

## **Somalia President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's Interview with Eritrean Local Media Outlets**



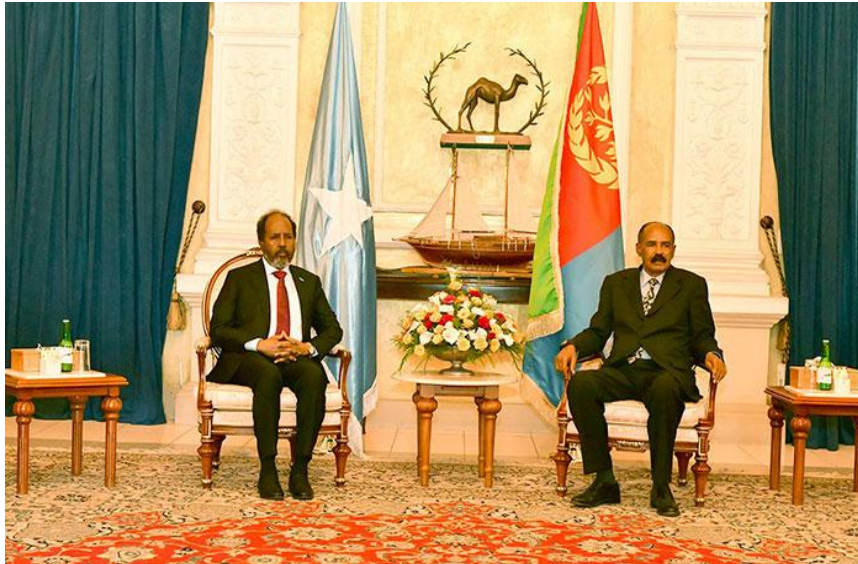
Earlier this week, the President of Somalia, H.E. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, paid a two-day successful working visit to Eritrea. During his visit, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud engaged in extensive discussions with President Isaias Afwerki on the enhancement of bilateral relations and regional developments of shared interest. The President was interviewed by local media at the end of his visit. Excerpts follow:

**Nesredin Abdrahman Mr. President, first and foremost, we appreciate the opportunity you have given us amid your busy schedule. It's well known that Eritrea and Somalia have a deep historical connection. How do you assess the current state of relations between the two nations?**

Thank you very much. The relationship between Eritrea and Somalia has deep historical roots, going back to Eritrea's struggle for independence and even further. We share a common heritage and numerous similarities as neighboring nations. Eritrea has consistently supported Somalia since its independence, and this support continues today. Whenever there are initiatives aimed at fostering stability and peace in Somalia, Eritrea stands with us. Currently, Eritrea's support for Somalia goes above and beyond what many other countries provide. The main challenge we face is security. Eritrea may not be a large or resource-rich nation, but it is a genuine country with an immaculate heart for Somalia and has consistently shown genuine and unwavering support for Somalia, sharing its resources and assistance. Our relationship is stronger now than it has been in the 30 years since Eritrea's independence. There are collaborative programs between Somalia and Eritrea.

## **What are the most significant of these initiatives?**

Eritrea and Somalia, both situated in the Horn of Africa along the Red Sea, share common interests in areas such as security, diplomacy, and regional integration. Our collaboration spans these shared interests, as well as cultural ties. However, our active joint efforts are primarily focused on security, regional integration, and diplomatic matters.



## **Could you provide an assessment of Somalia's current security situation?**

Stability and security in Somalia are crucial not only for the country itself but also for the entire region. Somalia has moved beyond its internal civil war and now faces the challenge of combating global terrorism. Al-Shabaab, the terrorist organization, poses a threat that extends beyond Somalia's borders. It is a regional, continental, and global menace. Eritrea has been steadfast in supporting Somalia's fight against this significant threat. Eritrea contributes morally, materially, through training, and by equipping our security forces, while also providing valuable advice on security techniques. Eritrea's support is solely aimed at ensuring Somalia can stand on its own feet and secure its own future. The people of Eritrea stand with the people of Somalia in this struggle.

