



| A Short summary of the seminar held in Uppsala, March 7, 2009

←-----**Formaterat: Vänster**

### **Horn of Africa, from where to where?**

The program started out with a welcome speech held by **Agneta Simonsson**, 1st vice mayor of Uppsala Municipality. She expressed her support and solidarity with the people living in difficult circumstances in the Horn of Africa, all the while Sweden has had 500 years of peace, and 200 years of democracy. She was also proud of the fact that Uppsala over the last 53 years has opened its doors to people who need assistance, and she stressed how important these people have been and are for the development of Uppsala. She urged, finally, the seminar participants to visit the newly built Uppsala Concert & Congress to get a broad view over the city!

**Hamad Issa**, President of Afar Friends in Sweden and the initiator of the program, continued with a summary of the situation in the different countries in the Horn of Africa. He expressed a hope that the annual conference organized by Afar Friends in Sweden would again provide an opportunity for peaceful dialogue and round table discussions to exchange ideas on pragmatic alternatives to perpetual war and political conflict. He asked whether positive and hopeful solutions will emerge in the foreseeable future, with solutions that will lead to the region recovering lasting peace and development in a stable and democratic environment? The question is whether there is any opportunity to sit down in dialogue with the elders and civil organizations on the ground for them to take the lead and change the equation to promote sustainable development and peace.

**Dr. Tedros Amanuel**, chairman of the Eritrean Association for Democracy and Human Rights, began to speak and asked if it is possible with a peace-building that is in harmony with ethnic diversity in

Eritrea. Is it possible when one considers Somalia? Tedros Amanuel, who has been over 30 years in Sweden, believes it is possible, but unfortunately, he says, there is nobody else who really believes in it, which is necessary for it to succeed. The Eritrean society must recover from the atrocities it is now being exposed to. 1991 was Eritrea's year of independence; a government that consisted of guerrilla fighters was welcomed with celebrations and promises of loyalty, and also with the international community's support. Amanuel expressed his hope that they (the Eritreans) will not in the future fall into the same trap as they did then, when Clinton called the present regime "a new brand of African leaders". Independence was an achievable dream. Eritrea now has its own flag, national anthem and an elected president for life, but that is all. The rest of Eritrea consists of mass arrests - people are considered guilty until proven the contrary - but even this is a legal luxury. Furthermore, Eritrea consists of economic collapse; Eritrean youths are fleeing the country even though they risk their lives when they do it. If they are caught, death is waiting. In addition, parents of young people fleeing have to pay a fine equal to 30 000 SEK. It is independence without liberation, said Amanuel. The state has full control over its citizens; churches and mosques are very hierarchical institutions. Dissenting opinions are considered to be subversive; even to listen to Ethiopian or Amharic music is prohibited. The economy is based on agriculture and animal husbandry, 80-90% of the population depends on this, while the country has an army of 300 000 persons. The country consumes more than it can produce, and it is entirely dependent on external help. 75% of the population has not enough to eat. 75% of the households are run by women. The men are stuck in unpaid military service year after year. There is no childcare, no older people's homes, no insurances.

What went so wrong? The classic resort is to blame the foreign occupation, but the enemy within the country is at least as tough and driven by ignorance, combined with a lack of resources. The perpetrators are also victims, but it is important that they be held morally and politically responsible. They speak a language that is characterized by self-deception. Intellectuals accept the crimes as a historical necessity. The regime considers itself to be the only

guarantor of Eritrean sovereignty and integrity. It is believed that organized violence is the only possible strategy for a multi-ethnic Eritrea because some groups require autonomy because of the oppression and marginalization they experience. There is a lack of empathy and remorse - and frightened leaders see enemies everywhere. There is no way for the regime to reform itself in a peaceful way and therefore violence is repeated.

We must demand justice for the regime's victims on the one hand, but given the massive human rights violations, it is a nearly unattainable option. But a peaceful transition is necessary. Reconciliation between ethnic and religious groups is necessary. Acceptance of democratic norms and willingness to compromise are necessary.

