



PDRCTalks



TOPIC

Underlying State-building

Issues in Somalia and Managing the Political Transition in the 2020/2021 Elections

Guest Speaker

Hon. Abdirahman Abdi Shakur


Former Presidential Candidate of the Federal Republic of Somalia in the 2017 Elections, Prominent Opposition Leader and Wadajir Party Leader

PDRC TALKS

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 Garowe, Puntland, Somalia

 (+252)907794231

 info@pdrcsomalia.org
www.pdrcsomalia.org

BACKGROUND TO THE PDRCTALKS

In March 2019, the Puntland Development and Research Centre (PDRC) initiated a monthly event dubbed PDRCTalks. This event is a new initiative to spread ideas, messages, and awareness on issues related to the betterment of Somalia. These issues cover topics ranging from governance, democratization, peace, and development, which are the key PDRC's focus areas.

PDRCTalks is an interactive platform in which prominent Somali scholars, veteran politicians and/or retired civil servants are hosted once a month to serve as guest speakers and to deliver an expert presentation at a uniquely themed talk-event at PDRC. PDRCTalks aim to spark conversation within the Somali community and, through this useful dialogue, change the attitudes and lives of Somalis. Social media is used to spread the messages throughout Somali communities living in the diaspora and within the country through live streams. PDRCTalks has been received well and has featured prominent figures in Somali society to bring to the fore a multi-faceted number of topics in politics, economics, social issues as well as cultural themes.

PDRCTalks is a value-addition component to PDRC's vision as a solutions-oriented organization that prides itself in offering useful tools to bring about peaceful coexistence and economic development for and by all Somalis.

PDRCTalks 13

The thirteenth PDRCTalks themed " Underlying State-building Issues in Somalia and Managing the Political Transition in the 2020/2021 Elections" took place at PDRC on 30th August 2020 with the former 2017 presidential candidate to the Federal Republic of Somalia election in 2017 H. E. Abdirahman Abdi Shukur as the Guest Speaker.

On the brink of uncertainty on the upcoming 2020/21 elections, the leadership of the FGS and FMS agreed to have a sit down which culminated in two agreements

dubbed the "Dhusamareeb 1" on 12th July 2020 by the Federal Member States and the "Dhusamareeb 2" on 22nd July 2020 between the FMSs, the Prime Minister and President confirmed that there was a possibility of Somalia going to the polls on time. This signified that the FGS and FMSs leaders would finally work together, to resolve the stalemate surrounding the 2020/2021 elections. The No-Confidence vote against the then Prime Minister Hassan A. Khaire on 25 August 2020 by the Lower House of the Federal Parliament on unconstitutional grounds complicated matters leading to a boycott of a planned meeting between Puntland and Jubbaland, nevertheless the meeting eventually took place on 15th August 2020 and was attended by Federal President and the Presidents of Galmudug, Hirshabelle and South-West besides of Governor of the Banadir region. On 20th August a new agreement dubbed Dhusamareeb 3 was reached spelling out a consensus on a proposed electoral model to be adopted in the 2020/21 elections and was signed by all the participants.

Against a backdrop of such a crisis and in the hope of charting a way forward, PDRC invited Abdirahman Abdi Shukur as the guest speaker at PDRCTalks 13 that was held on 30th August 2020 at its headquarters in Garowe. Mr. Shukur is prominent Somali Politician, a former presidential candidate in 2017. In 2007 he was the Vice-chairman of Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) and chief negotiator of the Alliance with the TFG in Djibouti in 2009. Abdirahman was among the members of parliament in the expanded parliament of 500 MPs which was formed in Djibouti in 2009 and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of the second Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and he is currently Leader of Wadajir Party. He holds a Master's degree in Law, specializing in the Comparative Studies of Federal Systems.

As is the norm in PDRCTalks, Asha Gelle Dirie and Hamsa Abdi Barre took part in the event as panellists. Asha Gelle is a graduate of Education from the National

University of Somalia where she majored in the Attitudes of Women to development in India in 1987/89. Asha fled to Puntland after the outbreak of the civil war and remarkably contributed to the growth and development of the Civil Society, delivery of essential services to the community and was an active member of the secretariat of the founding constitutional Conference of Puntland in 1998. Asha was a member of parliament in Puntland from 1998 to 2008 and Minister of Women and Family Affairs of Puntland from 2009 to 2012. At the national level, Asha became the Chairperson of the Independent Commission for the Review and Implementation of the Constitution (ICRIC) in 2013 and 2014, a position that she resigned after she realized that "finalization of the constitution wasn't a priority to the then federal government".

