Kulmiye party now, the chairman of the Kulmiye party, Biixi, was one of them and he was one of the last fired. He appointed him as Minister of Interior. He was one of the last fired. The only one who remained till the end was the Vice President from the SNM, from this group. But because they were elected together, he had no power over him, he could not—because they were elected on one ticket so he could not get rid of him.*

**WOLDEMARIAM:** All on the same ticket, ah, uh huh.

**ABAKOR:** *But, in the second period when he was reelected, that's the moment he got rid of him, and he brought this Riyale who was an embassy man. But by that time Egal was strong and he was not afraid of doing anything. He could do anything, even insulting the SNM in the struggle, by bringing somebody who was from the security of Siad Barre to become his vice president. When he died, automatically he became—.*

**WOLDEMARIAM:** Can I ask, on this point again, when these people were fired or marginalized, why weren't they able to return and mobilize their clan—?

**ABAKOR:** *Because they were no more that group, they were called the red brigade, [Indecipherable] in Somali, is a word for it, it is called the Red Brigade and they were notorious. Now, they have lost that—.*

**WOLDEMARIAM:** He demobilized them?

**ABAKOR:** *He demobilized them. By being part of the government they are no more a group now, they are part of his government. And then later on they became just individuals.*

**WOLDEMARIAM:** And these were the same people who had rebelled against Tuur?

**ABAKOR:** *Yes. And the same people who gave Silanyo the trouble during the liberation movement. Mostly they were military background.*

**WOLDEMARIAM:** And Tuur himself, there was also tension in this period between Tuur and Egal, wasn't there? One thing we've heard for instance is that people felt that, Tuur supporters felt he had been undermined by some of Egal's people during his administration and then they returned the favor later on during Egal's period they created some problems for him. Is that true?

**ABAKOR:** *Well, this is an oral history and everybody will have his own point of view.*

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WOLDEMARIAM: Sure, sure, I'm not sure.

ABAKOR: *You'll hear different stories. I'm not sure because Egal and Tuur were old friends, they grew up in the same house. They were classmates. They were the first class in Somaliland in the north during the British. They were classmates. They grew up in the same house, and they knew each other ever since.*

*As a matter of fact people say that Tuur even was the person who was encouraging Egal to take over the power and all this. But of course because two clans, there was sort of competition between the two clans, the two major clans, Garxajis [Isaaq sub-clan] where Tuur belonged and Habar Awal [another Isaaq subclan] which is where Egal belonged. And even, the next civil war which took place in 1995 and ended in 1996-97, that war also was between Garxajis and Egal's government which was the Habar Awal dominated. So there was that friction. If you talk to, if the person you talk to is Habar Awal he will give you another version. If you talk to a Habr Garxajis, Habr Yoonis guy he will give you another version of the same story now you told.*

*But that was not really— Abdirahman Tuur, when they were in the meeting, in the grand conference in Borama in 1993 where Egal was elected and Abdirahman Tuur also was running for election, several people, Omar Arteh, the previous foreign minister of Siad Barre, Egal and Tuur were one of the three major candidates for that. It was the Guurti, the elders, who organized that meeting in Borama who wanted Egal. So there was some—they preferred for Egal to take over. So even the process, some people said the process was not really that fair. But that way, whether it was fair or not, the vote was not a secret.*

WOLDEMARIAM: And it was Guurti members who were voting?

ABAKOR: *Guurti members because not everybody who was a member of that conference became a Guurti. Only the Guurti were the organizers of the whole conference. They invited more than 300 people to participate, from all different clans. But then when the voting took place it was not secret. Egal dominated. Now, for the reason why people elected Egal is they were trying to avoid SNM and the division of SNM and the conflict. Because all those two years it was very painful for the people. There was fighting going on. People were fed up with fighting with Siad Barre and being in refugee camps. Then, again they have to come back to Somaliland, and again some of them have to flee from the cities and flee to the interior. So people really wanted peace by any means.*