The next speech was given by **Mme Simone Bernier** from Femmes Solidaires and ORDHD. Mme Bernier opened her speech by giving an introduction to Djibouti history and geography and its strategic position in the Horn of Africa. Djibouti has been independent for almost three decades but the country did not succeed to achieve equitable power and resource sharing between the Afar ethnic group and the Somali-Issa group that controls power since the independence from France in 1977. The Afar people of Djibouti opted for armed struggle in the 1990s when they discovered that it was impossible to be part of the equation in the power sharing. France saved the Djiboutian government twice from collapsing due to the military success of the Afar guerrilla, mostly known as FRUD. She spoke about the crimes committed against human rights in Djibouti. Crimes that are rarely reported but that have become the rule in the country. Particularly, she devoted a lot of time to the situation of raped women and the difficulty to get them to come forward. She spoke about the Association de Femmes Solidaires whose efforts led to the release of Aicha Dabale from prison where she was held because she reported on the Afar women who were raped by the army. She also raised the problem of France turning a blind eye to the violations taking place in Djibouti in order to safeguard its interests in the country, while Djibouti leaders choose to emphasize their clan interests at the expense of the nation state. American and French soldiers will not in any way contribute to democracy in Djibouti, which is wrongly

believed to be the case by many Europeans. Mme Bernier wound up with an appeal to European democrats and human rights activists to mobilise their forces to put pressure on the EU to demand respect of human rights as a condition to give bilateral aid to Djibouti.

Before the break, **Abdulkadir Osman Farah**, PhD fellow at the University of Aalborg, Denmark, gave a speech on the expectations that exist on the political developments in Somalia and how the so-called global war on terrorism affects the situation. He has done research on the Diaspora, in particular with regard to Somalia, and what impact it has on the progress of peace. He believes there is a risk that the idea that it is moving forward in Somalia is wishful thinking. Millions of people have fled because of war during the last 18 years - people are moving back and forth. The global war against terrorism also disturbs the peace process, according to Farah. Extremism and the Diaspora are problematic phenomena. The definition of terrorism is a dynamic issue - it changes from day to day. Political dimensions are important for how we categorize. There are also structural problems - people have been trained to challenge the great powers, the balance of power is always unstable, there are always people who are not satisfied with the status quo. There is also a rhetorical dimension that plays on fear and anxiety. The global war is a very one-sided and unequal war in which rich countries turn against poor countries, for example, media's use of harmful rhetoric, such as "Axis of evil". There is no empirical evidence for terror, facts are fabricated. Somalia was a peaceful country for a long time when no foreign forces were in the country. There was peace and there were schools and technology. Somalia has not had any time to create its own system. Clan dimensions can be cured by Islamic rules. Islam is central but some people want to impose sharia laws they do not themselves want to live by. The new leadership in the U.S. can help, it is in itself not a system change but the rhetoric has changed. We live in a world where everything is interdependent; commerce and diplomacy is needed, etc. A regional solution is proposed, the countries of the Horn of Africa share many problems, and you may have spin-off effects by cooperating regionally.

Somalia needs to join the world in a favourable way. One must compromise between different versions of Islam. There is a need to reach consensus.

**Dr. Ahmed Moen**, Professor of Public Health at Howard University in Washington DC, began his presentation about the role of Ethiopia with a quotation from the Koran: one shall never shoot a fleeing person in the back. He then went over to a historical exposé on how Lucy, "our mother", inspired him and how the region ever since the Queen of Sheba has been a melting pot of tribes, nations, sultanates, Muslims, Jews and Christians. Unfortunately, persecution and human rights has become the region's theme. The "Clash of civilizations" and "Muslim anger" has been the other themes. The world as divided into two, but really, says Moen, it is all about a "clash of ignorance". We must build bridges between universal values and share the scarce resources. He quoted Herodotus who already in ancient Greece observed that in peace time children bury their parents, but war does violence to nature, and turns this fact around. "Differences cannot be seen as barriers," says Moen. Children lose their identity and nationality by being made into child soldiers.

