



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

www.techniumscience.com



Vol. 76/2025
A New Decade for Social Changes

PLUS
COMMUNICATION P



International
Communication & PR

The Somaliland's recognition: Challenges and opportunities

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Abstract. This paper intended to discuss the critical matters related to Somaliland's diplomatic recognition challenges and opportunities. These challenges stem from various historical, political, economic, and social factors that have shaped the region's quest for sovereignty, and analyses of these elements better explained the potential pathways for achieving international legitimacy and support for Somaliland's aspirations. After the collapse of Somalia's central government, Somaliland declared its independence in 1991 and successfully established government institutions that provide an efficient system of security and stability; however, Somaliland has not yet received international recognition.

Keywords. Somaliland, Somalia, Diplomatic relation, International relation, recognition, De facto, De jure

1. Introduction

Somaliland became a British colony in 1884 and subsequently attained independence from Britain. On June 26, 1960, four days before Italian Somalia's independence on July 1, 1960, Somaliland united with Italian Somalia to establish the Republic of Somalia. Somaliland is a state that regained its independence from Somalia in 1991. Somaliland reestablished its independence from Somalia with the establishment of the Somali National Movement (SNM) by the people of Somaliland in 1981. The Somali National Movement (SNM) insurgents engaged in combat and ultimately dismantled the Siad Barre administration.

The territory of Somaliland corresponds to the former British protectorate, which Somaliland inherited from the colony in 1960. The delineation of the British colonial borders is a critical factor in the establishment of this de facto state in Africa, which is defined as follows: "The territory of the Republic of Somaliland encompasses the same area as that of the former Somaliland British Protectorate, situated between Latitude 8°00' to 11°30' north of the equator and Longitude 42°30' to 49°00' east." This territory includes land, islands, and territorial waters, both above and below the surface, as well as airspace and the continental shelf. The Republic of Somaliland is bordered by the Gulf of Aden to the north, Somalia to the east, the Federal Republic of Ethiopia to the south and west, and the Republic of Djibouti to the northwest (Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland, 2001).

Since the reinstatement of Somaliland's sovereignty in 1991 and the borders inherited on the date of attainment of independence on June 26, 1960, Somaliland has made notable

progress in building peace, security, and constitutional democracy within its de facto borders. The reestablishment of Somaliland reduced tensions and border conflict between Ethiopia and the Somali Republic before 1991 and, in turn, has paved the way for laying the foundation of long-lasting peace in the Horn. Somaliland and Ethiopia share a long border of 850 kilometers, which is secure, safe, and peaceful. The existing relations between Ethiopia and Somaliland on various fronts, including the two countries' *economic, diplomatic, and security relations, have been won through the concerted efforts of many people from both governments (Mohamoud, M. A. 2017).*

2. Fundamental requirements of the state for the international legal system

As Addisu & Kruger (2009) mentioned, the fundamental element of the international legal system is the state. The state has a personality that indicates itself, and it also has rank in international law as a normal human being has rank. The state system was found in the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe as a "nation-state." A state's sovereignty denotes the country's autonomy, and its two qualifications are:

- first, implying the country controls its territory and
- The other concern is to have working institutions and principles,

The code of state sovereignty formed customary law and also habitually verified international treaties such as the UN Charter States in Article 2 Section 7, which states, "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state." This is a proposal to respect every sovereign country's right to exercise its international affairs.

States can build or subsist in a lot of different ways: a previous colony can get its sovereignty; a territorial section of the country may defect to shape an innovative state; the old state collapses and is divided into numerous new nations; or the unified sovereignty of two sovereign countries creates a new nation. In international law, there are two forms of recognition:

- De facto recognition, which is temporary recognition it is mostly granted to a government and it can easily be revoked.
- De jure recognition, which is a permanent and legal recognition that cannot be, revoked (Addisu& Kruger, 2009).

3. Montevideo Convention of 1933 and Somaliland's de facto statehood legitimate

As Hoch, T., & Rudicova, K. (2015), raised in Somaliland, declared its independence on May 18, 1991, and are still hoping to succeed in international de jure recognition, the formation of a state is derived from the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States. Consistent with Article 1 of this convention, the fundamental criteria of statehood are:

- A. Permanent population
- B. Defined territory,
- C. Government and
- D. Capacity to enter into relations with other states,

Therefore, if de facto statehood depends on having defined territory, a permanent population, and a government that controls its claiming territory, Somaliland's authorities perform state administration and exercise the capability to go through relations with other countries. Somaliland has been searching for independence for the last 30 years and isn't yet internationally recognized (Hoch, T., & Rudicova, K., 2015).

