



# Carruurteenna "our children"

UNICEF Somalia Newsletter

June 2010

## The imperative to protect children in Somalia

**By Rozanne Chorlton  
UNICEF Representative, Somalia**

Children are in more need of protection in Somalia at this time than at any time in recent years. The conflict in and around Mogadishu has deprived thousands of children of their physical and psychological security, the nurture and care of parents and community, and their expectations of a childhood and adolescence free from the constant threat of bereavement, violence and trauma. The experience of many children in parts of Central and Southern Somalia at the current time exceeds the boundaries of most emergencies, and yet in terms of the daily protection children deserve, it is extremely difficult for organizations like UNICEF to make a difference on a significant scale.

Amongst the most distressing aspects of Somalia's current reality is the extent to which children are being directly targeted by the fighting itself. This includes hundreds of child deaths over the past two years; hundreds more wounded; and reportedly, several thousand children being recruited to the frontline of the battle itself.



*The conflict in Somalia is depriving a generation of children of their freedom, their innocence, and their rights. Credit© UNICEF Somalia/2003/Pirozzi*

UNICEF and others have been monitoring and documenting these violations, and under Security Council Resolution 1612, (2005) and 1882 (2009) parties to conflict should be held accountable for their actions, in particular with regard to killing and maiming of children, sexual violence and recruitment of children into combat. The monitoring of violations has allowed UNICEF and partners to link child victims with appropriate services. The monitoring process has also strengthened efforts by the protection cluster to promote the protection of civilians by the African Union

Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and to apply pressure to the Transitional Federal Government to address grave child rights violations, and release children in its ranks. UNICEF is also supporting a programme to offer education and alternative livelihoods in three regions to children who have escaped or been released from armed groups.

Thankfully, the prospects for children in Northwest Somalia ("Somaliland") and Northeast Somalia ("Puntland") are more optimistic, and the foundations have been laid, in the past few years, for a child protection system, which will identify and support vulnerable children. UNICEF is already supporting significant elements of the system; gender-based violence outreach workers and child protection community workers, who will ultimately be brought together under a Ministry-led social welfare system; justice for children activities, backed up by a 2008 Juvenile Justice Act; legal reform ( Family Bill in draft), and policy development. It is hoped that this system can be strengthened to reach all children needing protection.

## Somali declarations against female genital mutilation are changing lives

The lives of many Somalis have been changed by declarations by communities and religious leaders to end the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM).

A 45 year old mother, Nahado Yassin Farrax, is one of them. Nahado is from Dangoroyo village, one of 14 communities in Northeast Somalia ("Puntland") which made a public declaration to abandon FGM in October 2009. Nahado is a member of the Dangoroyo Community Management Committee elected by her peers to help prioritize public issues and resolve problems using critical thinking and decision-making skills learnt during the community empowerment programme run by the international NGO Tostan and sup-

ported by UNICEF. It was during the Tostan programme that Nahado came to understand the harmful effects of female genital cutting. The practice is widespread in Somalia which has one of the highest prevalence rates in the world with more than 98% of Somali girls between the ages of four to 12 being cut. Now Nahado is proud to say, "I have a 12 year-old daughter whom I have not cut and am not planning to have her cut. I will not allow her to go through any form of FGM."

In Garowe, where another community made a declaration against FGM, a 38 - year-old father, Sharmaarke Ahmed Shire has changed his point of view since participating in the Tostan programme. He is

now a member of the Garowe Community Mobilisation Committee. "I decided and even made it clear to my wife that two of our daughters aged one year and 12 years, who have not yet been cut, should not be cut," he says.

However, Sharmaarke recognizes that men are often the most difficult to convince to end the age-old practice. Faad-umo Ahmed Nor, another member of the Garowe Community Mobilization Committee says, "Women in our village are against FGM as they have experienced it... but men still believe it's religious to cut in some way".

*Continued on Page 2*

### IN THIS ISSUE

Explosive remnants of war still pose a risk in Central Somalia	2	Religious leaders come together to discuss FGM.....	5
Publicity campaign on Juvenile law underway.....	3	Addressing domestic abuse.....	5
Prevention and response to sexual violence.....	3	Contact Us.....	5
Recruitment of child soldiers takes toll in Somalia.....	4		

## Unexploded ordnance threatening the everyday lives of Somalis

The presence of landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), explosives and ammunition is a major safety concern for the people in Galgadud region of Central Somalia. The region has several locations littered with landmines (both anti-personnel and anti-tank) as well as explosives which pose significant threats to the lives of local people.