*Even the election of (Dahir) Riyale (Kahin) in 2003 as the President, when he was competing for the first time with Silanyo, who is the current President, he won with 80 votes difference. But the reason he won was that people were still afraid of the SNM coming into power again. They thought because this guy is non-Isaaq, because he is not SNM, because he a guy who is away from all this division and conflict, he could be the person to vote for for having peace and stability here. The only reason he was elected, not because he was a politician, he was not a politician. He was not a man who would take this country forward, but simply because they were avoiding Silanyo and his group. Now they could not avoid it because they were fed up with having Riyale seven years, extending his term over time.*

*Now Silanyo and his group were elected, Kulmiye, just because people wanted to get rid of Riyale. But now they understood, people, that it is too—the issue of SNM and all these things is far behind and I think it will be now Kulmiye party and not an SNM party. They are not afraid that those divisions, because that story*

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*has almost come to an end. Silanyo now looks at his presidency as presidency of Kulmiye, not as SNM. He is not helping—I mean, you look at his cabinet, I do not think there are more than two or three people who struggled in the SNM, mostly they are diaspora people coming from outside. Some of them are Americans, even some of them are British. He is not paying much attention to the SNM. Because if you pay attention to the SNM, you are alienating the other minority clans. The other minority clans are sensitive about the issue of SNM, like the Gadabuursi from outer region and the Harti from Sool and Sanaag. They are very, very sensitive to SNM.*

*So even the last, there was an occasion, I don't know whether you were here or not. You were here on the 17<sup>th</sup> of this month?*

WOLDEMARIAM: Yes, we didn't go but we heard about it.

ABAKOR: *The SNM were not given a chance to speak, the SNM people. Silanyo spoke, another two persons but no SNM were allowed to speak though they were celebrating the day of an incident which took place in 1984 where major freedom fighters were called. The Siad Barre forces was defeated. It is called Day of the Shuhada, in English the day of those who died in the liberation movement, the 17<sup>th</sup> of October. But in spite of that they didn't bring the SNM. Even the only person who was given a chance to speak was Biixi and Biixi spoke in a way that – not alienate the minorities, he said, when he was speaking, it was brief, he said, well the liberation movement against Siad Barre involved everybody here in this country, involved in bringing on board also the minorities. So it was more politics, and it angered those people in the liberation movement, the SNM, who are now here. Really they were very, very angry that completely SNM was given another sort of shirt, a new shirt. SNM was not, the Gedabuursi were fighting, the Haarti were fighting, everybody was fighting against Siad Barre*

*The government intentionally did it so as not to alienate the clans because the other minority clans also voted for Kulmiye. So you can see that the SNM agenda is just swept under the carpet, they don't want to bring it up anymore.*

BENNET: So by 1995, '96, when there is this two year period of civil strife, where were you at that time and what was the relation between Egal and some of these other interests that were involved with the fighting ?

ABAKOR: *I think the fighting was that, it happened because still the SNM militia were carrying their guns, they were not demobilized. It was after this incident then, that Egal demobilized the militia and formed the Somaliland National Army. Ever since we had peace. As long as there were militia around carrying their guns, there was no peace in Somaliland. That was the last side effect of that.*

*So I was coming from that clan which was fighting against Egal and they left, but I am always, I am one of the few that did not leave the town. I was staying in my home. Because of my background, my background being Hargeisa Group. We never identified ourselves with clans or some other clans. We thought that all these people fought for us, for our liberation. So myself and my friends from that group who are here we stayed. But everybody from that clan left and the fighting was actually—the militia were leading the people, not the people leading the militia. So the fighting took place because the militia wanted fighting and those militia from our clan or from the Garxajis clan were controlling the airport, and that's where the conflict started because Egal and his government wanted to control the airport, the national airport. But these young militias would not allow them, and there was always trouble. This, then, this was translating into a clan.*

*Those two big clans always in the South had competition, the Habar Awal and the Garxajis. They even had a war a long time ago, I don't remember, I was in Aden at that time, but they said in 19-, something like, yes, during the British, in the early—in the late '50s or something, '58 or something. But it was not a big problem at that time. But this one was quite a serious problem because they were using anti-aircrafts, anti-tanks, and they were using the same arms they were using at the SNM fighting Siad Barre during the civil war here.*

