



# The Right Livelihood Award

*for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people*

Asha Hagi Elmi (Somalia)

(2008)



*"...for continuing to lead at great personal risk the female participation in the peace and reconciliation process in her war-ravaged country."*

Asha Hagi

**Asha Hagi has dedicated her life to gaining a better and more peaceful future for her war-torn country, Somalia. At great personal risk, she has fought for women to have a voice in the decisions that affect them. She has mobilized women in the cause of peace across clan and political divides and continues to play a vital role in mediating across warring clans in the on-going peace process. Women in Somalia are in a much stronger position today because of her courage, persistence and compassion.**

## **Career and the SSWC**

Born in 1962, Asha Hagi graduated in economics from Somalia National University and holds a Master's degree in business administration from the US International University in Africa.

Asha Hagi co-founded in 1992, and is the current Chair of, Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC), which works for a safe and sustainable Somalia by supporting women to overcome marginalisation, violence and poverty in their communities. SSWC has seven paid staff and nine volunteers. A large part of the humanitarian funding comes directly from the Somali community around the world as well as from international organisations and individual donors.

## **Representing the women of Somalia**

During the Arta peace talks in 2000, Hagi founded, together with other women, the Sixth Clan, the clan of women, to complement the traditional five Somali Clans which are all male-dominated. This became the first time women were represented in a peace process in Somalia. She played a similar role in the Mbagathi Conference in Nairobi (2002-2004), which gave birth to the Transitional Federal Government and the Transitional Federal Parliament, of which Hagi became a member.

In both cases the participation of women in these conferences played a crucial role in their success: Not only did the women represent a broader interest of the Somali citizens, compared to the often very narrow political positions of the men. They were also able to do 'shuttle diplomacy' between the antagonistic factions of the traditional five clans.

Among the women's achievements through the idea of the Sixth Clan are:

- taking women to the high negotiation table with their own identity (Sixth Clan) and as equal partners in decision making,
- a 12% quota for women representation in the Transitional Federal Parliament,
- introduction of fair gender formatting (he / she) in the charter language,
- the creation of a Ministry for Gender and Family Affairs, and
- a decree by the Prime Minister of the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia ensuring a 30% quota for women in the district and regional councils, in national commissions, local committees and conferences.

### **The recent development in Somalia and Hagi's role in the peace process**

Late in 2006, events in Somalia took a dramatic turn for the worse. There were two factions in the Transitional Federal Government, which had contrary views relating to peace dialogue or military action involving the Ethiopians. In November 2006, while a group, including Hagi, favouring the former was negotiating with the Islamic Courts Union, which effectively ruled Mogadishu and much of Somalia, the latter was inviting in the Ethiopian army. The Ethiopians took Mogadishu at the end of December, with the deaths of around 1,000 people and widespread destruction of the city. By April 2007, more than 350,000 people had fled the city.

The current situation effectively prevents Hagi, who has spoken out against this development on the global media, from returning to Mogadishu, so that she is now based in Nairobi. However, her organisation SSWC is seeking to give relief in Mogadishu to those who remained, distributing food and hygiene kits to women and children.

Since May 2008, Asha Hagi's focus is on the UN sponsored peace dialogue between the Transitional Federal Government and the Alliance Re-liberation of Somalia in Djibouti, where she is a member of the High Level Political Committee in the Djibouti Peace and Reconciliation Talks.

In the peace talks, Hagi represents a balanced position between the different political interests. However, she does not give way on her most important principle: the need for reconciliation and an inclusive, non-violent political process. Her role requires a lot of courage and is putting her in considerable danger, even outside Somalia.

### **Further activities**

Asha Hagi is a core group member of the Leaders Project, established in 2002, that has brought together more than 300 women leaders from around the world. She is also a member of the Pan-African Parliament in Johannesburg. She is a member of the 21 Peace Commissioners from Africa of the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA), and a Board Member of the Africa Peace Forum (APF) and the International Resource Group on Security and Small Arms in the Horn of Africa Region.

### **Honours**

Asha Hagi has received a number of awards for her human rights and peace-building work. In 2001, she was made an 'Ambassador for Peace' by the Interreligious and International Federation For World Peace. In 2005, she received the Blue Ribbon Peace Award from the Women Leadership Board of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and the first award of 'Women of Substance' by the African Women Development Fund. In 2006, she received the 'Tombouctou / Women Peacemaking Award' from Femmes Africa Solidarité. In 2009, she received the Clinton Global Citizen Award and in 2010 the Lifetime Africa Achievement Prize for African Peace.

## Quotation

*"Asha Hagi has been working tirelessly to help restore peace and stability to her homeland. She has put all her energy into this exercise. I would like to recognise her important role which also sends the key message that Somalis can truly help their country best by working to end the killing rather than having blood on their hands."*

Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, Special Representative for the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Jury member of the Right Livelihood Award

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