

## SOMALIA

### ISSUE

With various peace processes for Somalia underway, there was a decrease in conflict-related human rights abuses in 1997. However, in the absence of a central government or authority, basic social and economic rights, especially relating to employment, food security, and the rights of women and children, remained problematic. In the "crisis" zones (the south, including Mogadishu), there continued to be incidents of unlawful killings of civilians, kidnapping and abductions, oppression of minorities, and so on.

### BACKGROUND

In 1997, a number of initiatives were launched to promote peace and stability in various parts of Somalia. Such efforts contributed to decreasing conflict-related human rights abuses, especially outside Mogadishu and Baidoa. As in the past, the south, including Mogadishu, had the worst record. Large parts of the population live in fear of murder, rape and kidnapping by armed militia who have no respect for (or knowledge of) humanitarian law. The Northeast experienced relative calm, although there was an increase in armed conflicts prior to the dates for the peace and reconciliation conference in Bossasso scheduled for the end of November, but now postponed. The self-declared "Republic of Somaliland" in the Northwest had the least number of reported abuses.

In the absence of a central government or authority, basic social and economic rights, especially relating to employment, food security and the rights of women and children continued to be problematic. There are no effective local human rights organizations in operation in Somalia today, and international humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) find their work limited by security problems. Most international NGOs evacuated their international staff in early 1995 because of the security situation. Those remaining continue to be vulnerable to kidnapping (including a Canadian citizen working with a UN Agency), to arbitrary detention, or to intimidation by various militia or individuals. In May 1997, a doctor from Médecins Sans Frontières was killed, apparently in a personal dispute. International relief organizations, including UN Agencies, operate primarily through national staff to maintain humanitarian assistance to the beleaguered population.

Throughout Somalia, the judicial system is a hodge-podge arbitrarily maintained by factions and clan-based elders or courts, which apply a combination of traditional and customary practice, Sharia law, and the pre-1991 Penal Code. Prison conditions are generally severe due mainly to the lack of funds.

Boys as young as 12 years old are still recruited by the militia. An estimated 98 per cent of girls are subject to female genital mutilation (FGM). The United Nations Population Fund, which Canada supports, has projects aimed at focusing on the adverse effects of FGM on the health and well-being of women.

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