

Timeline

1860 - 1889 - France, Britain and Italy proclaim protectorates over different parts of Somalia. The colonies are thereafter known as French, British and Italian Somaliland, respectively.

1956 - Italian Somaliland becomes Somalia and gains internal autonomy after 6 years of being an Italian-administered UN trusteeship.

1960 - British and Italian colonies become independent and merge to form the United Republic of Somalia.

1969 - Muhammad Siad Barre assumes power in a military coup and declares Somalia a socialist state, introduces the Somali language as the official language, and seeks to eradicate clanism.

1977 - French Somaliland votes for independence from France and is renamed Djibouti. Barre seeks American military support in Ogaden War against Soviet backed Ethiopians and Cuban troops.

1980's - Government positions are filled with members of Barre's Marehan clan and exclude members of Mijertyn and Isaq clans.

1991 - Barre is ousted by clan-based opposition groups. A violent power struggle between clan warlords develops, killing thousands of civilians and the collapse of the central government. Somaliland, a former British protectorate, declares unilateral independence.

1992 - More than 300,000 Somalis die from violence, disease, or starvation and a million flee the country. After much of the food aid is stolen by militias, United Nations Operation in Somalia is established to oversee the distribution to address malnutrition and starvation. U.S. marines land ahead of the UN peacekeepers.

1993 - Somali militias shoot down two U.S. helicopters. The rescue mission results hundreds of Somali casualties.

1995 - After the failure of multiple international missions troops, humanitarian aid agencies, and peacekeepers leave the country due to instability.

2004 - A new transitional government in Kenya elects Abdullahi Yusuf as president of an interim government, known as the Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

2005 - Violence ensues as the government returns. Pirates begin hijacking food shipments.

2006 - Parliament meets in Somalia for the first time since it was formed. Hundreds are killed after violence breaks out between militias. Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a militia backed rival government, takes control of Mogadishu and imposes Shari'a law. Islamist militant wing is known as Al-Shabaab. US-backed Ethiopian troops and UN Security Council endorsed peacekeepers recapture Mogadishu.

2007 - Since taking office in 2004, President Yusuf enters Mogadishu for the first time. The number of internally displaced people grows to over one million refugees as people flee the violence.

2008 - EU calls for international efforts to tackle piracy after a series of hijackings and attacks on vessels. The UN Security Council votes to allow countries to send warships off the Somali coast. US Department of State designates Al-Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. NATO naval patrols begin to combat piracy. African Union peace-keeping force assists TFG troops after Ethiopian soldiers retreat. President Abdullahi Yusuf resigns.

2009 - Parliament elects moderate Islamist and former Commander in Chief of ICU, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, as president. Al-Shabaab gains territory in Somalia. UNHCR estimates that instability has displaced 1.5 million people inside Somalia, and some 60% of Mogadishu's population.

2010 - UN World Food Programme leaves Al-Shabaab controlled areas. Al-Shabaab forms alliance al-Qaeda, and its hold on Southern Somalia strengthens. Somali pirates account for 49 of the 52 ships hijacked.

2011 - Refugee exodus continues. UN calls famine in Somalia "worst humanitarian crisis" in the world. Millions are in need of humanitarian aid and tens of thousands flee to Kenya and Ethiopia. Al-Shabaab allows aid agencies in the south and withdraws from Mogadishu.

2012 - Transitional government ends after Somalia's first parliament in 20 years takes over. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is elected president in the first presidential elections since 1967. Two days later, suicide bombers attack Mohamud's hotel in the capital. Al-Shabaab later claims responsibility for the attack. The last major strong hold held by Al-Shabaab is captured by African Union and government troops.

2013 - For the first time since 1991, the US government recognizes Somalia's government. Violence increases with Al-Shabab attacking the Presidential Palace and the UN compound, and a shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, killing 60 people.

2014 - Al-Shabab carries out several mass killings in Kenya and Djibouti. US drone strike kills Al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane. A two million dollar bounty is offered for his replacement, Ahmad Omar. Postal service is resumed after more than twenty years. First ATM machine is installed in a hotel in Mogadishu. African Union and Somali National Armed Forces offensive pushes Al-Shabaab from several towns; however, Al-Shabaab continues to control large parts of central Somalia where it carries out beatings and public executions, and restricts basic human rights. Three media professionals are killed as the government continues to harass, intimidate, and detain journalists. 359 Somalis are deported from Kenya without access to the UN refugee agency. 33,605 Somalis are deported from Saudi Arabia without the opportunity to file protection claims.

2015 - Al-Shabaab responsible for killing 148 students at Garissa University College in Kenya. In retaliation, Kenyan forces carry out air raids on Al-Shabaab bases in Somalia. Al-Shabaab kills 17 people in the government center of the Mogadishu. US Secretary of State John Kerry visits Somalia, the first US government official to do so.



