



# NEWSLETTER

ICRC SOMALIA DELEGATION

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## GARGAAR

### SOMALIA: RESTORING CONTACTS BETWEEN FAMILIES SEPARATED BY CONFLICT

After two decades of conflict, tens of thousands of Somalis have been separated from their families. The ICRC in Somalia helps reunite these families in partnership with the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), and other Red Cross and Red Crescent societies around the world.

Radio remains the easiest way for people to connect in Somalia. I met Hashi in Mogadishu; he had lost touch with members of his family – his sisters, brothers and in-laws.

Each week the ICRC provides 125 names of missing people to the BBC Somali service to read out.

Hashi, who submitted tracing requests to the Somali Red Crescent Society always tunes in without fail to hear if there is anything new. Holding on to a small radio Hashi says "I hold it to my ear every day; I bought it just for this purpose."

Despite the availability of internet access in some parts of Somalia, sending a Red Cross / Red Crescent family message is not a thing of the past. For the Somalis who live in internally displaced people's (IDP) camps it's the only means available.

Batulo lives in what used to be the UK embassy in Mogadishu. Her family had lost everything due to the conflict and she has been living in the IDP camp for over four years.

Batulo lost touch with her husband in 2008. In 2012, she received information that he was in Nairobi, in neighbouring Kenya. The SRCS helped her make contact with him. She exchanged messages with him through the SRCS and the Kenyan Red Cross Society. However, just after they re-established contact, Batulo's husband passed away. Batulo is sad that her husband is gone, but she continues to send family messages to her brother-in-law. She says, "I am very happy because we are getting in touch with people who have been missing for a long time."

#### ICRC - BBC MISSING PERSON RADIO PROGRAM

As radio remains the best way of reaching many Somalis, the ICRC and BBC have combined for many years to help seek out missing people. Families share the names of their missing relatives with the ICRC and SRCS. The ICRC then shares these names with the BBC. The BBC Somali service then broadcasts these names during a 15 minute radio programme broadcast 5 times a week from 17:45 to 18.00 Somali time. When missing relatives hear their names read out on the radio, they are then able to contact the ICRC or the SRCS to re-establish contact with those trying to find them. In 2012, 10,000 names were broadcast, and 300 missing persons were located by the families searching for them.



Listen to a Radio programme helps people trace missing relatives

ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross

# RESTORING FAMILY LINKS:

## AN INTERVIEW WITH ASHA ISMAEL, ICRC SOMALIA HEAD OF FAMILY LINKS PROGRAM

Asha Ismael has been working with the ICRC as Head of the Somalia Family Links Program for 12 years. Based in Nairobi, she has been travelling extensively to Somalia over the years and knows the volunteers of the Somali Red Crescent the ICRC relies on to trace family members.



Asha Ismael, ICRC Somalia Head of Family Links Program

### What does the ICRC do to reunite families?

In close partnership with the Somali Red Crescent Society (SRCS), the ICRC has been helping restore family links in Somalia since 1977. The SRCS has 23 offices in all regions of the country working to help Somali people to re-establish and maintain ties with their relatives in Somalia and around the world.

### How does it work?

The ICRC and the SRCS offer different services to people who have lost touch in Somalia. These services include: -

**The Red Cross / Red Crescent Family Message:** These are open letters that allow people to send family news

when they know the location of their relatives, but the traditional means of communication have been disrupted. In 2012, 19,000 Somalis exchanged family messages with relatives both abroad and in Somalia.

**Tracing requests:** This is a service that helps people who wish to locate and restore contact with their relatives but do not know their address. In 2012, 543 persons opened new tracing requests for their missing family members, while 1370 requests are still pending from previous years. 300 persons could be traced successfully and put in touch with their families.

The Somali family links website includes those names broadcast by the ICRC - BBC missing person programme (please see ICRC-BBC Box), and any other tracing requests. In 2012 the ICRC published the names of 10,000 missing people on the family links website, where anybody in the Somali Diaspora around the world can log in and search.

**Travel documents:** This is a document issued by the ICRC on the request of an embassy, when a person lacks documents (passport/I.D.) enabling them to travel home to their country of origin to be reunited with their families.

### How do Somalis access these services in Somalia?

In Somalia, people can obtain access to tracing services through the Somali Red Crescent Society field workers and network of volunteers, or by going directly to the 23 tracing offices in the country. Somalis abroad can contact the closest ICRC or Red Cross / Red Crescent national society in their country of residence.

# SOMALI REFUGEES IN YEMEN: AN ICRC TRACING OFFICER SHARES HIS INSIGHT

My name is Mohamed Hersi. I am an ICRC tracing field officer. In addition, I am a Somali elder in our community in Sana'a. I was one of the first to arrive here and I have been a long-time resident in Yemen, for almost 30 years now.

As an elder it comes to me naturally to assist the Somali community and to facilitate relations with the host country in matters including education, health and immigration. During my spare time, the other members of the Somali community and I try to work together to meet the needs of the extremely vulnerable individuals such as elders, children, unaccompanied minors, widows and people with disabilities amongst the urban refugees.