Organization of the Event

The 13th PDRCTalks event was held on 30th August 2020 at the PDRC compound, Garowe, Puntland State of Somalia. The event included a lecture by the keynote the former presidential candidate to the Federal Republic of Somalia 2017 elections and Wadajir Partly Leader H. E. Abdirahman Abdi Shukur, followed by a panel discussion and audience Q&A interaction. The event's significance was also boosted by live State TV coverage and other social media outlets. The event was fully backed by the diverse audience due to its unique importance for both the local community as well as the Somalia diaspora community.

The event was attended by more than 250 participants, drawn from the government, civil society groups, human rights and advocacy groups, local government, women, youth politicians, and senior citizens who braced the chilly cold evening on January 29 to participate in this crucial event.

The event was streamed live on Facebook with live updates on Twitter to reach a cross-section of audiences all over the world. PDRCTalks prides itself on giving ample time to the guest speaker, panellists and contributors, and, most importantly, the audience to exchange ideas learn from each other, and further to deepen their understanding of the subject of discussion.

Introductory Remarks

The mayor of Garowe while expressing his gratitude and sincere appreciation to PDRC noted in his opening remarks noted that key-note speaker was a well-versed individual on matters of state-building and political transition. The key-note speaker has been engaged in Somali politics for a long time and was a critical person in sorting out the differences between the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia and the Transitional Federal Government during the peace and reconciliation conference held in Djibouti in 2008-9 coupled with his knowledge and career in Somalia political dynamics, thus making him well suited to present the possible solutions to the current political crisis.

The Keynote Speech

In his remarks, the keynote speaker noted that in the current state of the world, statelessness can't be tolerated and that people living in nations that lack functioning Nation-State are bound to suffer near inhuman conditions.



He noted that the Somalis have destroyed their statehood that was well-functioning for about 39 years, (1960 -1991). He added that for the last 30 years after the collapse of the Nation-State, the Somali people have been victims of tragedies never seen in history. Somalia has experienced the loss of nationhood including starvation, displacement, poverty, fratricide, extremism and divisive foreign intervention. Unfortunately, the people haven't learned from the painful experience of statelessness because they are yet to forge a comprehensive and shared narrative of reconstitution of nationhood.

The struggle for survival is human instinct. The great English philosopher of the 18th Century, Thomas Hobbes, noted that "No one is told to close the door before sleeping." It is unfortunate, however, that the nation has been on a lull daily knowing full-well that the borders of the country are defenceless from land, sea and air space for the last 30 years.

This situation has led to many Somalis seeking refuge and protection in other foreign countries where the citizens have struggled hard to make them what they are today through unimaginable human sacrifice, instead of seeking to make Somali their own country better. It is unfortunate that people are worried only for their survival or as tribal entities because of tribal consciences and not concerned about the fate of the nation. The flawed national conscience among the Somali society is the original sin of the collapse of our state and is also the single most impediment of its resuscitation. Somalis need to accept that as citizens of their nation – Somalia- they're responsible for its tragic existence. In reality, Somalis are the ones that have destroyed their state and also the same ones that are constraining its reconstitution. Accepting collective responsibility is the first step towards the complex and arduous nation-building journey. This is a prerequisite to come together and share imagination on how to forge a national mission that harnesses collective actions to salvage the country from the ruins of state collapse. If the Somali citizens fail to examine themselves and accept their responsibility to the state failure, the citizens will continue to shift blame to countries that are after their interests. Somalia is now in search of a nation that stands on its own feet and can prosper. This can only be achieved if Somalis accept each other, convince each other and above all agree how to live together as equals.

He noted that so far two decades have elapsed since the national accord that laid the first step of state-building in Arta, Djibouti, in 2000. Time has now come for the citizens to evaluate the current stage of national recovery noting that the political space that has been widening from 2000 to early 2017 is now sealed by the current FGS. There is an innate desire for recognition at personal, family and belonging to specific community/clan. However, the recognition of

nationhood is the highest and most prestigious one under which the dignified status of the citizens can thrive. The current global order does not tolerate recognition devoid of statehood.