Concerning the African situation, the doctrine of respect for the borders subsisting and appealing to the accomplishment of a country's independence is protected in the charter of the Organization of African Union (OAU) (Resolution AHG/Res.16 (1) on Border Disputes between African States) adopted in Cairo in July 1964 and in the Constitutive Act of the African Union (Article 4b) approved in Lome in July 2000. That was related to the reluctance of recognized states and international organizations to get involved in de facto states; this negligence also fits the poor reputation of de facto states. As a result, it is not too amazing that the global community has habitually supported the return of breakaway regions to the administration of the mother states through various offers of broad autonomy and asymmetric federations (Hoch, T., & Rudicova, K., 2015).

On behalf of the de facto countries, their economic activities, such as investment and loans from international financial entities and banks, are restricted because of the lack of recognition, as is their exporting of goods. In reality, there are comparatively considerable barriers and isolation that sort out the existence of de facto states' citizens from other worlds. Therefore, it is no surprise that the dream of getting de jure recognition is the first choice of foreign policy in de facto states, which is intimately associated with their financial and social growth (*Ibid.*).

3.1. Somaliland and the Montevideo Convention of 1933

The Somaliland government's plan shows that Somaliland fulfilled the important criteria of statehood described by the Montevideo Conference in 1933, in which the state was proposed to have:

- 1) A permanent population
- 2) A defined territory
- 3) A government; and
- 4) The capacity to enter into relations with other countries

3.1.1. Permanent population

Somaliland announced that the population of the country is 4.2 to 4.5 million (Somaliland Ministry of National Planning, 2023). Although the nomadic way of life likely affects population numbers by creating communities that move across borders, the Somaliland government highlights its successes in creating a national identity since declaring independence and other features that set Somaliland apart from Somalia.

3.1.2. Defined territory

Somaliland territory was the former British Somaliland using its colonial frontline borders established in 1884, and its frontiers were measured on the basis of international treaties among colonial powers in the region and Ethiopia between 1888 and 1897 (Bradbury, Abokor, and Yusuf, 2003).

Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland also mentioned to the colonial past, where it defines the territory of this de facto state as follows: "The territory of the Republic of Somaliland covers the same area as that of the former Somaliland Protectorate and is located between Latitude 8°00' to 11°30' north of the equator and Longitude 42°30' to 49°00' east" and consists of the land, islands, and territorial waters, above and below the surface, the airspace and the continental shelf, the Republic of Somaliland is bordered by the Gulf of Aden to the north; Somalia to the east; the Federal Republic of Ethiopia to the south and the west; and the Republic of Djibouti to the North West (Constitution of the Republic of Somaliland, 2001). Former colonial borderlines is a crucial qualification for the creation of new state in Africa, therefore, it forms part of the legitimization strategies of the Somaliland government.