Many roads linking parts of the region were heavily mined over different times in the past 20 years. However, the sections of the roads which are mined are unmarked or unknown and pose risks to road travellers, nomads and their animals. Consequently, many fatal incidents associated with landmines have been reported.

On 14 December 2009, a tragic event occurred in Ballanballe district after a nomadic Somali family consisting of nine people - six boys, a girl, the mother and father — had just moved there from Adado district in search of water and grazing.

The newly-arrived family settled in an area approximately three kilometres west of Ballanballe town. Soon after their arrival, the mother and her eldest son went to graze their livestock in the bush, while the father went to Ballanballe town to buy food for the family.

The six remaining children (five boys and a girl) then started to make a fire to prepare tea. Unknowingly beneath the spot where they were lighting the fire was buried an antitank landmine. After a while, the heat reached the device, and it exploded, instantly killing the six children. Following the incident, the Galgadud Child Protection Network provided psychosocial support and financial contribution to the rest of the family.

Considering the magnitude of landmine and UXO problems in



**A father who lost six children to an anti-tank mine in Ballanballe district in 2009. Credit© UNICEF Somalia/2009/CSZOffice.**

Central and Southern Somalia, UNICEF decided to organize a four-day training on mine risk education in 2009 to 24 members of child protection networks in Galgadud, Hiran, Middle Shabelle, Benadir and Lower Shabelle regions through the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS). UNICEF-supported Child protection Network members from Galgadud have since then been addressing the issue by conducting awareness raising during 2010 for communities living in exposed areas.

So far this year the network has held four mine risk education sessions for 185 people from members of the community in Dhusamareb including children, women, youth, teachers from Koranic and primary schools, religious leaders, businessmen, staff of local NGOs and local authorities.

The initiative has been very much welcomed by the local authorities and other segments of the community in the area. Members from the network facilitating the sessions used materials provided by UNMAS as well as illustrations and graphics of landmines and UXOs. They explained to the participants the nature and use of the mines/UXO and where they are most likely to be found and advised them on what to do should they see a suspicious metal object. At the end of the training session, participants decided to mark out areas where mines and UXO are suspected to be, and to pass messages on their risk to the communities in the region and their families.

The network is now working to reach as many people in the region as possible to raise the level of awareness with a particular focus on children.

### Declarations against female genital mutilation changing lives

*From Page 1*

To address the long-held but erroneous belief that FGM is a religious practice, UNICEF is complementing a community empowerment programme with outreach to Somali religious leaders to curb the practice. With the support of prominent religious scholars from the Sudan Council of Imams, UNICEF has enabled Somali academic institutions to work towards curbing FGM. Among the institutions is the Faculty of Sharia Law and Islamic Studies of the International Horn University (IHU) in Northwest Somalia (Somaliland). As a result of this collaboration, on 30 December 2009, 111 prominent religious leaders from four regions of Somaliland made a public declaration to abandon all forms of FGM. The University's Centre for Research and Community Development was also involved in the project. The centre's Director, Sheikh

Musa Mohamed Dirie believes that as an institution which is trusted and respected by the community, IHU has a responsibility to undertake such advocacy especially as, each year, up to 30 of its graduates become religious leaders.

Says Sheikh Musa, "There is need to promote dialogue based on Islamic perspectives of the issue. Islam is not against discussions about FGM. There is a chapter in the Quran that says if there is an argument about particular issues, one is encouraged to come up with evidence on why they oppose certain activities." Sheikh Musa says the declaration against FGM has led to increased interest from the public which wants to understand religious perspectives on FGM. This interest has created an environment that is

promoting dialogue among religious leaders. **See other story on FGM on Page 5.**



**Community representatives in Northwest Somalia who publicly declared that their villages have abandoned female genital cutting. Credit© UNICEF Somalia/2009/DShepherd-Johnson.**

Publicity campaign on Juvenile Justice Law underway in Somaliland

In mid-2008, the administration of Somaliland enacted the Juvenile Justice Law enumerating special law enforcement and judicial procedures for children in conflict with the law. Although with time it is hoped that this law could be amended to include clear provisions on the rights of child victims of crime, it nonetheless represents a significant step forward in recognizing the special rights of children in conflict with the law.