He also mentioned in passing something that could be regarded as a little odd - the fact that Sweden exports religion - that secular humanists are exporting religion ...

Compromise is a word that is not in the reference books in the Horn of Africa. We have to learn to change for the better in terms of personal attitudes. He told us of an anecdote in which a Somali man saw two clans that had previously been friends now fighting for a piece of land. Dead bodies lay on the ground. The clans turned to the man to ask who had the right to the ground and the man laid himself down on the ground and listened first with his left and then with his right ear to the ground. He then noted that the good earth said that no one had the right to the ground. Mother Earth had answered him: "I do not belong to anyone of you; it's you who belong to me."

Few people leave something behind for posterity, and one should ask oneself what has been done, what impressions have been left for posterity?

Dialogue is important, it is based on trust, justice and righteousness - we are all born equal!

Dr. Moen also raised the problem with the chewing of Khat. We have two corrupt generations who have become cynical, but, he says, give me a chance to hope - do not take that opportunity away from me.

**Dr. Babekir El Ubeid**, Phd in Political Science and Chairman of the Sudanese Association in Uppsala, spoke on the basis of Sudan. He began by saying that the country lacks a democratic concept. The idea of the Imam, however, is very strong. You must obey or you will be punished. He told us about an incident when he was hit by a car as he stopped at a red light, this time the police told him that he should have turned right at the red light and that it was his fault. The next time he turned right at a red light and the police stopped him and said that it was illegal to pass at a red light. He still does not know what applies - there is a government, but no system.

Sudan means "black land"; the divisions into categories with 52% black, 39% Arabs, 9% Beja, 2% foreigners are misleading. Arabs and blacks have mixed for a long time, but the media describes the conflict as a war between Muslims and Christians. There are two elements that are in conflict with each other: identity and distribution of wealth.

Sudan borders nine countries and all who live there are related to each other. The idea of "Sudanizing" the southern part of Sudan and incorporating it in the northern part is a very new idea. It's as if they think that if the South becomes Muslim and Arabized, it would be much easier to integrate it. In 1964 the first uprising occurred against the military regime when the students demanded a peaceful solution to the problem. People want peace, but the government is all the time feeding on the problem. It is important to understand how people think.

Peace building is a long process - for example, there are 3 armies in Sudan!

The problem with all the refugees and displaced people must be resolved. The economy must be developed. There are many children who have no parents. Many women end up in prison for selling alcohol illegally, where they get whipped. The sense of justice is not consistent with the Act. They are

unjustly treated and need help when they come out. Reconciliation is required. This requires cooperation across borders in the cross-border issues such as water, energy, food, trade, disease, wildlife and the freedom to move - this is the way to peace. Limits are new phenomena.

Finally, our moderator, **Professor Lars Rudebeck**, summarized the conference as follows:

- \* It was striking how the five different presentations converged in viewing peaceful dialogue and democratic representation as requirements for progress.
- \* There was an emphasis on bottom-up democracy and local dynamics, including respect for democratic values.
- \* At the same time, several speakers emphasized the need for regional solutions and regional integration. *Water* is a symbolic issue in that context.
- \* In my mind, the intersection between local, democratic dynamics and necessary regionalism is where the future will be determined. The Challenge is to work this out peacefully.

After a panel discussion with all speakers and with Professor Lars Rudbeck as moderator Dr. Ahmed A. Moen concluded with reading his poem "The other face of Africa" beginning with the following verse lines:

Afar friends in Sweden is a Swedish licensed international non governmental Organization. Its mission is to inform the international community about the plight of the Afar people in the Horn of Africa. We also provide expertise, knowledge, and Support for the development of programs dedicated to helping the Afar people fight the war against illiteracy, bad traditions (female extension), drugs (khat), water shortage, drought, diseases etc. Please do not hesitate to visit our website for more information.

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