*There were not many people killed because even the fighting that was going on, that hostility of killing each other was missing because it was not that bitter. Even the number of people, it was very few. It was a matter of frightening each other in the town, one side shelling the other and the other one shelling, but there were not a lot of casualties because people escaped. This group moved out of the city and this other group moved out of the city. But, as a result of that, Egal found himself that he succeeded, and then he started, with the exception of that clan, he started demobilizing other militias.*

*By the time reconsolidation started with Egal and the other, the Garxajis clan, the forces, the militias came in, they came in to join the army as demobilized. From there, Egal was having the control over the country and all the clans and everybody. Because he had the army and he didn't have any militias to fight against it, and he knew how to deal with the traditional leaders. One thing Egal was good at was, how do you say this—Egal was not corrupt—he was corrupted in a way. He never took money for himself. At the time he died he didn't have a penny, but he was very good in political, what you call—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Fundraising?

ABAKOR: *No, he was good in using funds for political reasons, for corrupting—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: For bribing?

ABAKOR: *For bribing the traditional leaders from different clans. Now Egal justified that by saying, I'm bribing these people so that they will not harm Somaliland. I have to give them so they will leave Somaliland— I mean so they will not be a problem in Somaliland. That was his way of justification. I think he had the right to use this money coming from Berbera ports for political fund.*

BENNET: So most of the incentives that he was giving these militias to demobilize were monetary?

ABAKOR: *Yes, yes. Then he would even give funds to politicians from the south. Politicians were flying from Mogadishu to Hargeisa to see Egal and at the same time he had ambition one day that maybe he will be again, there will be a united Somalia and he will be again President or whatever. That's the position he lost when he was prime minister of Somalia. So he had an influence over other politicians of the south. He had an influence over all these Somali politicians.*

*So many of them came for consultations with him. Whenever they come he would also provide funds for them. He was famous for that. But then he maintained peace and stability through that process and also the minority groups. Those were coming from the Harti, from the Darod. He also maintained their support to Somaliland by providing funds. He always provided funds. That's the one—his father was one of the richest people in Somalia and Egal inherited a lot of money, a lot of wealth from him. He spent all that money in politics. By the*

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*time he died he had only one small house while his father, he inherited so many houses from his father.*

*He said, whenever one of his ministers, he found his minister corrupted, was to make money from his ministry or from the government, he would call them and say, "Look, in politics you don't make money. You don't get money from politics, you have to spend and invest in politics." That was his idea about politics. You have to invest your money.*

*Then one day I think some of the stories they talk about him when he was a prime minister, or when he was a politician in the previous Somalia, they said somebody was asking and they saw he was spending his father's money, the wealth he had in there in politics. They said—somebody asked him and said, "Why are you spending all your money, wasting your money?" He said, "I'm wasting my money now so that I can have my picture on that money." That means so I can be the head of this country and my picture will be on that money. That's my—what's the use of money if you don't have, he means, the power to control that money later on. So that's one of the things he believed, that money doesn't mean anything and politics mean everything, or the power means everything.*

*I think he has got a lot of—people have mostly they realized that after he died. He really contributed a lot to Somaliland because he started from scratch and at least built the systems here with his experience. At least built government systems. By the time he died, Riyale did not contribute anything, he just continued on the strength of what he built.*

**BENNET:** *Egal did try to incorporate some of these private services that had started in the early period into the government-run services, is that correct? I mean as far as healthcare and basic services were concerned. How did Egal go about coordinating that with his ministries? It seems like up to Egal it was very much run by the traditional elders in the clan-based provision of services, so how did that process play about?*

