



# Promoting Peace Education within University Students Living in a Conflict-Affected State of Somalia

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Somalia has suffered devastating civil war that continued over the last 25 years. The war completely destroyed national institutions, and undermined the social foundations of Somali society. The younger generation has grown up in a miserable, disillusioning environment, lacking a sense of safety and trust in the community.

A war mentality and violent culture has become part of youngsters' everyday life. Because of their tendencies to violence together with their sense of hopelessness, young people can easily be recruited by warlords and the extremist Islamists. As members of the Somali diaspora with training in peace building our desire was to give back to our homeland through higher education students.

We hoped that teaching our participants universal peace values, human rights, non-violent conflict resolution, effective communication and conflict transformation skills will help them transform themselves positively and develop culture of peace, harmony, and coexistence.

The peace education training will also help university students restore of sense of hope, confidence, community spirit and social solidarity in the midst of civil war.

We aimed to help university students



understand and identify the root causes of Somalia's social problems believing that this will reflect in the long term on Somali society in positive ways. The training was first run as a pilot for Mogadishu University students in 2015, opening the door to a more ambitious program for other higher education students. Therefore, the 2016 program was run in four locations: Mogadishu, Somali National, Hargeisa, and East Africa Universities. Safety was a particular concern, especially in Mogadishu.

In delivery strategies, a culturally appropriate approach was blended together with

modern approaches to conflict transformation and peace capacity building. Since Somalia is a Muslim country and defined as a nation of poets, the delivery emphasized the role of Islamic teachings in opposing the use of violence, and included sessions in using the creative arts for peace building such as Gabay (poetry), Buraanbur (women's poems) composed by participants themselves, songs, Sheeko xariir (storytelling). Somali proverbs endorsing peace building, watching peace documentaries relevant to the local context, and sessions of reflection and inner-dialogue.



According to feedback from participants, the training was very successful and left positive impacts on the participants. At each University campus the participants formed their own peace network and now maintain regular contact with us. As well as having a local significance the training impacted on the worldwide Somali community through community media including TV, radio, and social media. The Somali community developed sense of ownership of the initiative, and therefore, the community contributed to the cost of the training and some community members donated a land in Mogadishu to build a peace centre.