Privately and professionally, I am always in touch with the Somali community in

order to put people back in touch with their loved ones when they lost contact due to the war in Somalia.

As an ICRC tracing field officer I try to help separated families to reunite and I collect data that helps solve tracing cases where Somali nationals in Somalia and all over the world can manage to find their family members in Yemen. We address the elders in all the regions in Yemen to contact and transmit the tracing lists to their tribe and clan members. This way they contact us and report back about their findings.



Tahrir cafeteria in Sana'a. Mohamed Hersi, meets Somali refugees to discuss the issue of their relatives with whom they lost contact because of the conflict in Somalia

The Somali community is grateful to the ICRC in Yemen as it was one of the first humanitarian organizations in Sana'a to support the Somali community to establish a centre.

Read about how a Somali man found his family

# SOUTH AFRICA: FAMILY LINKS KEEPS THE SOMALI COMMUNITY CONNECTED

Somali refugees started settling in South Africa in the early 1990s as a result of civil war in Somalia. Since at home there was no central government, in South Africa they did not have any diplomatic representation. The Somali Association of South Africa (SASA) was therefore formed out of the necessity to provide a voice to the growing number of refugees settling in South Africa. SASA is now the oldest and largest immigrant community organisation in South Africa.

Mr Amin Salat, the countrywide director of SASA says there are about 70000 Somali refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants living in South Africa. Many of whom were separated from their neighbours, families and relatives during the civil war which started in 1991.

“A great number of people who lost contact with their families were put back in touch with them, thanks to our Family Links program supported by the South African Red Cross and the ICRC. I do remember a number of cases that have

been successful here in South Africa and we were part of finding those people and bring them back together here in South Africa,” he says.

A volunteer at SASA and a former volunteer of the Somali Red Crescent, Imraan Mohamed Ali, says he encourages fellow Somalis to use the Family Links service as his father did when he was separated from his brother during the civil war in 1991. Through the BBC World Service and the Somali Red Crescent they were reunited in 2005 and though his uncle has settled in Ethiopia, they



Mkandawire Otae/ICRC

Imraan Mohamed Ali encourages fellow Somalis to use the Family Links service

are now in constant contact. Imraan is thankful for the programme – “not only for my family”, he says, “but throughout the world, the humanitarian assistance that the Red Cross is giving, and especially this programme of family reunification, is crucial.”

## LIFE IN A REFUGEE CAMP IN KENYA

Yasmeen was born in Mogadishu. She watched the town deteriorate over time due to the effects of conflict. In September 2010, the situation became unbearably dangerous. Her husband had told her of a camp where people were safe, and so when they made a decision to flee to Kenya, a peaceful environment was the only thing they were looking for. Unfortunately, she did not manage to take the rest of her family with her.

Yasmeen, only 19 years old at the time, and her husband arrived at Dadaab Refugee camp just across the border in Kenya. With every new day more people arrived but no one from their home area had any feedback on her family’s whereabouts. However, one afternoon, she came across a neighbour from Mogadishu, who informed her that her parents were killed by a bomb that had

exploded in a building neighbouring their house.

As she had nothing to go back to in Somalia, Yasmeen began seeking expatriation to another country. She and her husband decided to make their way to Kakuma Refugee camp in September 2012, where they hoped they would have better luck. Sadly, a month later, her husband divorced her.

Despite all the challenges she has faced, on the day I met her in Kakuma, she was happy. The Red Cross/RedCrescent mobile phone call service had enabled her to get in touch with an old childhood friend who had fled to South Africa; the only person left from her youth in Mogadishu with whom she could have contact.

As for many other beneficiaries of the mobile phone service, she looks forward to the next call. The contact with loved ones represents hope for those who have lost everything else.



Antonic Ivan/ICRC

A young Somali woman in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya makes a phone call to her family

Watch the video report on Somali refugees linking up with their families

# AUSTRALIA: A SOMALI MOTHER FINDS HER DAUGHTER AFTER 19 YEARS OF UNCERTAINTY

When Isha Munya fled war-torn Somalia more than two decades ago, she was faced with the heartbreaking notion of never seeing her loved ones again.

The brutal inter-tribal violence that had broken out across the country scattered her large and close-knit family, forcing Isha to leave her mother Akrabo and one of her daughters, Faduma, then 8, behind.

“My heart was pounding,” Isha recalls of the anguished moment she had to say goodbye. “But it was not a safe place to stay. If we had have stayed, the whole family would have been killed.”

Her departure from Somalia was the beginning of a 19-year separation – a traumatic time of uncertainty as she worried constantly about the welfare of her little girl.

The first eight years were spent in neighbouring Kenya, where Isha, her husband and remaining children lived in four different refugee camps. In 1998 the

family was given the opportunity to escape their life of limbo and relocate to Adelaide, in South Australia.

It was in Australia that Isha, determined to unearth the fate of her family members, sought the help of the Australian Red Cross’ Tracing Service, part of the International Red Cross Red Crescent global tracing network.