Local leaders listen to deliberations on the Juvenile Justice Law. © UNICEF Somalia/2009/PDiaz.

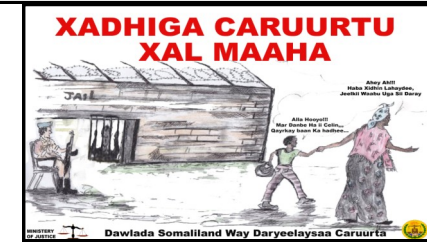
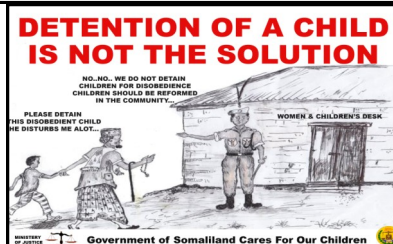
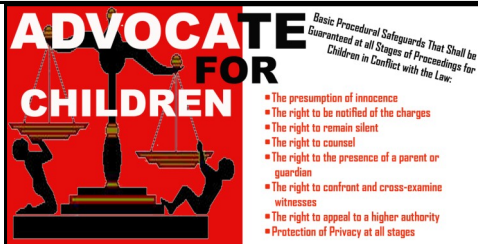
Since early 2010, UNICEF and UNDP's Rule of Law and Security (ROLS) programme, together with the legal Clinic of the Faculty of Law, University of Hargeisa, have been conducting a campaign of information and advocacy on the new law throughout Somaliland. The campaign is being conducted with the use of documentary films, posters, leaflets, bill boards and leaflets, and has messages for institutions such as the police, and judiciary, as well as more general information for communities, families and children on what they can expect under the new law.

Key messages for parents and community leaders stress that children should not be detained in prison for disobedience and petty adolescent misdemeanours and that alternative punishments can be found for such children in the community. The

campaign also emphasizes the importance of referring cases of serious crime (rape and murder) against children to the formal justice system, and not resolving them through clan mediation, which leaves little recourse for victims and even less punishment for perpetrators.

Regionally-based networks of child rights organizations are being supported to carry out focus group discussions in 75 communities, identifying groups with a critical role to play – parents, teachers and community leaders – to educate them about the law and their rights and responsibilities under it. In late 2010, the impact of this campaign will be evaluated through further discussion with communities, as well as by examining the way police and justice officials handle cases involving children. It takes many years to change entrenched customary practices such as children face when in contact with the law, but after five years of wide-spread community mobilization in more than 700 communities of Somaliland on child protection, and with the arrival of a promising new government, UNICEF believes the foundations have been laid for gradual, systemic improvement in the delivery of justice for children.

Sample shots of publicity materials highlighting issues covered by the Juvenile Justice law are below.



Prevention and response to sexual violence against girls and women

The rights of the girl child have a special resonance for UNICEF, and nowhere do these rights need more protecting than in Somalia, where girls occupy a uniquely vulnerable position based on their age and gender – exposing them to the possibility of double discrimination, marginalization, and violence.

Beyond the gender-based traditional practices which many girls in Somalia experience, women and girls are also threatened by the growing problem of sexual violence, particularly in internally displaced persons's settlements and other vulnerable communities where protective mechanisms are few, and impunity for perpetrators is particularly widespread.

The stories are myriad: young girls gang-raped in Galkayo or Burao internally displaced persons' camps; others raped while walking from school or collecting water in the early evening; women attacked in their own homes because they have no living male head of household to protect them; sexual abuse of very young children in the care of neighbours or relatives and assault of young boys by older men.

Whilst incidents of this sort appear to have been increasing in the past few years, fortunately, reporting in both Somaliland and Puntland is also on the rise, and activities targeting prevention and stigma-reduction as well as referral to appropriate post-violence services are becoming more widespread, institu-

tionalized and efficient. UNICEF supports gender-based violence outreach workers in both Somaliland and Puntland (via local partners Comprehensive Community-based Rehabilitation Services and Taduman Social Society), who reached approximately 1,700 survivors of sexual violence during 2009 and helped them reach police, legal aid, medical services and psychosocial care and support. The Ministries of Family Affairs in both Somaliland and Puntland are also being encouraged to lead in coordination, standard-setting and advocacy efforts on the issue.

