

**THE ISLAH MOVEMENT:**  
*Islamic Moderation in War-torn Somalia*

By:

*Abdurahman M. Abdullahi (Baadiyon)*<sup>1</sup>

Mogadishu

Somalia

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<sup>1</sup> The author occupied higher offices in the Islah Movement. His responsibilities include international relations, peace promotion, conflict resolution and political activism. He is also the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Mogadishu University.

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*Abdurahman Abdullahi (Baadiyow)*

*“I desire naught save reform so far as I am able”.*  
holly Qur’an (11:88)

*“Islah is a peaceful Islamic Movement in Somalia that adheres to the principles and methodology of the Islamic moderation. It is a success story worth telling in the war-torn Somalia. It demonstrates the alternative way in approaching Somali puzzle beyond clan cleavages and religious intolerance.”*

Dr. Ali Sheikh Ahmed, former chairman of Islah

### Introduction:

The growth of Islamic movements has been attracting greater interest over the last three decades, in particular after the 9/11 attack on US targets and the subsequent declaration of the Global War on Terrorism. Many factors have contributed to this growth; one of the major causes has been the failure of the post-colonial states in many Muslim countries and the attractiveness of the oppositional Islamic approach as an alternative. These movements took various courses to realize their agendas and formulated different methodologies and strategies because of the diverse conditions and environment in which they have grown and are operating<sup>2</sup>. For instance, some movements in dictatorial regimes or in Muslim communities under foreign occupation or those living as a

<sup>2</sup> Most Muslim countries are ruled by dictatorial regimes that violate human rights, creating conducive environment for the growth of violent organizations in reaction to the repressive state apparatus.

marginalized minority may resort to violence as the only available means of political expression. On the other hand, movements in the democratic environment usually participate in the democratic political process and implement successful social programs<sup>3</sup>. In the Somali context, Somali students in the Arab World universities in 1960s had been interacting with different Islamic groups, embraced similar ideas and gradually formed comparable movements. In particular, two main organizations have become more prominent since the 1980s; namely the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated *Islah (reform) Movement (1978)* and the neo-Salafia associated *al-Ittihad (Islamic Union) Movement (1980)* and its successive offshoots<sup>4</sup>.

Moderation is a general feature of Islam called “*al-wasadiyah*” that sets itself up against all kinds of extremism: *ghuluw* (excessiveness), *tanattu'* (transgressing; meticulous religiosity) and *tashdid* (strictness; austerity). The concepts of “moderation” and “extremism” are not newly coined terms used to classify Muslims since the 9/11 event and the Global War on Terrorism. Rather they were evident in early Muslim history since the “*Kharijites*” rebelled against the legitimate authority of Imam Ali bin Abidolib in the year 658 and initiated a path deviating from the mainstream Islamic moderation. Currently, all armed Islamic groups that subscribe to the ideology of “*Takfir and Jihad*” (*judging an individual to be an infidel on the basis of difference in practice of Islam and then fighting them*) could be called a neo-Kharijites and extremists<sup>5</sup>. In this paper, moderation simply means the natural condition of the majority of the Muslims who are tolerant among themselves and with others, and

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<sup>3</sup> There are examples of armed Islamic movements in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Palestine, Algeria and Somalia. Examples of peaceful organizations are found in Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Somalia and Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> At first, the neo-Salafia Movement in Somalia was named “*al-Jama al-Islamiya*” (1980); after uniting with the *Wahdat al-Shabab* Islamic organization, the name was changed to “*al-Ittihad al-Islami*”(1982); this was changed again to “*al-Itisam bil kitabi wa Sunna*” in 1996 after their conflicts with the armed factions in Kismayo (1991), Puntland (1992) and Gedo (1995-96). The most recent name, “*Jama'at al-wifaaq al-Islaami*,” appeared in 2008 in the aftermath of the Islamic Court defeat with the allied forces of the TFG and Ethiopia. Al-Itihad is the backbone of the Union of the Islamic Courts.

<sup>5</sup> Other names such fundamentalists, radicals and terrorists are recently coined terms, mostly used pejoratively. For instance, Al-Qaida and its offshoots come under this category.

avoid extremism either in belief or in behavior<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, moderate Islamic movements are collective venture of those individuals who reject violence as a political means and “*takefir*” as a religious conviction while vigorously seeking to modernize their societies in the context of Islamic authenticity.