**ABAKOR:** *I don't give, because I was part of that, being, with Progressio at that time and part of working in health and all those, in social services. There is no credit for Egal in that. All the credit goes for i-NGOs and UN. They are the ones who really established these systems, they supported it. Everything, the rehabilitation of education and social services and health and all that was done by the UN and by aid. The government was not contributing money. The little money he got from the revenues I said he was using it for political funds, he did not include it—. Egal in that sense was not very much development oriented. He was not a very development oriented person who would really look into the social services, into the economy. He was more of a politician who really dealt with traditional leaders, dealt with the enemies, dealt with those hostilities. He was very good in that area.*

*He had a lot of work to do. He was the one who was building from a scratch the foundation. But then he has not contributed a lot. The private sector, because of the nature of the Somalis, they are more of an entrepreneurship. The private sector started, actually the boom started—what Egal has maintained is a free market which is good. He maintained a free market and once the people had that free market and the government is not interfering with the market then they had the free hand to develop the telecommunication, the remittances and the export/import and of course because you have a big market in Ethiopia where*

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*any export can – the population here is very small, but they always target Ethiopia population where they can sell things.*

*So the good thing is that he maintained that free market, and he did not interfere. There was no monopoly, giving somebody a monopoly, but you cannot see the signs of Egal, the influence of Egal in the development sector. It was more of a civil society organization, local organizations, and the international aid which was really involved in social services, in other services, water, sanitation, everything, health, education. Even the president, any president in Somaliland, in the annual speech when he gives his annual speech, all the things they talk about the government has contributed that year. It is 99% is to the aid.*

BENNET: Civil service, civil society, interesting.

ABAKOR: *Because the revenues are very small. The Somaliland revenues are very small. Maybe this government is promising to increase those revenues, but the revenues are so small. 70% of it goes to security, to maintaining the army and the police and the security. So what remains is very small, really, to develop anything very seriously. I don't know what this government, maybe this government will have sort of a vision to increase the revenues because most of the—a lot of the revenues are wasted on corruption. Corruption is very high.*

*I think this new Minister of Finance, Mohamed Hashi is his name. He is well known for being strict, a very, very strict man. So everybody is hopeful about the revenues that Mohamed Hashi as long as he is the Minister of Finance might increase the revenues, and he promised, I mean this new government, he promised that they will increase the salaries by at least—. You know, the salaries now, it is only a joke, you can't call it a salary what the civil servant gets, it is very small, especially in the social service sector. They have promised to increase those salaries. I think we'll wait and see because now the new government has a lot of challenges. The previous governments have just—most of the governments now a days they complain about the previous governments debts and spending all the money and leaving behind debts. Same thing as government also is complaining about that.*

*So they have to cover the debt and they have to—because by the time they were elected and they took power, three months, the civil servants, they didn't get salaries for three months. So now they succeeded immediately to pay the salaries of the civil servants for three months and then promised to increase their salaries, which was good.*

BENNET: Can I ask you, I'm sure you're short on time, I'd like to know about this transition period as well. In 1997 they began to the draft of the constitution.

ABAKOR: Yes.

BENNET: Then there is a referendum in 2001 and then initial elections in 2002, 2003 and then the parliament in 2005.

ABAKOR: Yes.

BENNET: What are your impressions of this transition period of Egal, in his final years, pushing for direct democracy and the suspicions of what his actual motives were? We're also interested in some of the initial challenges that came with trying to move from the civilian government into one that was directly elected.

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**ABAKOR:** *I think Egal, one of the other credits for Somaliland is he is the one who established this democratization process. I think he died too early, but he is the one who introduced the multi-party. One of the things always, because he was a clever politician, a man who had long experience, people suspected always what he intended. They thought that the constitution was a shirt, which he fixed, a shirt or a suit for himself. They thought the three political parties was one of his tricks so that he will have one ruling party and two opposition parties, and then he can easily divide and rule the other two.*

*So people talk about all these things. But actually, yes, there is a problem with the constitution. The problem with the constitution developed at that time it has a lot of ambiguities. It needs to be reviewed. But the parliament didn't do it. The previous government had the opportunity to do that because they ruled for seven years, but they did not do it. This one also promised that they review so that these ambiguities and all these things would be removed. But now there is a problem again of whether people who don't want to be a member of these three political parties, what is the solution? People are saying, and this government also promised that they will start again the same process during the local elections. There will be organizational, political organizations who will run for, who will compete and then there will be always three political parties coming out of that. That has a lot of questions.*