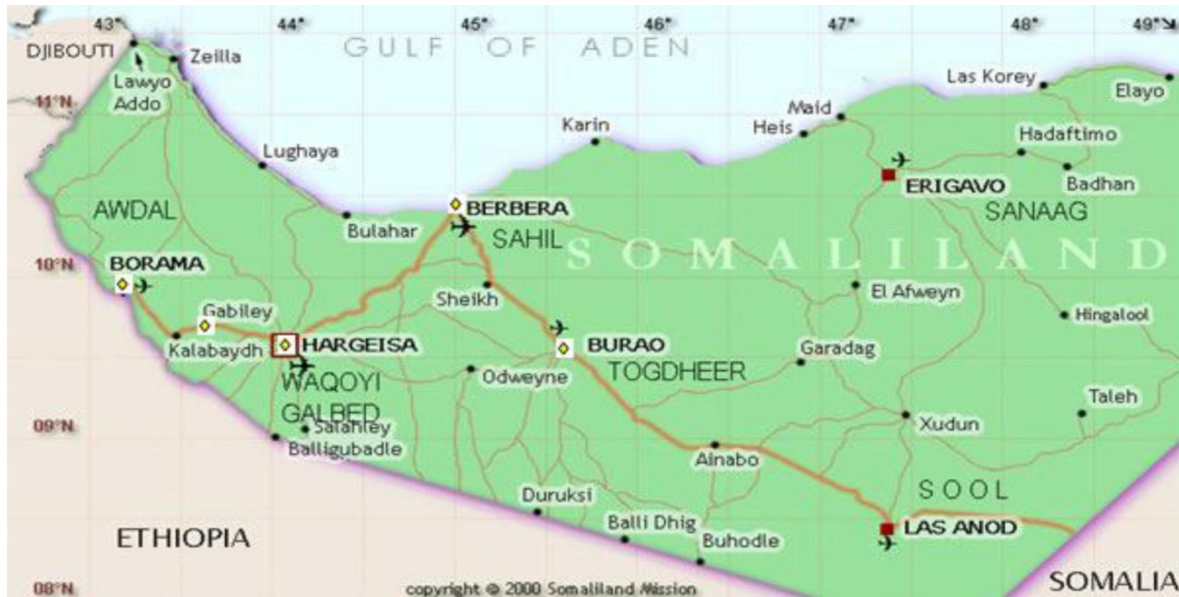


Figure 1 Somaliland's British protectorate Map and the new Somaliland de facto map
Source: Somaliland Ministry of planning

3.1.3. Government

International community doesn't yet recognized Somaliland as a full state, as well Somaliland doesn't offered any foreign aid for the post-war reconstruction, internal conciliation has been resumed the peace and security that Somaliland maintained last 30 years, the resolution was based on traditional cultural approaches conflict resolution and setting the rule of law via the clan leaders which resulted today's Somaliland government, for the period of the first twelve years the customary way of government based on clan leaders and clan institutions triumphed, which was afterward put backed with a western-style system of political parties and institutions (Bradbury, Abokor and Yusuf, 2003).

3.1.3.1. Somaliland Government 1991–1993 (SNM Government)

When Siad Barre regime defeated 1991, Clan leaders were the peace making leaders and the first significant peace conference was held in February 1991 in the port city of Berbera, this conference announced official cease-fire and settled SNM's policy of nonviolent coexistence between Somaliland clans, Somaliland's first administration was founded in May 1991 at Burco conference, structurally this government was developed on the SNM's organizational chart, and the chairman Abdirahman Ahmed Ali (Tuur) became Somaliland's first executive president and the central committee of SNM grow to be as a first parliament, agreed on two years term of office, two years later Abdirahman Tuur's government held a conference which was held to Somaliland's western city of Borama 1993 and peacefully transferred the power to his successor president Mohamed Ibrahim Egal who was elected this Borama conference, the conference also accepted agreement which mentions the government procedures including two houses of parliament Council of Elders and Representatives Assembly in addition government executives (*Ibid.*).

President Egal affirmed in 1999 the conversion of Somaliland's governmental system into a multi-part parliamentary system and held a constitutional referendum on May 31, 2001, which stretched the independence of Somaliland. The constitution also limited the number of the national party's three political parts, and the first step in performing multi-party democracy was the election of local council committees. On December 15, 2002, the presidential election

was held, in which President Dahir Rayale Kahin succeeded after competing against three parties. International observers noted that this election adhered to democratic rules. Then, on September 29, 2005, Somaliland held its first parliamentary election, marking a significant transition from a political system based on clan membership to modern representative democracy (Hoch, T., & Rudicova, K., 2015).

3.1.4. The capacity to enter in to relations with other states

Somaliland has the capacity to enter in to relations with other states, although most authors normally pick out that the de facto states that are encircled by barriers of Segregation, but Somaliland survived this for the reason of that Somaliland has good relation for the countries of east Africa including Ethiopia and the rest of the world, the trade relation between Somaliland and Arab peninsula is an witness of this point particularly export to livestock for Saudi Arabia, Yemen and United Arab Emirates and remittances are the majority significant revenue sources of Somaliland, Diaspora fit in vital role for the country's economy, there are many sectors growth such as Hargeisa International Airport, Telecommunication segment, media, and Somaliland Passport which is not only recognized the states of the region but a number of European countries are accepted such as Great Britain, France, as well as Belgium (Hoch, T., & Rudicova, K., 2015).