Scholarly studies of the Islamic movements in Somalia remain very superficial, based mostly on sensational media coverage and security related studies in the post-9/11 event and increased curiosity in the political Islam in the Horn of Africa<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, more interest was observed after the emergence of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2006 and the subsequent Ethiopian intervention that captured the attention of the world. In the coverage of this, the UIC was branded as an alliance including the whole spectrum of Islamic groups. On the other hand, the Islah Movement officially distanced itself from being part of the UIC and demonstrated its distinctive nature and programs<sup>8</sup>. In doing so, it reaffirmed its firm adherence to the peaceful reform program that has persisted since its formation on July 11, 1978. This moderate approach was sustained during the ruthless dictatorial rule (1969-1991) and vicious civil war (1991-2008) that were highly tempting of violent approaches.

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<sup>6</sup> The four main manifestations are: (1) Bigotry, prejudice and intolerance to differing opinions. (2) Perpetual commitment to excessiveness and tireless attempts to force others to emulate them. (3) Continual emphasis on out-of-time and out-of-date religious excessiveness. (4) Harshness, roughness and crudeness in calling people to Islam. See Abdurahman Baadiyow and Ibrahim Farah. “Reconciling the State and Society in Somalia: Reordering Islamic Work and Clan System.” A paper presented at the International Somali Studies Association Conference in Ohio, August 2007. see [http://www.geeskaafrika.com/academics\\_21jul08.pdf](http://www.geeskaafrika.com/academics_21jul08.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> This type of literature includes International Crisis Group reports on Somalia. See <http://www.crisisgroup.org>. Also, Medhane Tadesse. “Islamic Fundamentalism in Somalia: its Nature and Implications,” see [www.somaliawatch.org](http://www.somaliawatch.org). Also, Medhane Tadesse. *Al-Ittibaad*. (Addis Ababa, 2002). See also Shauy Shaul. *Somalia between Jihad and Restoration*. (London: Transaction Press, 2008). The more objective literature through focused on the security concerns includes: Le Sage, Andre. *Somalia and the war on terrorism: Political Islamic movements and US counter terrorism efforts*. (DPhil Thesis, Cambridge University/Jesus College, 2005). Menkhaus, Ken. *Somalia: State Collapse and the Threat of Terrorism*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies; London, New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> See the communiqué of the Islah Movement dated 21/06/2006 on revoking the membership of Dr. Mohamed Ali Ibrahim and denying any Islah’s involvement in the Union of the Islamic Court. See <http://www.islaax.org/arabic/bayaan>

In August 12, 2008, Islah publicly announced the result of its five-year term election, in which its fourth chairman was elected by the Consultative (*Shura*) Council<sup>9</sup>, demonstrating its firm commitment to the tradition of internal democracy, even in these tumultuous times in Somalia<sup>10</sup>. The Islah Movement, being ideologically affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, has been continually developing its organizational capacity and sharpening its views on major contemporary issues. This paper benefits from the opportunity of its author being a researcher, witness and participant of the historical evolution of the Islah Movement. It contributes to filling the knowledge gaps in this particular field of Islamic studies in the Horn of Africa and highlights the moderate nature of Islah and its position on major contemporary issues.

## **I. Historical Background of the Islamic Revival in Somalia**

In the modern history of Somalia, Islam has been used as a strong mobilizing ideology in the early anti-colonial response led by the Islamic scholars and in the subsequent nationalist struggle<sup>11</sup>. However, the Somali Islamic League is considered to be the first effective Islamic organization, established in 1952 in Mogadishu in reaction to the increased role of Christian missionary organizations after the return of Italian rule as administrator of the UN trusteeship in 1950<sup>12</sup>. This organization supported by the Somali Youth League (SYL) was mainly promoting education in the Arabic language and lobbied Egypt to open Arabic schools in competition with the Italian education system<sup>13</sup>. These

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.islaax.org/arabic/Dorashada>

<sup>10</sup> According to the Islah by-law, every five years the organization has to elect its Consultative (Shura) Council which elects the Chairman and the two Vice-chairman. During the last 30 years, four chairmen were elected. These are Sheikh Mohamed Geryare (1978-1990), Dr. Mohamed Ali Ibrahim (1990-1999), Dr. Ali Sheikh Ahmed (1999-2008) and Dr. Ali Bashi Omar Roraye (2008-2013). Each chairman can be elected for only two terms of five years. The membership of Dr. Mohamed Ali Ibrahim was revoked after he joined the Islamic Court Union in 2006 in defiance of the organization's laws and policies.

<sup>11</sup> Differences between the anti-colonial and modern movements is that the former was led by the Sufi brotherhood sheikhs and therefore was traditional in nature, while the modern movement had all the characteristics of modern organizations, such as bylaws, programs and policies.

<sup>12</sup> The first Somali Islamic organization was founded by Farah Omar in Eden in 1925. The second was founded by Sheikh Sheriff "Mara-adde" and Sheikh Zahid under the name of the Islamic League in 1952. See Abdullahi, Abdurahman. "Non-State Actors in the Failed State of Somalia: Survey of the Civil Society Organizations in Somalia during the Civil War." *Darasaat Ifriqiyyah*, 31 (2004): 57-87.