After discovering that many of her extended family members had died during the war, the Red Cross gave Isha the news she had only dreamed of - Akrabo and Faduma were alive.

Letters and photos were excitedly exchanged and in 2009 Faduma, now almost 30 and with a husband and baby of her own, flew to Adelaide to reunite with her mother.

“When I saw Faduma for the first time I didn’t recognise her, but then she called out: ‘mother’ and tears started falling down my face,” Isha says, recalling the emotional moment at the airport.

Four years later, and mother and daughter are making up for lost time.

Faduma now lives in Adelaide, just a few blocks from Isha’s colourful rug-draped home, and the pair spends precious moments together each day.

And while life together away from war and refugee camps has brought immense joy, there is still one person missing from this happy family picture.

For Isha, reuniting with her Kenya-bound mother Akrabo – whom she continues to contact regularly through the Red Cross – is the final key to lasting happiness.

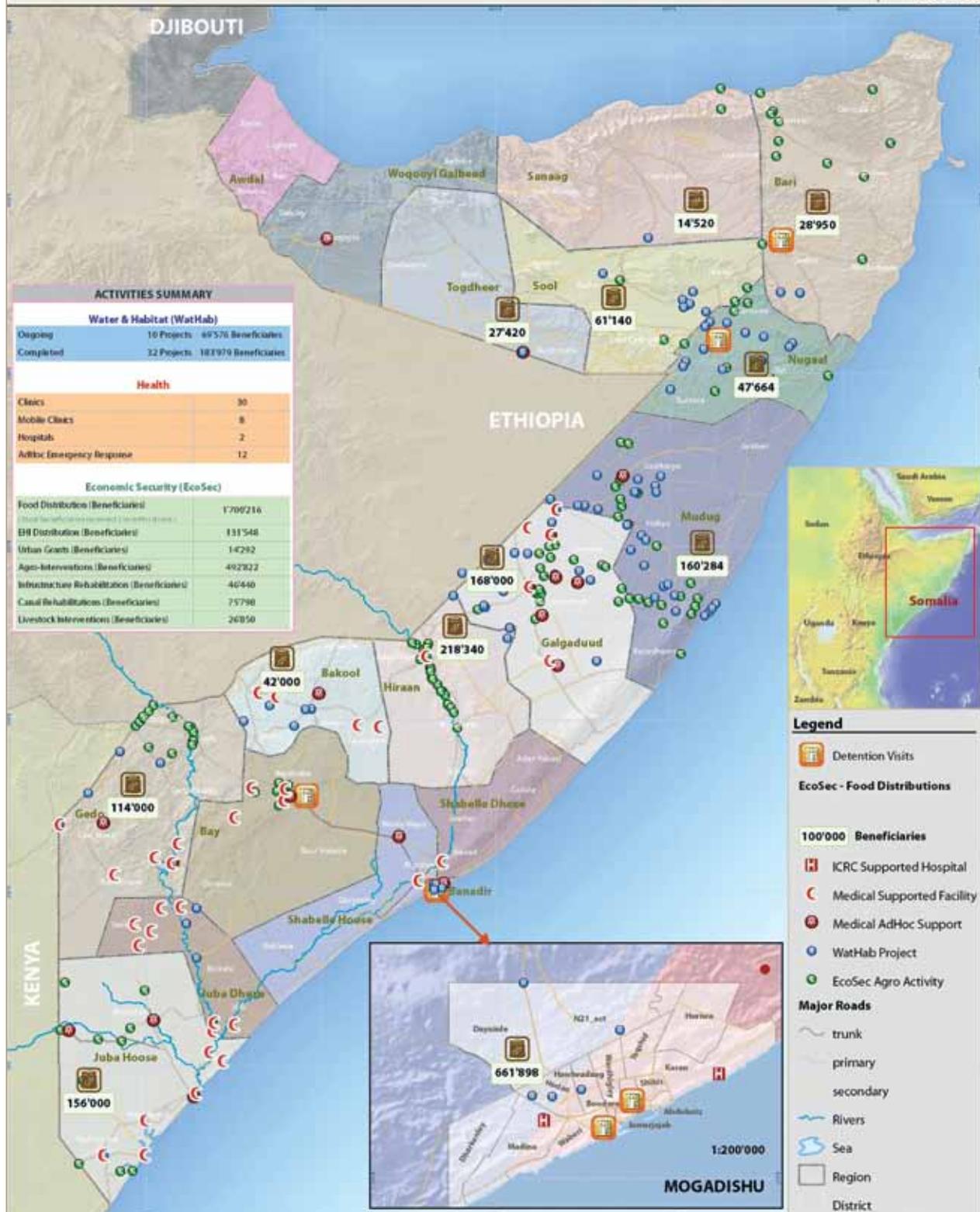
“It’s the last piece of the puzzle,” she says.



C. Martin-Chico/ICRC

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# Summary of all ICRC Interventions in 2012



## MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

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