Much work remains to be done, in particular in Central and Southern zone, where outreach work has been difficult due to the lack of any evidence base, and the very limited number of services available for women and girls surviving sexual violence. Although the current Somali conflict is not characterized by a use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, there is no doubt that vulnerabilities are compounded in the extreme conditions of displacement and collapsed livelihoods faced by many in the south of Somalia. Through a Mogadishu-based NGO, UNICEF supports survivors with psychosocial care at the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) Hospital, but as the war continues, a more robust, collective response is called for given the reality of sexual violence in the conflict-affected areas of Somalia.

Women and girls are threatened by the growing problem of sexual violence...

## Recruitment of child soldiers takes its toll in Somalia

One of the most brutal consequences of long war in Somalia is the recruitment and use of children on the frontlines of the conflict. Children are amongst the ranks of all armed groups in Southern Somalia. Children as young as eight years old, some recruited willingly, but others through force, violence and deception, have been engaged in active combat, manning checkpoints, in espionage, assassination missions, and suicide bomb attacks. Although the actual number of children involved in the Somalia conflict is unknown, informed estimates would suggest hundreds in the ranks of the Transitional Federal Government armed forces and its allied militias, and thousands in the ranks of the insurgent groups.

Children are recruited from a variety of sources including schools, madrassas, homes and the street, and in the case of recruitment by the insurgent groups, tactics used are increasingly predatory, involving forcible conscription and intimidation. Although young people have been expected to take up arms for the clan and the family over many years of Somali history, the situation has changed in the past two years, with the introduction of extremist notions that youth should comprise the frontline of the *jihad*. This has been compounded by the collapse of alternative livelihoods and widespread destitutions amongst communities in Central and Southern Somalia.

The scale of this child rights violation has been documented in the recent 9th report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict in April 2010, as well as in more detail in the Somalia Country report against Security Council Resolution 1612, due to be submitted to the Security Council Working Group in July 2010. The use of children in the conflict has been highlighted widely by UN protection agencies and non-governmental human rights organizations as one of the egregious and unacceptable consequences of this war, and one prohibited under international humanitarian law, and in particular the [Paris Principles of 2007](#), to which the Somali Transitional Federal Government is signatory.

There have not been formal efforts to release children associated with the numerous armed groups in Somalia. Most of the children who leave these groups escape, defect, or are captured. UNICEF will also continue to work closely with protection partners, donors, AMISOM and others to advocate strongly with the government for the release of all children in their fighting forces. At the time of writing, the Transitional Federal Government President has ordered a review of his armed forces in an attempt to identify under-18 children who should be released. UNICEF has also initiated partnerships with local NGOs in Mogadishu, Dhusamareeb and Merka providing a programme of alternative livelihoods, education, psychosocial and community reintegration support for children formerly associated with armed forces and groups. Any children released by the TFG will be given the opportunity to access these services, and thereby to find an alternative to life on the frontline.

### Hassan and Sidi tell their stories of child recruitment

Hassan\* described his situation and experience of being recruited: "I am 13 years old. I lived in Dhusamareeb where I was a shoeshine boy. I have no family. Once, I shined the boots of members of an armed militia group, but they refused to pay me. They told me that if I continued to ask them for payment that they would kill me. This made me very angry. After my bad experience with the militia, I was asked by an opposing group to join them. They told me that they would give me clothes, food, a bed, and money. They told me that they would pay me from \$25 to \$150 depending on where and what type of work I did. This group also recruited 14 other children from my area to join them. Some of these children were shoe shiners, like me, and had no families. I went to a training base. I learned that there are about 460 other children at the base who came from different places in Somalia, aged from 13 to 18 years old. This group does not pay the money that they promised, it is usually a lot less. And, once you are involved with them and have joined them, it is very difficult to get out. We are preparing ourselves to fight."

*\*Name has been changed.*

My name is Sidi\*, I am eight years old and I live in Holwadag district of Mogadishu. I was forced to join an armed group because of my knowledge of the district. I was sent to a training camp together with other children. Now I operate a checkpoint on a busy road in Mogadishu. Because of the nearby presence of African Union Mission (AMISOM) forces it is too dangerous for adult fighters to operate in this area therefore, the armed group sends me and other children to the frontline to attack the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) soldiers who are positioned in front of the African Union Mission in Mogadishu. When we leave our base to attack the enemy, we are accompanied by adult fighters, but once we near the enemy positions they stay behind and send us to the frontline. My direct commander tells me I should not be afraid to die since this is a Holy War and I will go to heaven. I refused several missions and I expect to be executed any day. I have given up hope of ever seeing my parents again. Parents who try to rescue their children are threatened with death by the commanders. In December another child soldier in my group was beheaded in front of the other child soldiers because he refused a suicide mission against the TFG in Mogadishu. I cannot leave.