<sup>13</sup> Somali Youth League (SYL), the major nationalist movement sent a letter to the Egyptian prime minister Mustafa Nohas, requesting educational assistance for Somalia. See Sayid Omar (2006). *Somali-Egyptian Relation*. MA Thesis, submitted to the Institute of Islamic and Arabic Studies in Cairo.

schools were very effective in creating a new Somali elite educated in Arabic culture, with a close affinity to the Arab world. The role played by the Islamic League was to prepare the cultural grounds on which modern Islamic revivalism was to be formed later. After independence in 1960, a few students who had graduated from Arab universities carried modern Islamic ideas and introduced them to Somalia<sup>14</sup>. These Islamic scholars were inspired by the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Wahabi School of Saudi Arabia, the appearance of innumerable items of new Islamic literature and the existence of an intolerably corrupt regime in Somalia. All these factors provided ample fuel for the revival of Islamic consciousness and the formation of new social organizations led by modern Islamic scholars. *Al-Nabda* (the Renaissance), the social club for young returnees from the Arab universities, was formed in Mogadishu in 1967 to promote Islamic values and Arabic language and to advocate for other relevant national issues<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, other similar small organizations were also active in Hargeysa and Mogadishu like *Jamiyat humat al-Diin* and *Jamiyat Ihya al-Sunna* respectively. In addition, some other political parties and personalities with Islamic inclinations had come into view<sup>16</sup>.

After the military regime took over power in 1969, all non-state organizations were completely banned, including the burgeoning Islamic organizations. Nevertheless, Islamic

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<sup>14</sup> Islamic scholars in Somalia had mainly graduated from the learning circles inside Somalia. However, new scholars began to graduate from the renowned Islamic universities such as Al-Azhar in Egypt and Al-Madina University in Saudi Arabia. Among these are Sh. Abdulqani Sh. Ahmed, Sh. Mohamed Ahmed Nur “Garyare”, Sh. Mohamed Moallim and others. These scholars had founded *Al-Nabda* society in Mogadishu. For a more detailed account see Abdurahman Abdullahi. “Political Islam in Somalia.” *Middle Eastern Affairs Journal*. 1:3 (1993): 46-47.

<sup>15</sup> Sheikh Mohamed Ahmed Nur “Garyare,” the vice-president of the *Al-Nabda* organization stated in my interview with him in 1992 in Toronto that this organization was established in Mogadishu in 1967. The founders were: President: Sh. Abdul-Qani Sh. Ahmed; Vice-president: Sh. Mohamed Ahmed Nur “Garyare”; Secretary: Abdurahman Farah; Vice-secretary: Abdullahi Moallim; Treasurer: Mohamed Osman Jimale; Vice-treasurer: Abdurahman Samatar.

<sup>16</sup> Among these personalities are Sh. Ali Ismael, MP who used to read *Tafsir* (interpretation of the Holy Book) in Mosques and the founders of *Hizbu Allabi* which had participated in the elections of 1969. See Abdurahman Abdullahi. “*Political Islam*”: 46-7.

activism took greater strides by 1970s in reaction to the introduction of socialist ideology by the regime. The newly founded student organization of “*al-Abli*” and scholars of the banned “*al-Nabda*” were coordinating stiff defiance to the regime’s ideology. They have confronted socialist ideology with promoting Islamic awareness through establishing many Islamic study circles that were reproduced every corner of Somalia. This revivalism was part and parcel of the wave of Islamic revivalism gaining impetus in the entire Muslim world after the Arab-Israel war of 1967. Somali Islamic scholars carried the vision and strategy, and gradually propagated the comprehensiveness of Islam. Initially, the majority of Islamic revivalist movements in Somalia claimed affinity with moderate methodologies for propagating Islam, similar to that of Muslim Brotherhood in its matured stage in the seventies<sup>17</sup>. However, that situation changed after the Islamic movement was hard-hit in its infancy in 1975, when 10 leading scholars were executed and hundreds of Islamic activists were prosecuted<sup>18</sup>.

As a result of oppression and prosecution, many Islamic activists fled to Sudan, Egypt and the Gulf States, getting employment there and education mainly in the Islamic universities in these countries. Conservative Arab countries in the Gulf had been supporting forces opposing socialist ideology in Somalia and thus facilitated Somali Islamists to join Islamic universities. In these countries, Somalis came into contact with Muslim scholars from all over the world and with all kinds of Islamic revivalist groups having different visions and strategies. In the aftermath, the time from 1975 until 1978 could be characterized as a period of intensive Somali exodus to Saudi Arabia, emergence of internal disputes among Islamic activists and defeat of the Somali army in the war with Ethiopia. Thus, formerly unified Somali Islamists became ideologically divided and brought back home these divisive ways of Islamism, introducing them to the younger

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<sup>17</sup> See Abdullahi, Abdurahman. “Political Islam in Somalia,” *Middle Eastern Affairs Journal*, 1, no. 3 (1993).