Year	Name	Quantity	Unit Price USD	Total Value	Grand Total Value	Grand Total Quantity
2016	Goat/Sheep	2,875,770				3,074,899
	Cattle	142,303				
	Camel	56,826				
2017	Goat/Sheep	1,770,968				1,894,696
	Cattle	95,474				
	Camel	28,254				
2018	Goat/Sheep	1,280,252				1,397,466
	Cattle	116,705				
	Camel	509				
2019	Goat/Sheep	1,710,646	\$56.91	\$ 97,352,864	\$ 197,769,447	1,898,431
	Cattle	136,846	\$ 461.1	\$ 63,099,691		
	Camel	50,939	\$732.58	\$ 37,316,893		
2020	Goat/Sheep	1,105,054	\$71.40	\$ 78,900,855.60	\$170,783,822.40	1,277,897
	Cattle	113,109	\$ 470.60	\$ 53,229,095.40		
	Camel	59,734	\$ 647.10	38,653,871.40		
	Goat/Sheep	1,867,665	\$ 69.87	\$ 130,493,754		

2021	Cattle	102,346	\$ 366.20	\$ 37,479,105	\$182,817,662	1,997,971
	Camel	27,960	\$ 530.93	\$ 14,844,803		

Table 1 Somaliland's Livestock exports to the Arab Peninsula (2016-2021)

Source: Somaliland ministry of Finance.

As the above table depicted \$183790, 310.46666 average Somaliland Annual livestock trade.

4. Challenges adjacent Somaliland to get international de jure recognition

The most important ideology, which was established in the 18th century, and today's discussion relating to self-determination, is that in order for a secessionist entity to be valid, it desires to be approved by the metropolitan state; if not, it risks being declared illegal. Katanga in Congo, Biafra in Nigeria, Anyanya in South Sudan, and Western Sahara were dismissed on account of this principle. At this time, what is being referred to be "matter of fact" in opposition to 'matter of law, in the course of the last, de facto counties get recognition from the international state system, and the independence that it awards them convinces them of legal requirements and privileges. Because of reality, countries might fulfill de facto statehood requirements, although they don't accept adhering to the global state system because of the legality of their claims and requirements. One of the underlying reasons that Somaliland has not yet achieved recognition could be the influence of the policy of recognition by the metropolitan state (Bereketeab, R. 2012).

On the other hand, for the legal obstacles to recognition, there are other aspects causing difficulties: there is some procedural and official recognition. South Sudan's self-determination what facilitated technically and formally recognition of South Sudan's self-determination and resulting secession is the existence of a legitimate central government so as to might be a reliable and principled collaborator in the negotiations mandatory to accomplish the work out of self-determination, in this logic, South Sudan convened the situation that the challenging parties ought to turn up at some sort of agreement if secession is to be validated, the willingness on behalf of any reason of the judgment National Congress Part (NCP) in Khartoum to have a significant role in bargaining the Comprehensive peace Agreement between it and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) has been noted above, The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) as a result served as a legal instrument upon which the AU, UN and international community may possibly support to grant recognition on the promising independent country of South Sudan, Eritrea also is the same case relative to the recognition of Eritrea (*Ibid.*).

Unluckily in the case of Somaliland is different while the central state of Somalia collapsed leaving negotiating vacuum and caused Somaliland leaders to miss credible Somali administration and resulted difficulty of recognition on the secession of Somaliland, International community told to Somaliland side first to negotiate with government of Somalia, and if both sides agree it will straightforward for international Community to recognize Somaliland independence, in brief lack of Somali Central government or the fall down of the nation, conversely one sided independent declaration of Somaliland cannot confirm recognition, while this fall down of Somali government caused the issue of law situation might not be accomplished, and as a result became a barrier to achieving Somaliland's official recognition, Conciliation and assembly discussion meant to resolve the problem were out of question because one partner was absent. IGAD, AU, UN, and the international community,

which take part in an important task in bringing the conflict in South Sudan to an end, do not give Somaliland an important achievement because Somaliland does not meet legal partner negotiations. International law requires the consent of the central government to enable secession demands if international bodies are to intervene. For that reason, the case of Somaliland became so sensitive that neither IGAD nor the AU would risk intervention, and neighboring countries, Somaliland corresponds to a complicated regional dilemma (Bereketab, R. 2012).