Torture Methods

SEXUAL VIOLENCE, RAPE, AND SEXUAL SERVITUDE are widespread in Somalia. Government forces, African Union soldiers, militias, and Al-Shabaab commit sexual violence and large scale rapes. Militias and armed bandits rob, sexually assault and gang rape women traveling within Somalia in the direction of refugee camps in neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia. AU forces offer food, medicine, and humanitarian assistance in exchange for sex. Victims suffered from subsequent discrimination based on the attribution of “impurity.” Exploitation of children is also widespread, where girls are subject to forced prostitution and in many instances are sold and forced into sexual servitude.

BEATINGS commonly occur during interrogations and include brutal beatings with rifle butts, whips, sticks, hoses, pipes and clubs. Victims are usually kept in shackles. These beatings often occur daily or every other day for weeks or months. Some survivors described transfers to areas where beatings occurred perhaps twice a week as being a great change for the better. Beatings, and other abuses are used to punish people for activities such as participating in prohibited recreational activities and dressing in a way deemed improper. Al-Shabaab also employs intimidation, beating, and torture to extract confessions.

INHUMANE PRISON CONDITIONS where detention cells are so dark that a sense of time is completely lost. One man detained for nine months thought three or four years had passed. Prisoners are often blindfolded or placed in large bags before getting beaten. Some are placed in solitary confinement in cells so small that they are unable to stand straight up or lie straight out. In many instances prisoners do not have access to bathrooms, they may be provided with buckets or forced to live and sleep on floors filthy with their own urine and feces. There is no medical care in Somali detention centers; reports indicate that in the prisons almost everyone has chronically draining wounds.

SUSPENSION or the Somali terms “mig” and “fig” describe a variation of a torture method where the wrists and ankles are bound together in the front or back. The mig is conducted on the ground while the fig involves suspension from a ceiling fixture. Detainees are tied in these positions for hours while being beaten, poked, cut and burned. Some prisoners are left hanging upside down until they lose consciousness. Some of the ankle abrasion scars on the bodies of survivors are consistent with rope burns resulting from long periods of bondage.

BURNS, ELECTRIC SHOCK, AND SUBMERSION occur in detention. Detainees are burned with cigarettes or the hot tips of electrical appliances. Electric shocks are administered to legs and genitals; in many instances prisoners are forced to watch while others are being shocked. Survivors described being tied and repeatedly submerged or held under water until losing consciousness. Interrogations often occurred as victims were reviving.

RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN by government forces, militias, and Al-Shabaab has occurred.

Current Situation

Language: Somali (official), Arabic (official), Italian, English

Population: 10,616,380 (July 2015 est.)

Religion: Sunni Muslim (Islam) (official)

Ethnic Groups: Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15%

FAMINE AND DROUGHT have caused a severe food crisis resulting in malnutrition and starvation. As much as half of food aid is misdirected by militias and corruption. As of 2014, an estimated 1 million people were facing food insecurity due to a combination of drought, flooding and ongoing conflict. The World Food Program estimates that an additional, 2.3 million people are struggling to meet their minimum daily food needs.

DISPLACEMENT due to conflict, drought and a critical shortage of food have forced many Somalis to migrate to Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen and Djibouti and to urban areas in Somalia. An estimated 1.5 million Somalis have been displaced in their own country (IDPs). An estimated 1 million people have taken refuge in other countries. Crowded conditions of the displaced in Kenya, Ethiopia and urban Somali areas pose serious health concerns. Cases of cholera and measles outbreaks are on the rise. The 2011 report of the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia described the security context and humanitarian operational environment aid agencies faced in Somalia as “among the most prohibitive in the world”.

PIRACY has dropped since 2012 due to a NATO led effort; however, pirates off the coast of Somalia remain a serious threat to international shipping. Since the beginning of the century piracy practices have caused the loss of billions of dollars to the world trade economy. Somali pirates have kidnapped, extorted and killed numerous innocent people.

AL-SHABAAB still controls most of the south and central regions despite a 2014 military initiative by the African Union and the Somali military to drive Al-Shabaab out of some parts of Somalia. Al-Shabaab commits human rights abuses including arbitrary and politically motivated killings, torture, restriction of humanitarian assistance, abductions and extortion. Al-Shabaab attacks on local humanitarian workers, prominent peace activists, community leaders, clan elders, and their family members, NGO employees, and foreign peacekeepers have resulted in numerous deaths. There are reports of Al-Shabaab amputating the limbs of persons suspected of minor theft and stoning persons to death for suspected adultery. On several occasions Al-Shabaab has forcibly evicted people from their homes in order to house their leaders. Al-Shabaab is also known to target children for forced marriages and recruitment of child soldiers.

THE RULE OF LAW is largely nonexistent in Somalia. The TFG, affiliated militias, Somaliland and Puntland forces, Al-Shabaab, pirates, civilians in TFG uniforms and armed gangs regularly commit arbitrary killings, kidnappings, executions, robbery, evictions, torture and extortion. Conflicting factions continue to kill civilians, humanitarian workers, journalists, demonstrators and others with complete impunity. Police are generally ineffective; they are underpaid and corrupt. Military troops engage in indiscriminate firing on civilians, arbitrary arrests and detention, extortion, looting, and harassment. Corrupt judicial officers, politicians, and clan elders use their influence and bribery to have people detained or released. There are no formal mechanisms in place to address civil disputes, abuses or human rights violations.