<sup>18</sup> Somali religious scholars had voiced their concerns with respect to the regime’s interference in the family law by introducing articles making the genders equal in terms of inheritance. This legislation directly contravenes Islamic law and indicates the lack of respect that the regime holds to the Islamic laws and values.

generations in Somalia, from 1976 to 1980. In addition to the Muslim brotherhood's peaceful methodology, certain groups, more extreme either in their opinion or in their activities, such as the neo-Salafism and Takfir (*Jama'at al-Muslimuun*) were establishing their footholds in Somalia. Somali Islamic movements could be characterized in the 1970s as having immature and emotional attachment to the Islamic revivalist ideology, very low organizational capacity, meager economic resources, and a romantic approach to social and political realities. Moreover, all these organizations were in the early stages of their formative period and were working in secret, since all peaceful avenues of social and political participation were firmly blocked by the military regime.

## II. The Islah Movement: its nature and strategy

After a long pregnancy of the Islamic revival in Somalia, the Islah Movement was finally formed, mainly, by university students who had become active members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan and Saudi Arabia<sup>19</sup>. The name of Islah is derived from the Qur'anic word "*Al-Islah*" carrying various meanings such as "reforming, betterment, reconciling and correcting"<sup>20</sup>. Islah is a peaceful and moderate Islamic organization, the main goal of which is to advocate and lobby for the harmonisation and calibration of the indigenous culture, state laws and policies with Islamic legal framework and values. It also aims to promote these values in order to stimulate the religious adherence of the individuals and community in accordance with the principles of Islamic moderation<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, Islah strives for the sovereignty and development of the Somali people in order to be able to embrace Islamic values such as *Shura* (consultation "democracy"),

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<sup>19</sup> The founders of the Islah Movement are the following five persons: Sh. Mohamed Ahmed Nur, Dr. Ali Sheikh Ahmed, Dr. Mohamed Yusuf Abdi, Sh. Ahmed Rashid Hanafi, and Sh. Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah. All being wanted by the regime, they were living in Saudi Arabia. They elected Sh. Mohamed Ahmed Nur as the first chairman of the Islah Islamic organization. See <http://www.islaax.org/arabic/history.htm>

<sup>20</sup> See Qur'anic verse (11:88) and verses (49: 8-9).

<sup>21</sup> Islamic moderation is a fundamental concept in Islam that is the antithesis to extremism (*Gulumu, Tanadu'* and *tashadud*). Its principal meaning is derived from the Islamic verse "Thus we have made of you an *Ummah* justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over the nations and the Messenger a witness over yourselves" (1:143).

justice and equality. Furthermore, it strives to contribute in the reshaping of the Horn of African region to be a place secure from disastrous conflicts and instabilities through cooperation among its nations. Finally, Islah aims to contribute to world peace, social justice, freedom of nations, tolerance among different religions and races, mutual respect for multiculturalism and development for all nations<sup>22</sup>.

Islah is also a non-exclusionist movement and its inclusive policy and cooperation with other Islamic organizations, Sufi brotherhoods, traditional elders and nationalists has given it a center stage among the elites. Moreover, the movement's strong commitment to democratic and inclusive programs of restoring the Somali state had succeeded in bridging the gap between worldly and spiritual aspects of the Somalis that hitherto appeared to be irreconcilable. Islah is neither an anti-western movement nor does it imitate western patterns of culture that contravenes Islamic values. Instead, it is a realistic, mature and forward looking pro-Somali movement, struggling to create an enabling environment for the Somali people on the basis of their social and cultural realities. It is also not a fundamentalist movement, a negatively used term, Christian in its original roots<sup>23</sup>, which is alien to the Muslim culture, but an indigenous reformist movement. Its moderate views and peaceful programs are demonstrated by its consistent denunciation of all sorts of extremism and violence. Moreover, Islah considers itself as part of the burgeoning civil society movement in Somalia, having a proven record of promoting civil society values such as protection of human rights, democratic values, women's political rights and so on. All the above stated principles and policies are

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<sup>22</sup> See goals of Islah in Somali and Arabic languages, broadly translated by the author. <http://www.islaax.org/about.htm>

<sup>23</sup> The origin of the word fundamentalism dates to an early 20th Century American religious movement which took its name from twelve volumes published between 1910 and 1915 by a group of Protestant laymen entitled: *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth*. It came to embody both principles of absolute religious orthodoxy and evangelical practice which called for believers to extend action beyond religion into political and social life. It has been used by the western scholars and media to explain Islamic movements in the Muslim world.

maintained through an educational curriculum and training programs for its members, and within the framework of moderate interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him (pbh).