On behalf of historical and ethnic pattern of Somaliland community, unlike South Sudan, obviously missing in Somaliland is the interest of powerful external actors, it is comprehensible that geopolitical security, energy and economic benefits shapes the contrary of international arena, it is apparent that the discovery of South Sudan oil was the main motive of international powers to support South Sudan case, but Somaliland does not yet succeeded to be capable to attract influential countries to support on international stages on its own interest, because though Somaliland has valuable resources Somaliland does not have currently discovered or extracted its strategic resources, the relation of neighboring states with Somalia also influenced Somaliland's probability of recognition, as well as the connotations of recognition of Somaliland for their own minorities, neighboring countries are vigilant not to be seen to support the fragmentation of Somalia, whereas the international community is waiting for the AU to take the initiative, therefore, fundamentally recognition is forecasted on a political rather than a legal basis (Farley, 2010:810).

5. Comparing Somaliland and Eritrea's secessions

Somaliland's secessionists are still arguing the right to secede and gain independence, on the other hand the government continuing marginalization and subjugation for the northern Somali Communities, particularly for the period of the dictator rule of Siad Barre, Somaliland inquiry matching to the theory of remedial right on secession, regarding to the territorial matters of Somaliland, there is opportunity of independent existence to negotiate for the preceding country, if Somaliland population are keep going their rejection of the involvement and taking part of the Somali government events and oppressions, Siad Barre created clan enmity between the northern inhabited clans to fulfill his political objectives, Siad Barre evacuated from other region clans population who is loyal to him to settle northern region at the end of the 1970s (Hoch, T., & Rudicova, K., 2015).

Armed rebels against Barre's regime resulted in the formation of opposition groups by northern Somali clans. A violent campaign by the regime against the opposition in the north of the country culminated in 1988, when Burao and Hargeisa were bombed. This attack caused the deaths of about 50,000 inhabitants and the displacement of another half million Somalis, particularly to Ethiopia. The violation of the rights of the northern Somalia inhabitants during the period of the United Republic of Somalia thus questions the right of Somalia to the preservation of territorial integrity; during this period, Somaliland was deprived of the right to internal self-determination, and thus it has the right (Hoch, T., & Rudicova, K., 2015).

5.1. Eritrea's Secession

Eritrea's case of secession was put on trial in a thirty-year war of secession against Ethiopia, its metropolitan state. Eritrea was an Italian colony until the British occupied it during World War II. Following World War II, instead of gaining independence through decolonization, Eritrea became federated with Ethiopia by the United Nations (UN). Ethiopia abrogated this UN-imposed federal arrangement by annexing Eritrea in 1962, extinguishing

Eritrea's autonomy. Ethiopia's annexation sparked the armed Eritrean secessionist movement; ultimately, Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia was facilitated both by the success of its armed struggle and by a revolution within Ethiopia. Ethiopia's revolutionary government, rather than continuing the struggle to retain Eritrea, endorsed Eritrean independence. Eritrea emerged as an independent state within its former colonial borders on May 24, 1993, following a plebiscite conducted with the support of Ethiopia and monitored by observers from both the UN and the Organization for African Unity ("OAU"). Eritrea was then rapidly recognized by governments around the world and admitted to the UN. Eritrea's secession was thus legitimated when its parent state gave up the struggle to retain Eritrea and acceded to its independence (Farley, B. R., 2010).

6. Prospects of Somaliland recognition

The likelihood of Somaliland's recognition is rising as global support for Somalia diminishes in light of the Somali government's persistent shortcomings. This alteration in viewpoint helps Somaliland establish diplomatic relations and possibly achieve full state recognition. With the increasing global focus on democratic systems and the competent administration of Somaliland, Somaliland's proclaimed independence finally gives the impression that it is predicted to attain the recognition that it desires. Recognition elevates Somaliland's political status and attracts foreign relations and aid. Furthermore, an increasing number of countries are expressing interest in Somaliland's diplomatic relations; this attention has been growing since the new president of Somaliland Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi took office. Somaliland's strategic geopolitical location is one of the factors that draw interest, along with the dynamic issues in the Horn of Africa. This newfound attention presents opportunities for the citizens of Somaliland. As Somaliland navigates its path toward greater recognition, it also addresses internal strengths to ensure sustainable growth and governance.

6.1. Somaliland and its aspirations for recognition from the United States of America

Somaliland has been suffering from a diplomatic problem for the past 30 years and has pursued international recognition, targeting nations and international bodies such as the USA, Britain, the UN, the AU, and IGAD. Since Mr. Abdirahman Mohamed Abdillahi assumed the presidency, the Somaliland government has dispatched requests for recognition to numerous countries worldwide. Regarding extensive efforts, in early July 2025, there emerged a consensus among US officials, including President Trump, who indicated that his administration would consider thinking about recognizing Somaliland. Additionally, members of the US Congress and other officials expressed their support for Somaliland's recognition. Furthermore, there are members of the British parliament who have started to express their support for Somaliland's recognition.

