

Overview of Local Peace Processes in Puntland

Introduction

Demography and historical background to Puntland

Historically, and during colonial times, the regions of Bari, Nugaal and North Mudug⁴ were together known as “*Migiurtinia*”. After independence, they were referred to as the ‘Northeast Regions’ of Somalia, known to the rest of Somalia as *geeri-go’an* and *gaariwaa* (meaning “isolated and inaccessible”) because of its remoteness. The territory is characterised by vast semi-arid rangelands on which nomadic pastoralists raise herds of camels, goats and sheep, a number of small towns, and small coastal settlements where people practice rudimentary fishing. The economy is primarily dependent on pastoralism, the livestock trade, and the import and export of goods at the port of Bosaaso on the northeast coast.

Stretching from the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean to the north and east, to south Mudug region in central Somalia and bordering Ethiopia and Somaliland in the west, the area encompasses the traditional territory of the Harti clan group of the Darood clan-family and a number of other Darood clans and is considered one of the most homogeneous Somali regions. The Harti clan group comprises the Majeerteen (in Bari, Nugaal and North Mudug regions and Zone 5 of Ethiopia), the Dhulbahante (in Sool and Sanaag regions), the Warsangeli (in Sanaag and Bari regions) and the Deshiishe clans (in Bari region). The Majeerteen are further subdivided into four major sub-clans, of which the largest, the Mohamoud Suleiman, is further subdivided into Omar Mohamud, in northern Mudug region, southern Nugaal region and lid in Zone 5 of Ethiopia; the Isse Mohamud, in Nugaal and Bari regions; and the Osman Mohamud, in Bari region (see diagram below). A number of smaller Majeerteen sub-clan also inhabit northern Bari region.

Three other clans of the Harti clan group, the Geesaguule, Kaskiqabe and Liibaangashe, are found in all of these regions, as well as a number of other Darood clans, including the Marehan, Leylkase and Awrtable and minority groups, such as the Arab Mohamud Saalah, Madhibaan, Tumaal, and Bantu. The formation of Puntland State, in 1998, claimed a wider territory than the historical “Northeast Regions” to incorporate parts of Sool, Sanaag and Togdheer to the west⁵, although Puntland’s claims to these western territories are contested by Somaliland. Harti clans also inhabit areas of southern Somalia, notably in the Lower Juba region and Kismayo, the regional capital, where they migrated in the 19th century, as well as the adjacent area of Wardheer in eastern Ethiopia.

The traditional life of the northeast regions was disrupted from 1900-1920 by the turmoil of battles waged by Sayid Mohamed Abdulle Hassan against European and Ethiopian colonisation of Somali territories, and subsequently from 1923-7 by the resistance of the Majeerteen Sultanates to Italian direct rule (Abdisalam M. Issa Salwe 1996). From 1935-36, over 25,000 pastoralists were subject to compulsory conscription by the Italians for their war against Ethiopia and many of the able young men who survived this later emigrated to southern Somalia, contributing to the socio-economic growth of the emerging towns there (Puntland State profile, 2006-7). Through their involvement in business and in the Italian and British colonial administrations, they acquired modern skills and experiences and played a prominent role in Somali politics, becoming an important component of the Somali state machinery after independence in 1960 (Bernhard Helander 1998). For example, the last civilian president of Somalia (1967-9), Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, and Prime Minister Abdirizak Haji Hussein were both prominent Majeerteen leaders. Sharmarke’s assassination by one of his bodyguards triggered the 1969 military coup, and Abdirizak Haji Hussein subsequently became a target for persecution by the military regime.

4 North Mudug region comprises (Gaalka’yo, Jarruban and Galdogob districts)

5 Specifically, Sool region without the district of Ainabo, eastern Sanaag, and Buhoodle district of Togdheer region: the latter is now considered the capital of the Puntland region of Ayn, with two new districts of Widh-Widh and Horufadhi.