Islah is neither a political party focusing only to gain political power nor merely a social organization focusing on purely social issues. It is, rather, a movement for reawakening Islamic faith and promoting national consciousness in the Somali society. Indeed, Islam provides guidelines for all aspects of life and requires its faithful to abide by certain rules and principles. This means, in contrast to the compartmentalization of spheres of life into social and political, secular and religious, Islah views these spheres as unified aspects of the Islamic doctrine and therefore, extends its operation to all of them<sup>24</sup>. Islah functions as a decentralized grass-roots organization and its members share common vision, mission, values and broad strategy. Its membership is open to all Somalis who meet the requirements in the due process procedure that is centered on the individual's Islamic commitment, adherence to the organization's goals, objectives and policies. The minimum level of the individual's commitment is measured by his/her regular payment of the financial contribution and active participation in its programs. All members follow the same education and training programs that unify their understanding of Islam, their country and the world affairs. The organization's activities are coordinated through the office of General Secretariat of the Chairman with the support of the executive Bureau and Consultative Council.

The strategies for attaining the above stated goals are founded on implementing comprehensive programs and curricula of social reform, aimed at the gradual reform of individuals, families, communities, public and private institutions. These curricula and programs include: (1) An internal curriculum and program targeting Islah members and

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<sup>24</sup> In doing so, an organization creates specialized institutions for each aspect; for instance, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for different social activities and political parties for political activities.

conducted as regular education circles, training programs, seminars, symposia and conferences. Different levels of Islah membership qualify for different programs as they ascend the leadership hierarchy; these consist of theoretical and practical sections. (2) Curricula and programs targeting communities that aims to raise the Islamic awareness of the public and to improve their loyalty and adherence to Islamic principles and values. These programs are generally implemented in the public mosques, Islamic circles, Friday sermons, community activities and conferences, and so on. Beside all these, Islah related charities are designated to reach out to communities through distribution of charity programs and Zakat funds, opening schools, and building and operating hospitals and health posts. Also, these charities work in sustainable developmental projects in various sectors such as agriculture, health, employment, educational initiatives and so on. They work as well in humanitarian and disaster relief operations, caring for orphans, the widowed and the vulnerable people. Some of these charities are specialized, like women's and youth organizations. Furthermore, Islah members participate actively in public debates and dialogue, political activism, and civil society activities. All these initiatives serve to fulfill Islamic obligations and address the comprehensive social reformation programs.

### **III. Historical development of the Islah Movement: The formative period (1978-1992)**

The initial program of Islah, from 1978 to 1992, was meant to lay a strong foundation for the modern Islamic organization by attracting and recruiting more educated members through effective education circles and by comprehensively propagating Islam among the Somali people. Politically, Islah had adopted a policy of peaceful struggle against the repressive regime of Siyad Barre and had refrained from indulging in the mushrooming

armed opposition movements in the 1980s<sup>25</sup>; instead, it had been following peaceful means of political opposition, like raising awareness about the atrocities of the regime and mobilizing public opinion against the regime. By 1980s, while working underground, some leaders of Islah in Mogadishu were discovered, persecuted, and imprisoned as part of the regime's crackdown on Islamic activists in Somalia. Gradually, however, the regime was loosening its iron hand and its security apparatus was weakening drastically. Specifically, the regime was hard hit after a disastrous confrontation with the armed Somali National Movement (SNM) forces in Hargeysa in 1988 and the ensuing mass exodus of people to the refugee camps. This event had caused the drastic drying up of international assistance to the regime, due to its gross violations of human rights and waging war against its people. During the years 1987 to 1990, Islah focused on providing relief operations in the refugee camps in the Northern Regions affected by the war. On the other hand, it was expanding its Islamic activities on the campuses of the Somali National University in Mogadishu and among students in the Diaspora. The movement was also attracting to its ranks more experienced members that could play more active social and political roles. In the final years of the regime, Islah even overtly expressed its socio-political program and played an important role in the bloody demonstrations of "Black Friday" on July 14, 1989. It had been issuing press releases and sending open letters to the leaders of the regime calling for the resignation of the President and the formation of a transitional national unity government<sup>26</sup>.