The reason that state security apparatuses are established is to protect the citizens against threats to their lives, families and all their beloved ones. Unless the persisting feeling of animosity between and within clans is overtaken by national empathy, Somalia will be defenceless to confront other nation's vested interest to it. Having struggled in the past against the unfair policies of the defunct military government and tolerating the pursuance of the same by the current FGS will only lead to loss of trust on the restoration of statehood.

The keynote speaker intimated that there was a need to revisit the people's imagination of the modern state. Somalis must have a clear understanding that the state is founded on national accord and there should be a reliable mechanism to hold it accountable whenever it preaches over the limits of its authority. Unfortunately, the growing system of checks and balances has been shattered during the last four years. Only a kind of state that is equidistant and applies equal treatment to all sectors of the society irrespective of clan and particular interest groups would have a chance of success and longevity. This kind of Somali state will anchor its power base across all clans and shall be unshakable by local and foreign interest groups that are hostile to the national good. Impersonal institutions will secure internal harmony, defend the inviolability of national territory and champion for equitable wellbeing.

H.E Abdirahman Abdi Shukur noted that there were many impediments against state-building but he focused on a few main ones as enumerated below:

A. The Flawed Tribal Conscience

Incompatibility of modern Nation-State and culture of tribal conscience that prevail in Somalia is a great impediment of the resurgence to the nation-state. Tribal consciousness also dilutes the national bond between citizens and leads to the breakdown of a nation if it is not checked in time. National consciousness on the other hand is generally carried by a national movement

to make a nation where there is none and consolidate in perpetuity where already nation-state exists. Modern Nation-State is founded on the following three pillars:

1. Geopolitical space shared by given population (territory);
2. Population formed of citizens that are equal in eyes of the law and enjoy equal opportunity;
3. The loyalty of the citizens to a shared legitimate political framework (State) and body of laws applied by impersonal institutions throughout given territory and citizens willing to abide by such laws in exchange of the protection of their rights and advancement of their wellbeing.

At independence, 1960, Somalia enjoyed the above characteristic of the modern nation-state. However, under the objective homogeneity of the citizens, persisted fragmented polity founded on kinship. The political civilian elite (1960-1969) used clannism as a factor of mobilization during electoral periods to advance their agenda through the exchange of favours in the form promises of public sector employment opportunities. The 1969 military coup installed an illegitimate authority that sealed categorically all spaces of political competition and prohibited expression of grievance. This coupled with the repressive nature of the government with its differentiated treatment towards the clans created distorted loyalty characterized by the superseding of tribal sentiments with a strong allegiance to clan.

B. The Distortion of Islamic Teachings

The Islamic religion is the perfect and sacred revelation by the Almighty and promotes unity and the wellbeing of the collective. Politics on the other hand is temporal and circumstantial and concerns the management of conflicting interests. Negative trends that claim the application of Islamic Sharia have currently taken centre stage in Somalia. One group defends the power holders by issuing rulings (fatwa) that support the government of the day on false claims of religious grounds. Another group pursues terrorist agenda including the killing of innocent people, detonation of powerful blasts in public places, including Mosques during prayer times and slaughtering of human beings. True Islamic religion promotes coexistence and toleration of people with

different beliefs contrary to what these self-declared proponents of Islam promote.

C. The Lack of a Definitive Political Order

The unilateral declaration by Somali National Movement (SNM) on May 1991 splintered Somalia into former Somali British Protectorate pursuing succession from Somalia and the former UN trust territories standing for the preservation national unity of Somalia proclaimed in 1960. Although the current Provisional Constitution, which is the law of the country, establishes Federal form of state there are pervasive sentiments that hold preference to centralist option in some pockets of the south-central regions. Until definitive agreed choice of unity or succession and implementation of the federalization process is achieved Somalia statehood will remain shaky.

D. Overcoming Fragility

Somalia being in its early stages of recovery amid chronic fragility, given that any mechanism of checks and balances and any form of control is very weak at best. The ruling elite benefits from current fragility and disregard the criteria of meritocracy in making appointments and selection of office holders at all levels of the government. One critical benchmark towards the effective public administration is to give precedence to individuals with knowledge, skills, experience, conscience and high ethical standards of justice and fairness.