*Now what is going to happen if the three political parties that exist now, and the parliamentarians who represent these political parties, don't succeed in that competition? Then you have a political party that disappeared but the members of the parliament that belong to that party do? There are a lot of questions that need answers before that. But the public supports that system. The public are really fed up with the same three political parties, sometimes with the same three candidates. I mean these three candidates were there in 2003 and again in 2010, and they might again come back again. So people are really fed up with them, they don't want these three political parties. The government promised when they were campaigning. Then there is a realization now that the government somehow is resisting because Biixi who is the head of the Kulmiye party is completely resisting and the other two political parties are also resisting because they don't want to compete, they don't want other people coming out of this.*

*But the president, Silanyo is in a situation where he has to explain, because that was the platform where people elected him, that he is going to allow you to form their own chance of organizational, political organizations and then political parties and all this. So that is one of the major now issues.*

*The other thing is that the Guurti again, is becoming again, the Guurti was the savior of Somaliland, saved Somaliland from a lot of troubles and conflicts, but now they are becoming a problem themselves because they were politicized, they became a political entity and they don't want, their out of time and now are increasing their terms. Now they're talking about increasing their terms again. That's quite—people say that's a problem because almost 40% of the members of the Guurti now are young people who inherited from either their father or uncle. So there are no more elders that have the skills and the talent of reconciliation. So how about another two years or three years, it may be 60%, because these are old people, the average is 70-80 years old. So they're dying, every day they are dying. They are replaced by the son or by the nephew. There is only one wife, there is only one woman. One husband died and he was replaced by his wife because the son was a dropout, so they suggested for the first time how about the wife and they agreed. So we have only one woman now among the elders which is very good, it is really progress.*

*Then we will have—if they continue all the time extending the terms, then we will have a group of young people who have no idea about reconciliation and peace and all this and might not be useful to Somaliland.*

BENNET: When did that politicization start to happen?

ABAKOR: *When they were used by the presidents because they have got—which is another mistake -- they have got more powers than the elected House of Representatives. They could reject any bill if it is not by two-thirds of the votes. They can reject any bill coming from the House of Representatives. Then they are involved in extending the term of the President. The last, when President Riyale was here, he had twice an extension and it was all through the Guurti. It is not clear. It is only one article talks about that extension and it can be done by the Guurti in the constitution when there is force of majority, where there is crisis or there is tragedy or war or something. Then they have got the right to extend the time of the President. But they were doing it in peaceful times, in a more peaceful time, they were extending. So that means they have been used by the president in political maneuvers also against the parliament. So they became a hindrance rather than—.*

*Of course because they get salaries they don't want to leave. I mean two things the parliament should have done is to look into this and review and see whether the Guurti will be elected like the House of Representatives or will be selected. But that selection also should be based on criteria, certain criteria and also that selection should be for a certain period, you cannot be there forever. All these things, still there is a lot of resistance going on, the parliament is not really—now they themselves have increased, because the time of the parliament was up in September this year. They increased the parliament by two years and eight months. Since they have to stay one year after the parliament they have increased their term by three years, eight months. That is just—the president was very angry about it and he called them and he asked them to reconsider that because he was not happy with what—he was thinking of an extension of one year, one year and a half, but they just extended it a long time because within that one year the election could have taken place.*

*So Somaliland had an election in this year so at least an extension of one year, one and a half because you have to get the results and you have to organize yourself and prepare for election again. But Woldemariam, you are originally from Ethiopia?.*

WOLDEMARIAM: My parents are from Eritrea.

ABAKOR: *Ah you are from Eritrea?*

WOLDEMARIAM: My parents are, I was born and raised in the US. Woldemariam, it's a common name in Ethiopia too, very common name.

ABAKOR: *I had a lot of Eritrean friends from Aden when I lived in Aden.*

WOLDEMARIAM: There were many who lived there.