On 26 January, 1991, a new chapter of Somali history began, which had a profound and lasting imprint on Somali society in the following years. It was a turning point in the

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<sup>25</sup> In 1980s, armed opposition movements like SSDF, SNM, USC and SPM was established to topple the regime in support of Ethiopia. "Islah was invited to join these movements but refused to do so in believing that violent conflict and Ethiopian support will not solve Somali debacle, rather exacerbated it." Interview conducted with Sheikh Mohamed Garyare, first Chairman of Islah, Toronto, October 25, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> On July 14, demonstrations were organized from the mosques in protest against the detention of leading Islamic scholars after the killing of Bishop Salvatore Colombo, the Vatican representative in Somalia. About 200 Somalis had died in "black Friday". Also, the "*Sawt-al-Haq*" (the righteous voice) communiqué was released later on by Islah, calling on the president to resign and safeguard the country from imminent civil war.

history of the nation characterized by the failure and collapse of the post-colonial state after 30 years of self-government. Initial joy at the disappearance of the repressive regime was, at the same time associated with the unimaginable risks of the civil war. A new dark era had befallen the Somalis and the fate of the Somali State was in the hands of feuding clannish factions. All types of weapons were available for the angry militias who fully exercised their culture of revenge, looting and destruction of the symbols of civilization. The outcome was the outbreak of senseless civil war in every corner of the country. This war caused unprecedented destruction of lives and properties and more than a million Somalis migrated to all continents of the world while other millions perished, internally displaced or became refugees in the neighboring countries.

In Southern Somalia, in the first years of the civil war, the politics of guns and bullets, clan solidarities, organized robberies, and the humiliation of weaker clans were prevailing. Starvation, agony, and unprecedented human suffering were widespread in most regions. Unfortunately, during those years, the warlords in the South and their savage militia were recognized by the international community as the sole legitimate representatives of the country. On the other hand, the SNM faction in the northern part of Somalia was proclaiming a separate state of "Somaliland". The national vision inherited from the fathers of the nation was entirely lost and a myopic clannish agenda was digging its roots deeply into the Somali society. During this challenging time, although hampered by its limited capacity, Islah did not give up its programs and activities and its involvement in the affairs of the country. The movement had been trying hard to voice its concerns and express its positions on the major national issues; Islah considered that what had happened in Somalia was a cataclysmic and senseless clannish conflict and secured its members from being part of such conflicts, maintaining its internal unity in the volatile environment. It issued statements, communiqués and press releases on every important issue. It also courageously and overtly criticized the policy of militarism of the Al-Itihad

Islamic movement and its armed confrontation with the faction leaders; see Kismayo (1991), Puntland (1992) and Gedo (1996)<sup>27</sup>.

While civil war had devastated the whole nation and caused colossal loss of lives and properties, its damage to Islah was also painful and tremendous. In the first year, the movement had lost many of its active members and field leaders to the civil war, for example its deputy chairman and his chief political officer.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the war had caused huge displacement among its members and the leadership ranks; and the process of regrouping them was difficult since most of them did not know each other due to the underground nature of the organization at that time. The scope of displacement was vast and covered almost all villages and localities in Somalia and neighboring countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Migration to Europe, USA, and Canada had started and intensified as well. Furthermore, communications between leaders in the Diaspora and field leaders within Somalia was interrupted due to the destruction of communication facilities. Nevertheless, the situation was not absolutely disastrous. In the contrary, this was a great opportunity for Islamic activism to flourish and reach out to the remote areas and to hitherto unthinkable locations. Moreover, in the Diaspora community and among students in universities abroad, migrant members of Islah had been actively reaching out and spreading the message of Islam. During the first years of the civil war, the movement had been working to achieve the following three major objectives: 1. Reconciliation between warring parties “*Islah dat Al-bayn*”. 2. Intensification of Islamic work “*Al-Da’wa Wal Irshad*”. 3. Focusing on relief operations and education “*Al-Igatha wa tacliim*” in support of needy and vulnerable families and to revive education. Other important

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<sup>27</sup> Islah issued a communiqué of denunciation with respect to the announcement of Jihad by al-*Al-Ittibad* Movement in 1992 in Puntland and considered all *Al-Ittibad* wars against armed factions to be part of the civil war conflict.

<sup>28</sup> Sh. Ali Dayar was the Deputy Chairman of Islah in Mogadishu and Inj. Cise Ali was the chief political officer. They actively participated in the efforts to prevent civil war and mobilize Islamic scholars to play role for that endeavor. This information was collected from Dr. Ibrahim al-Dasuqi and Sh. Ahmed Hassan al-Qudubi who were closely working with them. Mogadishu, December 20, 1999.

policies were also re-affirmed, such as non-violence, political neutrality and establishment of effective community organizations in the Diaspora<sup>29</sup>.