Somalia is not only in the midst of the transitional stage but also significant signs of progress haven't been achieved regarding principal transitional tasks, including:

1. The constitution is provisional and is yet to be finalized;
2. One Person One Vote is not held
3. Clan based 4.5 formula remains the effective power-sharing criteria
4. There are no effective National Security Agencies
5. The responsibility of the security is not transferred from AMISOM to Somali forces
6. Al-Shabaab is not defeated.

The current federal government has not only failed to make the least progress on the above transitional tasks but unfortunately has practically suspended the constitution in its entirety starting from the time the current President Farmajo was sworn in on 8th February 2017. Since then the country is being governed outside the rule of law and only according to the president's wishes. The traditional peaceful transfer of power from 2000 to present has been per the constitution but is in great jeopardy due to the current administration's stance on the upcoming 2020/21 election.

Panel Discussion

The PDRCTalks platform is designed a way in which the audience and the keynote speaker aided by a panel of experts have two-way interaction, which is central to the discussions. The second part of the session (panel discussion) offers an opportunity for the participants to interact with the guest speaker and ask questions.



Asha Gelle in response to questions by the audience expounded on the challenges of state-building in Somalia noting that tribe/ clan is one major contributor to the demise of the nation-state. She noted that voters preferred candidates from their clans against the need to look at issues that affect the nations as a whole. Personal interest and the expense of the general interest of the nation eroded the foundation of the statehood. Besides, widespread poverty in the nation offers the political class an opportunity to influence election outcomes through bribery at district councils, legislative organs and to the presidency. Against this backdrop, it is a daylight dream to expect the nation to prosper when it lead by people who are unfit to hold the

positions they are in today, a situation that in reality exacerbates conflict, misery and bad governance.

The second panellist, Mr. Hamsa A. Barre, addressed the source of the recent populism expressed in the widespread cult following to president Farmajo in spite his lacklustre performance both in the past as Prime Minister and now, during his presidency. After 30 years of total statelessness and weak governance, the youth become emotionally attracted by documentaries that exhibit the contrast between the enviable military strength of previous governments and state of fragmentation that Somalia has fallen into since state collapse in early 1991. The coincidence of mimicking the replication of a government similar to the defunct military government by president Farmajo's and the nostalgia to a strong state is the source of misleading of most of the youth. The former military government ought to be judged by its mortal end that led Somalia to a tragic downfall. Likewise, any attempt to replicate it will impede Somalia's resurgence to statehood.

Recommendations

Recommendation to address the challenges of state-building and overcoming the current deadlock on 2020/2021 revolved around two major issues:

1. In this critical juncture, it is necessary to hold timely and equal opportunity election and render the outcome of the sixth transition (2021 – 2025) as an all-inclusive and this one can be accomplished by completing these transitional milestones:
 - Finalization of the constitution;
 - Ceasing 4.5 formula
 - Holding universal suffrage election;
 - Securing Somalia's public order and territorial borders;
 - Advancing the federalization.
2. Somalia must embark on extensive and multi-phased genuine dialogue on the choice of political order that can secure internal harmony, defend from foreign aggression and promotes sustained and speedy prospects of prosperity. It is necessary

to look at lessons learned from the past and recent history as well from the current conundrum of the imposition of personal rule by president Farmajo. Citizens must organize themselves along political platforms to decide how they have to be governed and resist those who want to decide for them how to govern them for personal ends and against the general wellbeing.

Conclusion

The audience both at the event and those online were unanimous that the event was a success. The concluding remarks by the Keynote speaker, panellist's contributions and Q&A sessions indicated the need to make a distinction between the process of remaking the state that had collapsed on 26th January 1991 and managing existing state order. Unfortunately, successive leaders who have been at the helm of state's institutions since 2000 have in various degrees, been acting as though they were/are leading functioning full-fledged state. The Somali people must appraise their choice of leaders for key state positions of the next dispensation (2021 -2025) according to the leaders' willingness to commit to the difficult and arduous but critical process of nation-building and not give chance any more to those who hope to use state power and resources for personal gain. Somalia at this juncture needs leadership that will catapult the nation to greater heights and harness the collective potential of its citizenry.