*\*Name has been changed.*

## UNICEF brings Islamic scholars together to take a stand on FGM

During 2009, UNICEF supported an Islamic theological institution in Sudan, SSMART, to bring scholars to both Somaliland and Puntland to discuss with Somali religious leaders the roots of female genital mutilation, and its relationship with Islamic teaching. The scholars were hosted and supported by the International Horn University in Somaliland, and the East Africa University in Puntland, who themselves have scholars and a history of working on social issues and their relationship to Islam. During the course of the year, three gatherings of imams took place in Puntland and four in Somaliland, culminating, in a conference for imams and sheikhs in Hargeisa Somaliland. At this conference religious leaders declared their willingness to support the abandonment of all forms of FGM.

Sheikh Ali Adan Nuur who leads prayers at a mosque in Borama, and is one of the most respected religious leaders in Somaliland spoke at the conference of sheikhs in Somaliland on the topic of Female Genital Mutilation. Here is what he said: "It was hitherto shameful for a religious man like me to talk about FGM because talking about such a topic was considered as an insult in the Somali community. For example, a sheikh named Mohamed Saaweer even received advice from his daughters not to talk about FGM in the conferences or meetings.



Sheikh Ali Adan Nuur. Credit© UNICEF Somalia/2009

This is because the daughters feared that they might be ostracized or insulted by girls of their age group if their father talks of FGM.

I am an imam, and I previously thought that female circumcision is endorsed and sacred, from the words of our prophet. I had my daughters circumcised while young because I believed this would enable them to live peacefully with the rest of the community.

However, I happen to have taken part in the discussions organized through International Horn University, where religious leaders among them learned sheikhs debated extensively about the issue. The debate focused deeply on the issue of FGM in an Islamic perspective. The various aspects of the *Xadith* and *Fiqi* were deeply looked at. It was agreed that FGM has no place in Islam, and from there we decided to raise our voices and urge people to abandon any type of FGM in the Somali community.

I really accept and appreciate the need for the abandonment of the FGM, a point I had never reached until the Sudanese scholars facilitated open discussions for us. I have since started monthly lectures (about the abandonment of FGM) in the mosque where I lead the prayers. I have also spoken on TV where I urged other sheikhs, who still have my old belief, to join me and abandon the custom. The other step I have taken is I have promised not to circumcise those of my daughters who are still uncut."

### Child Protection Advocates address domestic abuse

Amina Ahmed (not her real name) is eight years old, and lives in Waberi district in Mogadishu with her mother and five brothers and sisters. Her father is dead, and they are a family living in extreme poverty. Because of this, Amina's mother sent her to work for another family as a house-maid for a monthly salary of approximately \$10.

Amina was given work for more than 15 hours per day and when she complained to her mother, she responded violently, hitting her with stones and burning her with hot plastic. Amina sustained severe injuries on her eyes, back and stomach.

The Waberi Child Protection Committee, one of whose members lives near the house where Amina worked, referred this case to the local UNICEF-supported Child Protection Advocates. The Child Protection Advocates were then able to visit the family and to counsel Amina's mother. Amina was by then confined to her home because the severe wounds she had sustained made it difficult for her to continue working.

Amina's mother confessed to what she had done to her daughter, and agreed to stop punishing her and to stop exposing her to such exploitative conditions of work. Amina has since then received medical referral and UNICEF-funded psychosocial support from the Child Protection Advocates, and is now attending the local madrassa school.

**For more information on our programming or to learn how you can help, please contact us at:**

Isabella Castrogiovanni, Chief of Child Protection  
Denise Shepherd-Johnson, Chief of Communication  
Iman Morooka, Communication Officer,  
Robert Kihara, Communication Officer

icastrogiovanni@unicef.org + 254 723 786 765  
dshepherdjohnson@unicef.org + 254 722 719 867  
imorooka@unicef.org + 254-714 606 733  
rkihara@unicef.org + 254 722 206 883