The first inclusive conference of the Islah leadership after the outbreak of the civil war was held in 1992. This conference could be characterized as the second rebirth of the movement, in which the performance of the movement had been re-evaluated, its vision sharpened, new strategy developed and internal restructuring accomplished. In the evaluations, it became clear that the core vision, common values and policies of the movement were being maintained everywhere, although there had been wide displacement and migrations. An overwhelming majority of the members had complied with Islah's policies, such as neutrality and non-alliance, peacefulness and rejection of militarism and clannish wars. The conference had approved main strategic objectives, including, amongst other things, intensification of Islamic works, and publicly and vigorously denouncing the use of Islamic legitimization of the internecine wars. It also included in its objectives reaching out to the educated Somali elite, improving relations with the traditional elites, such as Ulama and tribal elders, and keeping a policy of neutrality with respect to the clannish wars. Although social services and reconciliation had always been a consistent field of focus since the beginning of the civil war, at the conference, education and national reconciliation were given critical priority for the years to come.

#### **IV. Historical development: The Islah Movement during the civil war (1992-2008)**

Participation of Islah in the socio-political affairs of Somalia after 1992 was growing progressively. The movement participated in the international conferences on Somalia,

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<sup>29</sup> See "Brief history of Islah" in <http://www.islaax.org/arabic/history.htm>.

established relevant institutions, and conducted specific public programs. The movement participated in the two reconciliation conferences held in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the United Nation Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) in January and March in 1993, and issued communiqués and press statements at the conferences that were widely distributed<sup>30</sup>. Also, it had organized conferences on various national and religious occasions, such as Independence Day, the birthday of Prophet Mohammad (pbh) and the Eid Festivities. These conferences were used as a way of reviving national identity and explaining the principles of the movement. In the Diaspora, too, annual conferences, community meetings, and social gathering on different occasions were organized. Moreover, student and community organizations were established, as well as national study groups. During these years, in 1994, Islah had established the Somali Reconciliation Council (SRC) as a specialized NGO for promoting and making peace between clans, communities and political factions. Its branches in the major conflict areas in Southern Somalia had played a vital role in mobilizing traditional elites to mediate disputes and resolve conflicts<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, all over Somalia, many NGOs had been formed by members of Islah to provide humanitarian assistance to the needy, orphaned, widowed and vulnerable segments of the society. Most of these NGOs were focused on education, health, accessibility of clean water, and on building mosques and Islamic centers. These NGOs became the backbone of the burgeoning Somali civil society networks.

In the absence of national institutions of the state and peaceful political parties, and with the supremacy of the armed clannish factions, participation in the political affairs is not an easy undertaking for a modern Islamic organization. As stated above, isolation is not an appropriate solution and participation means dealing with clannish realities. Certainty,

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<sup>30</sup> Radio of Peace in Addis Ababa broadcast in 1993 a series of lectures and interviews with Dr. Ibrahim Al-Dussuqi about Islah and its position in the Somali reconciliation.

<sup>31</sup> See the activities of Somali Reconciliation Council (1994-1998) in which 18 reconciliation conferences were held in different regions of Southern Somalia.

the current Somali social and political activism is tribally organized, driven, and supported. In such a radical clannish and hostile environment and a poisonous political culture, how could a trans-clan organization, such as Islah, be involved effectively in the community affairs without compromising its core values and while maintaining its essential internal unity? Theoretically, the issue is more complicated than it seems at first glance. However, referring back to the time of the Prophet Mohammad (pbh), when there were clans similar to those in present-day Somalia, reviewing the history of the Prophet (*Sira*) and deriving lessons of how clans were dealt with, the issue becomes simple and easy in one respect, turning out even easier since all Somali clans are Muslims. On the other hand, the issue becomes more complex, given the scarcity of modern studies on this topic and a complete absence of theoretical background from the Muslim Brotherhood literature on how to deal with the stateless situation<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, continuous instruction of Islah members in order to weaken clannish attachment and behavior, and witnessing the savagery of the clans during the war, had created negative attitudes among Islah members in dealing with the institutions of the clans. To create an atmosphere of common understanding, an exhaustive dialogue and discussions was opened in 1991 on the issue of how to deal with the clannish communities and a gradual development of the policy known as “Dealing with the Reality” was finally adopted in 1995<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Iman Hassan Al-Banna, the founder of Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, had theorized how to reform societies ruled by secular nation-states and how to transform them gradually into an Islamic state by reforming individuals, families, communities and state institutions. In the literature of Muslim brotherhood, stateless situations were not envisaged, so Islah had to fill a theoretical gap in studying its social realities, which required a period of reflection, discussion and digestion.

