

On the Line FOR PEACE

Making Peace in Somalia

In 1960, the independent country of Somalia was formed from two areas of east Africa. Each of these



areas had Somali people—nomads who moved from place to place to graze their livestock. They were Muslims and spoke the Somali language. Unfortunately, these

common things were not enough to unite the people of Somalia, and they have been fighting a civil war for most of their history (see box).

Somalis believe conflict is a part of everyday life. A Somali proverb says, “The teeth and the tongue are close neighbors, and yet they sometimes bite each other.” From long ago, the Somalis had their own ways of solving conflicts. The elders would call the two sides to a meeting under the “court tree,” a place to talk things over. Everyone involved in the conflict had to be present in front of the jury of elders at the agreed time.

Farah Suusle, Peacemaker

One time, the elders met with two warring clans (groups) to work out a problem between them. As they talked, members from one clan got stubborn and refused to give in. At that moment, Farah Suusle, a brave and peace-loving elder from the other clan, requested that the mediators ask one of the most stubborn men what were his conditions for peace.

The man said, “I demand that your clan come here before my clan, carrying shoes in their mouths [an extreme humiliation] and crawling on the ground. Only then will I consider accepting a peace deal with your clan.”

Farah Suusle stood up right away. He took his shoes off his feet, put them in his mouth, and crawled toward the man who had made the demand. The war between these two clans ended, because of the humble and peace-loving actions of Farah Suusle.

Women as Peacemakers

Since women in Somalia often marry into a different clan, they can sometimes help to resolve conflicts. Once, men from one clan

Recent Somali history

1960—Two areas with Somali people join to become the Republic of Somalia.

1969—Mohamed Siad Barre comes to power by overthrowing the government.

1977—Somalia starts a war against Ethiopia and loses.

1991—Barre is overthrown, the government is in chaos. Local warlords take power. Somaliland (northwestern part of country) declares independence.

1992—Famine in Somalia. U.S. goes with the United Nations on “humanitarian mission” but tries to win over warlords through force. Warlords force out the U.S. and UN.

1998—Puntland (northeastern part) declares independence.

2000—Peace conference organized by the country Djibouti.

2001—New government elected, but it can't take control of the capital, Mogadishu, and fails.

2003—16th international peace conference held in Kenya.



by Anne Meyer Byler

stole camels from another clan. The clan elders decided to send a group of women delegates to ask for the camels to be returned to them. The leader of the women was related to the men who had taken the camels, but she had married into the other clan.

When she and the group of women arrived, she demanded that her clansmen return the camels. After several days of arguing, the elders and the men who had taken the camels finally agreed to give her back her own husband's camels.

After the woman got her camels back, she said to the elders of her clansmen, "Gentlemen, what about the camels of these women who are here with me now? I tell you,



it will be shameful on your part if you send them back empty-handed. Please give them their camels too, so we can all go back to our families with joy." At last, the elders handed over all the camels, and some of them went back with the women. Elders from both clans met together and made a peace agreement.

Women in Somalia have also helped to make peace by writing songs and poems, persuading their husbands to stop fighting, helping out at peace conferences by giving money and food, organizing demonstrations against war, and making speeches.

Information on Somalia was taken from articles in the MCC Peace Office Newsletter, Apr.-June 2003, (see www.mcc.org) written by Chantal Logan and Abdullahi Mohamed Shirwa; and from a sidebar "Somali Women Peacemakers" from Amina Mohamoud Warsame, *Queens without Crowns: Somaliland Women's Changing Roles and Peace Building*, 2002.



A peacemaker of yesterday: Lois Gunden Clemens

In 1941, Lois Gunden was 26 years old and teaching French at Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, when she heard about Jewish refugees in southern France who were fleeing the war. She also heard that a children's home—a safe place for Jewish children to go—needed a director who spoke French. Lois wanted to help the children, so she volunteered to be the director and sailed on a ship across the Atlantic Ocean.

While Lois was at the children's home, she had to comfort children whose parents were taken away to concentration camps. Sometimes police came and wanted to take children away, too. Lois had to think fast to save the children from going to concentration camps.

In 1943, German soldiers came and took the American workers in the children's home to Germany as prisoners. They had to stay in a big hotel for 13 months. They were not hurt, but couldn't go outside unless a soldier went with them. In 1944, Lois was finally allowed to return to the United States.