**Speaking of Al-Shabaab, Mr. President, could you elaborate on what Al-Shabaab is, its objectives, and why it is often used as a pretext for interference in Somali affairs?**

Al-Shabaab is an ideology driven organization with goals that transcend borders and nationalities. Its threat extends far beyond Somalia's borders. The reason Al Shabaab is active in Somalia is due to the existence of a large, ungoverned territory within the country for an extended period. This ungoverned territory provided a fertile ground for terrorists to operate when the state was weak and unable to control these areas. Al-Shabaab recruits not only Somalis but also individuals from neighboring countries, Asia, and Europe who share their extremist ideology. The presence of an ungoverned territory where the state cannot exercise control allows these terrorists to flourish and provides them breeding ground. Al-Shabaab thrives when a territory lacks proper governance and security. Thus, it poses a threat not only to Somalia but to the entire region and the world at large.

### **Who supports and funds the Al Shabaab movement?**

Terrorist organizations around the world have various supporters with hidden interests. Those who support global terrorists are, in essence, terrorists themselves, albeit with different motives. They may aim to weaken governments or alter existing conditions, whether for ideological or economic reasons. Al-Shabaab capitalizes on recruiting unemployed youth and the impoverished and uneducated. In Somalia, we have developed a multi-faceted strategy to counter Al-Shabaab. This strategy encompasses military operations, ideological efforts, and economic measures. We emphasize the importance of demonstrating to our citizens that Al-Shabaab's ideology does not represent genuine Islam. On 14 October 2018, they killed almost a thousand people in just one incident. That was like a 9/11 for Somalia. These are the kind of people who we are dealing with. So we need to tell our people that they are not who claim to be but masking themselves as Muslims. These are mafia, terrorists, they have nothing to do with Islam. We work with religious scholars from diverse backgrounds, including Salafin, Sufi and Akwanschools of thought, to denounce Al-Shabaab's distorted interpretation of Islam. These scholars publicly declare that Al-Shabaab's actions are not Islamic and do not align with the principles of Islam, such as the prohibition of killing fellow Muslims. We have a TV Channel where these scholars publicly explain that actions of al-Shabaab are not Islamic, and has nothing to do with Islam. This strategy has awakened many people who may not be deeply knowledgeable about Islam but love and respect it. We aim to show them that Al-Shabaab is a violent and criminal organization that misuses the name of Islam. Additionally, we have implemented an economic strategy to

combat Al-Shabaab. The organization raises substantial funds through extortion, intimidation, and threats against businesses. Their financial transactions are conducted through banks, remittances or through mobile money transfer systems. We have responded by controlling these financial flows within the system, closely monitoring suspicious financial activities, and taking appropriate actions. This approach has limited their ability to collect and transfer funds freely. In summary, we are pursuing a multi-pronged strategy to weaken Al-Shabaab's ideological influence and financial capabilities while also conducting military operations against them.

**African Peacekeeping forces are present in Somalia. How would you assess their role?**

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been in Somalia since 2007, and they have played a crucial role in the country's stabilization. At the time of their arrival, Al-Shabaab held significant territory, and AMISOM successfully pushed them back, particularly in the capital, Mogadishu, and other key areas. Most importantly, AMISOM provided Somalia with a valuable opportunity to organize and establish a functioning government. Their contribution has been significant, and they have sacrificed the lives of their citizens to help Somalia grow and progress. We are deeply grateful for their support. Moreover, AMISOM's involvement demonstrates that African problems can be addressed with African solutions. AMISOM's mission in Somalia is a success story, and it has allowed Somalia to build the capacity to take over its own security responsibilities. Within 15 months, Somalia will assume full responsibility for its security.

**Your Excellency, you mentioned that the Somali government will assume the responsibility of security in the near future. How do you view the role of the Somali forces trained in Eritrea in this endeavor, especially those who have already completed their training and are currently serving in Somalia?**

Eritrea has gone above and beyond in its support of Somalia. Eritrea has trained and equipped over 10,000 Somali soldiers, including specialized forces, who will play vital roles in our future national army, naval forces, and air forces. Somalia was once known for its strong army, but circumstances have changed. With evolving global threats, Eritrea has provided the foundation for the rebuilding of our national military. While other nations have also contributed,

Eritrea's commitment has been particularly significant. We already have Eritrea-trained soldiers serving in Somalia, and they are performing exceptionally well.



**In conclusion, Mr. President, if you have a message for the Eritrean people or the Somali people in general during your visit to Eritrea, please feel free to share it.**

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the people of Eritrea for their unwavering support for Somalia, under the leadership of His Excellency President Isaias Afwerki. Eritrea's contributions during our challenging times will always be remembered and cherished. To the Somali people, wherever they may be, Somalia is your country, and you are the ones who will restore it to its rightful place in the global community.

**Eritrea Profile**

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