ABAKOR: *Yes, there were many at that time. Together with an Eritrean friend, I went to Germany together. Took a ship from Aden and we went to Germany. I still communicate with him.*

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WOLDEMARIAM: He is in Aden?

ABAKOR: *No, no. We went to Germany, he remained in Germany and then I went to Poland to study. So he is a German now. He has his family there. But I had always the intention to visit. I had a lot of stories about Asmara and Eritrea. Always my ambition was to go and see Asmara, but now since this regime everybody's afraid to go with this current regime now.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Maybe in a few years.

ABAKOR: *In a few years time.*

BENNET: Can I ask you before we finish, can you speak a little bit about some of your current work with Progressio? We're interested in the role of the civil society in relationship to both the traditional mechanisms of Somaliland's culture, but also the government and facing some of these challenges.

ABAKOR: *I think I started, Progressio started in 1995. I was a trainer, a facilitator for them, but I joined Progressio in January 1998, quite a long time ago. Now Progressio has a technical assistant who provides skilled people, we recruit international skilled people to come and share skills with the locals. Because, you could say that the civil society are as the same age as Somaliland. Before Somaliland there was no civil society because it was not encouraged by the dictatorship because of that socialism system or whatever. So it only started when Somaliland was declared and as a part of the need which was there at that time. There was a need for rehabilitation and reconstruction. There was a mushrooming of civil society and NGOs, organizations.*

*Because the Somaliland government was not internationally recognized so the money and the funds were channeled through local NGOs. As a result of that—and the other reason the mushrooming also was the lack of employment for professionals. So the professionals found an opportunity to get engaged by organizing themselves and starting NGOs and all that. So the civil society work mostly was rather doing some of the work of the government, especially in the social services, because the government didn't have resources and because they were not directly supported by the internationals. They were doing some of the work in the education and the health sector, water and sanitation and all those things. Agriculture, environment, also they were doing that.*

*Now Progressio was building on the capacity-building of those nascent NGOs from the beginning, but those organizations started to grow and mature and they started forming forums and umbrellas and networks. So now we moved from supporting local partners, individual NGOs, into supporting those networks and forums and umbrellas, umbrellas of sectorial. We support women's umbrella, youth umbrella, disability, people with disabilities and human rights umbrella, organization networks.*

*We are also involved, as our governance we have three themes, the governance theme, the sustainable environment, and HIV and AIDS. We are also involved in HIV/AIDS a lot. We have got the support of the global fund because the global fund usually is for governments in the countries, in recognized countries. But Somaliland is an exception since they are not recognized the money is not channeled through the government but rather channeled through the UN which is UNICEF as a place for receiving and then organizations like Progressio and other NGOs apply as a separate recipient. So we provide ARVs for people infected, the infection is growing now from 0.9 when we had done a previous*

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*survey in 1999 and now lately done by the WHO in 2004 it is now 1.4. So it has increased. But when you compare it to the neighboring countries still it is quite low when is it compared to Djibouti, to Ethiopia, and Kenya.*

*I think the civil society played a very important role in the democratization process also. They are being very involved in civic education and local observation. We have been responsible in all the three elections in coordinating the international observers who came to Somaliland. There were almost the same number, 76 this year and 76 in 2005 parliamentary elections. We have coordinated from many countries, European, American, even Australia and New Zealand. So they were very important for the democratization process because they were declaring whether it was a free and fair election.*

*The civil society organizations now are recognized by this government but the previous government there was a sort of confrontation between the civil society organizations and the government. For what reason? Because the civil society organization is advocating for rights, human rights of a marginalized group and of course the government doesn't like that. The other reason is government felt that resources that were supposed to be channeled through the government are going through local NGOs and local -- so there was that sort of grudge.*

*But anyway, in the end the dialogue has been going on. There has been grudging dialogue between the government and the local civil society and that succeeded in the end in producing something called NGO Act which has been approved by parliament, enacted. An NGO Act which gives support and protection to the local civil society organizations and of course regulates them at the same time. That is quite progress when you see where they started and where they are now.*

BENNET: Is there an effort for the government to try to—I know with the recognition issue it is difficult, but to try to resolve some of this tension between the fact that the aid is being channeled through the NGOs rather than through the government. I mean, is there a partnership with the civil society and the government trying to target priorities or with this new government?

