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A written information report on women's rights in Somalia

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Introduction:

The rights of Somali women have remarkably developed in recent years thanks to a number of steps taken by the government towards women, such as the right to representation in parliament, along with the efforts made by various local and international civil society organizations and the support of the United Nations to ensure women's enjoyment of fundamental freedoms and political participation and to help her overcome social barriers and obstacles. All this coupled by the women's uprising and the social movements for positive change. It is worth noting that in 2016, Somalia received 30 recommendations on women's rights during the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism, which means that they must be taken into account and implemented. However, in reality, we see the otherwise. Somali women are being clearly marginalized. Also, the tribalism control and the weakness of the educational identity have played an undeniable role in blurring the various violations practiced against



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women and the failure to hold the perpetrators accountable, and thus the situation continues as it is until further notice.

Violence against women: different forms

Women in Somalia are exposed to many violations, some of which are declared and others not. Female genital mutilation (FGM) is one of the most serious problems in the world in general and Somalia in particular, which is still widespread in Somalia. Although FGM is prohibited by law in many countries, including Somalia, it is still practiced routinely due to people's appraisal of harmful traditional practices and customs.

To this day, Somali women are subjected to various domestic violence, including rape, despite continuous attempts to address this issue by imposing penalties upon perpetrators and denouncing this practice both locally and internationally, amid a great blackout and suppression of women's rights to lead normal lives. A large number of girls have reportedly disappeared in central Somalia, including young children, whose abused and disfigured bodies were found scattered in different regions across the country. Other girls have not been found at all. In some case, the family of the victim flood the streets demonstrating and calling for retribution against the offender, at other times silence prevails for fear of social stigma prevails.¹

Another form of the unspeakable violations that Somali women suffer from is the marriage of minors. Parents, out of need

¹ اغتصاب: ما الذي يمنع معاقبة معتصبي طفلة ذات 12 عاما في الصومال؟، 26 فبراير 2019. <https://bbc.in/3cmwaR7>



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and financial burdens, marry their children to increase the income of the family. Government data showed that about a third of Somali girls get marry before the age of 18 years and more than half of them are under the age of 15 years. As a measure, a new bill, proposed by a member of the government, on determining the age of marriage for girls, was rejected by many groups of people, topped by clerics, legislators and members of the Somali People's Assembly. ²Undouble, tribalism and the influence of the ruling class in Somalia play a major role in the clear discrimination and distinction between men and women in society. ³

Somali women have not been spared the terrorist exploitations. They are increasingly recruited by terrorist groups to carry out certain roles, such as attracting new members or serving the organization, marrying armed members, preparing and raising their children according to the organization's plans and radical ideologies, and even spying and collection intelligence from other government institutions and suicidal groups, as well as distributing weapons and collecting the financial support from society in general. Perhaps the Somali terrorist organization al-Shabaab is the most prominent of these organizations that deliberately recruit women in an abusive and repressive manner. In July 2019, a woman, motivated by Al-Shabaab terrorist group, caused an explosion in the office of the Mayor of the capital in Mogadishu. Other girls were arrested at the border with Kenya

² ضجة حول مشروع قانون يسمح بزواج القاصرات في الصومال، 12 أغسطس 2020. <https://bit.ly/2RQNDb6>

³ غضب في الصومال من مشروع قانون يجيز زواج القاصرات، 20 أغسطس 2020. <https://bit.ly/2EKa52C>



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while attempting to cross the border and join Al-Shabaab movement, which calls for the need to take decisive and prompt steps in order to stop these violations against women.⁴

Women's education: clear exclusion for various reasons:

The multiple levels of crisis in Somalia have affected education delivery and contributed to one of the lowest school enrolment rates in the world with only 30% of primary school age children in school, of which only 40% are females. Girls tend to drop out of school during the preparatory time before the marriage or shortly after. In 2018, about 45% of girls got married before reaching the age of 18. Financial needs and dire poverty may also be a catalyst for school-dropout among girls who prefer getting a job and supporting their families in household and raising children that continuing their education, which contributed to the unbalanced level of education between girls and boys. The Somali society must consider the declining health conditions Somali women continue to suffer under the widespread hunger and malnutrition.

Women's political participation and gender equality:

⁴ أحمد عادل، المرأة في حركة الشباب الصومالية.. من الأعباء المنزلية إلى الأعمال الانتحارية، 2 أبريل <https://bit.ly/362yMT0> 2020.



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The political participation of women is very slim and is not comparable to men's. This is evident by the widespread societal rejection of scholars, sheikhs, tribal elders and even ordinary individuals to the UN-backed Somali government's decision to allocate about 30% of parliamentary seats to women. Despite the government's insistence on implementing this decision, women's potentials and real value remain neither noticed nor appreciated.

Although there is a relative improvement in the participation of women, who now occupy a quarter of the seats in Parliament, the rejection of women's political participation by tribes leaders and dominant groups in society is motivated by the thought that women's place is in the home, bringing up children is their cause and cooking skills are their only tools. Therefore, the backward societal culture needs more efforts to be changed and developed, through long-term human rights and political initiatives and appeals

The situation of women in Somalia is getting more and more complicated due to the dominant tribalism and the strict societal traditions, such as the clear discrimination against women education and thus the spread of illiteracy among females and denying them the ability to enjoy their various rights. Still, education remains the eraser that alone can remove societal sediments that restrict women's freedoms.

Recommendations:



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The International Alliance for Peace and Development recommends the Somali government to consider the following:

1. Somalia should accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
2. To enact the necessary laws and allocate more seats for women in Parliament and the various decision-making positions in the country, and ensure that this is practically implemented. It also need to promote the institutional efforts to support women's political participation in Somalia, through social media platforms and the media.
3. The need to involve various stakeholders, locally and internationally, in following up on the violations that women are subjected to in Somalia, and to look into their proposals to address such violations.
4. To develop health care in general, to build hospitals, establish special wards for women, and implement a comprehensive health insurance system, along with establishing a fund to receive women complaints and work seriously to solve these complaints and interact positively with victimized women.
5. To put in place measures to encourage women's education in society, and to stress the free preparatory and secondary education.
6. To combat terrorism and the widespread of irregular groups that recruit women illegally, through monitoring, confrontation and continuous cooperation with the relevant authorities.



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7. To take legal steps and measures to prevent the marriage of underage girls, and to make more efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation that is rampant in Somali society.