Given that the United States currently holds the most influence of any country in the world, both economically and politically, it is crucial to support Somaliland in its effort to gain recognition. President Trump stated in an interview that the United States is currently considering Somaliland's issues. On the other hand, Senator Ted Cruz recommended that the United States of America support Somaliland's bid for recognition due to its ongoing diplomatic conflict with China. The diplomatic war, which began in 2020 when Somaliland and Taiwan became allies, involves Somaliland on one side and the Chinese government on the other, as China supports Somalia to prevent Somaliland from gaining international recognition due to its important geopolitical position.

Somaliland, with its 856 km of coastline, is a highly strategic country. Berbera Port is one of the strategic ports in East Africa and also generally in Africa. In terms of trading and economic development in Somaliland, the USA and other countries are considering a crucial opportunity related to Somaliland's recognition: its seashore lies along a strategically important maritime route that extends from Bab-el-Mandeb to the Indian Ocean, bordering Somalia (Elmi A. Yousuf, 2023, *Ethio-Somaliland Diplomatic Relations since 1994: Status, Opportunities, and Challenges*, Hawassa University, Unpublished Thesis). This strategic location enhances Somaliland's potential for trade and makes it an attractive partner for international investments. As a result of recognizing Somaliland, countries can promote stability in the region while capitalizing on its rich resources and vibrant economy.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

Every nation in this modern era has a diplomatic strategy for interacting with other states. If a country lacks political ties to other nations, it will become isolated. Somaliland has been actively seeking diplomatic recognition. The lack of recognition hinders its ability to engage fully in international status growth, which is crucial for its economic progress. Somaliland consistently advocates for its international standing, navigating the intricacies of a difficult geopolitical landscape while striving to establish itself as a genuine state. Somaliland offered important resources to the United States of America (USA) and other powerful countries, as its primary interest in diplomacy is to gain international recognition. Globally, diplomatic relations are essential to a country's existence. Somaliland has met all the criteria for recognition but has not yet received international recognition. For that reason, Somaliland is suffering from a diplomatic problem.

To ensure that Somaliland receives the long-sought recognition, it should intensify its efforts to obtain international acknowledgment and reach out to every country that can assist in this endeavor. This includes engaging in diplomatic dialogue, participating in international forums, and fostering relationships with influential nations. Through demonstrating steadiness, governance, and a commitment to peace, Somaliland can bolster its case for recognition on the global stage.

Somaliland is aware that certain individuals, invited by the Somali government from Somaliland, claim to represent its populace while disregarding Somaliland's superior governance and democratic electoral system, which operates on the principle of one man, one vote. Somalia integrates the individuals from Somaliland into various governmental councils, including the Somali parliament and executive bodies. Consequently, Somaliland should formulate a definitive strategy concerning these individuals to avoid relinquishing personal interests and strengthen national interests. Additionally, these individuals could present the case for Somaliland's recognition to the Somali Parliament for deliberation, while Somaliland maintains its stance against unification with the Somali government. This approach not only upholds Somaliland's autonomy but also guarantees that the Somali government will stop inviting those people if it feels that these members are pursuing Somaliland's case for recognition.

Somaliland has tackled the last 34 years of diplomatic isolation from the rest of the world. The international community should now take its recognition issue into consideration. Somaliland should not remain tied to Somalia, as Somalia has long failed to establish a government that can fully control its territory and ensure peace and security; this failure has forced Somalia to rely on foreign troops from other countries for its security. Instead, Somaliland is enjoying peace, stability, and democratic elections that it has achieved

independently. Recognizing Somaliland's autonomy would not only validate the aspirations of its people but also encourage a more stable and secure region. By acknowledging its self-governance, the international community could encourage economic development and cooperation, ultimately contributing to a more peaceful coexistence in the Horn of Africa.

Somaliland should submit a request to the United Nations, the African Union, and IGAD to review their policy towards Somaliland and Somalia so as to prevent the neglect of the legal and human rights of Somaliland citizens. This request could pave the way for increased recognition of Somaliland's sovereignty and the establishment of a framework that ensures the protection of its citizens' rights. Engaging these international bodies, Somaliland should advocate for its interests and seek support in addressing the ongoing challenges faced by its people.

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