ABAKOR: *Not yet, not yet. But the previous government there was a Minister of Planning who had a long experience working with the ILO [UN International Labor Organization] for 30 years, he was retired from the ILO. He was quite oriented about development so he started something called the process of aid management coordination, where everybody reported to the Ministry of Planning in terms of funding and projects and reports and all that. He has developed the data where the money of aid which comes to the country through the civil society, through the i-NGOs and UN, and where the money goes.*

*That could help this government now to prioritize and to develop a sort of development policy for the country or whatever, the poverty reduction strategy or something like that. This new minister also for planning, he came from the U.K. (United Kingdom). He's got a lot of experience working with the private sector but he is also quite oriented in development around this. So he might be quite helpful.*

*I think this current government also has taken some of the people they appointed from the civil society. The Minister of Education previously was the chairperson of a human rights network. We have some of them in the president's office also working—they were all from the civil society organization. So there will be a better cooperation with this current government. Also the people who voted for*

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*this government are the youth and the women, so the government is trying to deal with the youth and give the youth an opportunity and also to have the women to participate. So they are the first ones who agreed, who appointed three women in the cabinet which is quite progress. They appointed one woman for the human rights commission, who will be the chairperson of the human rights commission. So there is some sort of progress, and it is a matter of only three months here, almost three months since they were elected.*

WOLDEMARIAM: We're almost done. I wanted to—I was fascinated by your story about your time in the Hargeisa Group.

ABAKOR: Yes.

WOLDEMARIAM: Can I ask, when you decided to start the Hargeisa Group did you anticipate what would happen—?

ABAKOR: No.

WOLDEMARIAM: The government's response was completely—?

ABAKOR: *A shock, a shock because what you're trying to do is good, you're doing humanitarian work, and you don't expect that humanitarian work will really make the government angry. You always expect to be praised and told good things, that you are doing well and all this, even get a promotion or something. You never expect to go to solitary confinement for doing good.*

*But later on, when you think about it, then later on you start to understand how things happened. Of course, for a government like a dictatorship, like Siad Barre, that kind of humanitarian work exposed them to the people, that they are not doing anything for the people. They considered it as something very dangerous. You could take a gun and fight against them, they would prefer that, because they know how to deal with those things. But if you especially write something or do something, activities of that sort, they look at you as very dangerous.*

BENNET: And self-service.

ABAKOR: Yes. *Nobody expected, none of us expected—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: My last question is, you mentioned as you went to the field and you saw the SNM in 1988 did you, when you arrived at the SNM and you spent some time there, did you anticipate that this—you saw the internal politics, did you anticipate that there would be this war in '91? Did you have a feeling that this was going to blow up? Did you already see signs of this internal kind of faction was emerging?

ABAKOR: *In Somaliland?*

WOLDEMARIAM: Yes, Somalia, when you went in '88, '89?

ABAKOR: *In '89, did we anticipate that this problem would happen here you mean in Somaliland?*

WOLDEMARIAM: Yes, did you anticipate that the SNM would blow up, basically blow up in '91 in terms of this friction?

ABAKOR: No.

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WOLDEMARIAM: it was a surprise.

ABAKOR: *SNM had this process of reconciliation and traditional leaders and everybody being involved and everybody had the ownership. So nobody expected—.*

WOLDEMARIAM: It was a surprise.

ABAKOR: *Yes. But the conflict was started in the SNM when there was struggle, already had this division. But always they maintained that unity because they had a common enemy, because Siad Barre was there. Now then you should realize when the enemy goes out of the way, then these problems blow up, but nobody thought about it at that time, but we understood it later on. That while we maintained that unity, and that coordination very well, the enemy number one was there. That's why all these minor things were just left on the—.*

*Then, I think it also happens to other liberation movements. Once they liberate the country, then there is a competition and there is a power struggle and one of them gets rid of the other. I think it happens to all liberation movements and then one strong person remains in power and controls the other, like [Indecipherable] now putting his colleagues in prison.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Yes.

