

Somalia - can its diaspora in Europe help the UN find a workable plan?

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(Baroness Howells of Greenwich)

Too many initiatives, both domestic and international, seeking to end Somalia's misery have ended in failure. In Somalia, former allies fight each other while the international community led by the United Nations continues to send conflicting messages to its people. The lack of cohesion in the UN's political initiatives and humanitarian policies, incomplete reports on illegal and unlicensed fishing in Somali waters and the activities of UN-mandated naval armadas flying the flags of those same unlicensed fishing fleets confuses Somalis and observers alike. Further, the programmes of the European Union and other agencies fall short of their planned impact, tempting some member states to reconsider this use of their energies and resources.

One important and deeply involved community, the Somali diaspora, has yet to show it can work together for peace. And yet it has not been formally consulted, either by the UN or the EU. Now, diaspora members from six European countries supported by those in the USA, Canada and Australia have agreed new initiatives, outlined in a Joint Statement (www.somalijointstatement.info) which embraces all clans and all regions. The newly-formed G18 Group, comprising members from Somalia's eighteen regions, seeks to use the Joint Statement as a platform for diaspora cohesion. Their leaders will address this meeting. At their recent meeting with the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Mr Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, they asked "Does the UN have a plan?" Clearly, it does not but through their co-operation, the diaspora and the international community can surely develop a workable plan, using their links with clans and family. This will be Europe's first public meeting on Somalia convened by Somalis who believe they can be part of the solution, working with the UN and for the Somali people.

Please allow time to negotiate the rigorous security procedures upon entry.
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