ABAKOR: *All the liberation movements they face the same problems.*

BENNET: Is there anything that we've left out that you'd like to include—.

ABAKOR: *One thing I left out is water. I don't think—I think it is a long, long story. These are things which are happening here. I think we talked about the most important things, most important issues which are worth talking about.*

WOLDEMARIAM: Maybe one thing we could ask you as we wrap up that we often ask people when we finish the interview, just to reflect for a moment on Somaliland's future. Are you positive, are you bullish about Somaliland's future and do you see the country going in a good direction or are you a little more pessimistic, a little more worried about the trajectory of the country going forward?

ABAKOR: *I think I was worried since last year and the year before because of the problem of the previous president will extend his term and there were always people demonstrating on the street. We found, we almost reached the brink again because we found our democratization process was in jeopardy. But we have now crossed that bridge, I think I feel more positive now and the peaceful transformation of power. I think now everybody feels really peaceful.*

*But I still wonder about the challenge which remains, the challenge of recognition is quite great. As long as the rest of Somalia is in this mess, Somaliland will always be facing problems. So I don't know how things might—because no country would like to recognize Somaliland now, even the neighboring countries, Djibouti, Ethiopia, nobody, the AU (African Union). They're not prepared to recognize Somaliland and that will always remain a challenge. Without recognition then Somaliland's development is also under question.*

*The other thing is that the region for Somaliland is such a volatile region. Anything happens in Djibouti, Ethiopia or Somalia, affects also Somaliland. It is such a small entity. I remember, I studied in Poland but the history of Poland is that whenever there is a war in Europe, there is a world war or any other war in*

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*Europe, Poland is affected because even Napoleon, when he was attacking Russia they have to go through Poland and then everybody destroys Poland on their way to Russia. The same thing, the Germans on their way to Russia, they just—. There was time in the history of Poland they were divided between three countries and there was no Poland on the map, so always smaller countries which are not strong in a region where there is—they're very much affected.*

*You have Kenya and then you have this small Djibouti. Then you have all this piracy, terrorism, Al-Shabab, a lot of challenges. I don't know how Somaliland can manage through all these challenges. So far we've been lucky, but still there's always that fear that something is hanging there. Terrorism is now the challenge number one, it is not recognition but it is—. And aid, even the aid which is coming, is geared towards terrorism instead of gearing it towards development. The British, the Americans will come and say, we'll have to support you but of course you need development, you need water, people need water, they need health, they need education. Still most of the money will go to the security, the intelligence. Now they are supporting the Marines in Berbera, giving them infrastructure, giving them equipment so that they can fight against the piracy, those are all challenges coming.*

*What Somaliland needs is really to develop basic things like education and health and water. Those are the three major—and nobody is talking about those three major things. Well, let's see, maybe this year, Americans say that they will do some more. The British also in spite of doing a lot of cuts they put Somalia and Somaliland separate, saying they will continue supporting, increase.*

*But I think yes, it all depends on the new government also, what sort of vision they have for Somaliland, because they could develop the port of Berbera, because Ethiopia needs that port of Berbera badly and that port could, if it goes into private hands, like the one of Djibouti, it could really provide a lot of revenues for Somaliland to develop in a way. They have got all this coastline, fisheries which are not exploited at all. There is a lot of wealth for this new government also to look at—*

**ABAKOR:** *And they are going to go forward. Of course with all this mentioned, they will also have a lot of challenges—*

**ABAKOR:** *Channeling the money through the civil society organizations, now it is changing a bit. There is a de facto recognition of the administration so many of the money through the UN or World Bank and all this is channeled also through the government. So there is a collaboration of the international community with the local administration, with the administration is much more than before. There is a lot of support for the democratization process coming from the EC, the United States and from, yes—supporting the EC, the democratization process and let's hope, let's hope for the better.*

**BENNET:** Thank you so much for your time.