<sup>33</sup> The issue of how the movement should deal with the new realities in Somalia was first discussed in Toronto, Canada, after the fall of the regime in January 1991. The outcome of this discussion was published in an internal pamphlet. The author of this paper had participated in these discussions. However, the official policy of “*Dealing with the Reality*” adopted in 1995 was a turning point and a shift in the policies of Islah to working with the traditional institutions and civil society organizations. Its fruits are that members of Islah were allowed to be part of the transitional parliament selected by their clans. The only limitations imposed on the members were those prohibited and forbidden in Islam.

Sine 1995, new developments that weakened the authority of the armed faction leaders had taken place in Somalia. They include the revival of the local education system up to the tertiary level, epitomized by establishing Mogadishu University in 1996 and the proliferation of networked civil society organizations. Moreover, stronger across-clan business community had emerged vying armed faction leaders in the local politics and community affairs. As a result, Islah adopted an advanced political program in 1998 focusing on working towards national reconciliation. Besides its support for the regional reconciliation efforts in Mogadishu, Islah sent delegates to the various regions to advocate a way out of the political stalemate in Somalia<sup>34</sup>. As a new opportunity emerged with the Djibouti reconciliation initiative on 22 September 1999, the movement not only lent strong support to the initiative but also actively participated in the conference and considered it as “the first genuine political reconciliation in Somalia”<sup>35</sup>. During the reconciliation process in 2000, Islah members played a crucial role within different clans and some of its members became members of the Transitional Assembly and held cabinet posts. However, the low capability of the leadership, the weakness of the national institutions, and strong opposition from the armed factions reorganized by Ethiopia under the umbrella of the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC); encouraged a new call for a reconciliation conference in Kenya in 2002, under the auspices of Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

The prominence of Islah in the Djibouti held Somali peace conference and its international exposure after 9/11 demonstrated its true nature as a moderate movement and its firm commitment to the formation of national state institutions. Moreover, Islah’s social programs in education, health, and peace promotion were growing fast across the regions. The Islamic moderation that Islah represents in Somalia took a center stage in

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<sup>34</sup> Islah delegation headed by Sheikh Mohamed Geryare met with Mr. Abdullahi Yusuf, president of Puntland of that time, in Gowe and Mr. Mohamed Ibrahim Igal, president of “Somaliland” in Hargeysa in 1999.

<sup>35</sup> All other conferences were warlord-dominated conferences though their names were given to be national reconciliation conferences.

all public forums and among civil society organizations. Consequently, memberships of Islah increased significantly, though its political role was later curtailed in the warlord-dominated Reconciliation Conference in Kenya (2002-2004). However, Islah maintained its strategy of peacefulness and reconciliation in dealing with the new regime created in Kenya. Absolute priority was given by Islah to the maintenance of the national transitional institutions without which Somalia disintegrates into clannish ghettos, and to the curbing violence and internal strife. To bolster national reconciliation, Islah supported reconciliation between the two factions of the Transitional Federal Institutions that were divided on the issue of relocation of the state institutions established in Kenya; either to the town of Jawhar or to the capital city of Mogadishu<sup>36</sup>. It also proposed a national plan for rebuilding national institutions and offered its support to this venture.

Islah's role of reconciliation, developmental programs and relief assistance was very much in evidence when the conflict erupted between Mogadishu warlords and Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2006. Reconciliation teams of Islah met continually with the two conflicting sides, attempting to broker a peace deal. However, war broke out and the notorious faction leaders were easily crushed. Moreover, the humanitarian assistance of Islah-affiliated NGOs continued to provide assistance to the population displaced by the conflict. Furthermore social services continued to provide education, health services and awareness rising in the mosques, mass media and community centers. These programs intensified when war between UIC forces and TFG allied with Ethiopia was imminent. For that purpose, Islah established a special reconciliation committee to work out reconciliation initiatives between the two sides and to continue promoting peace and dialogue<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> An Islah delegation visited Baidoa in February 2006 and met with the President, Abdullahi Yusuf, the Speaker, Sheriff Hassan and the Premier, Ali Mohamed Gedi. The aim of the visit was to bolster reconciliation and contribute in the rebuilding of the national institutions.

<sup>37</sup> See Islah communiqué dated 22/07/2006 in which the formation of the special reconciliation committee was announced. <http://www.islaax.org/arabic/bayaan22-7-06.htm>. The author was appointed to lead this

The Islah Movement had distanced itself from being part of the UIC Council and prohibited its members from joining a group using violence against other Somalis. When some Islah members, defying the organization's policy participated in UIC, their memberships were publicly revoked. As a result, relations between Islah and UIC soured and some Islah's activities were banned by UIC including the annual commemoration of its 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary<sup>38</sup>. This friction had reflected negatively on Islah's reconciliation efforts and its relations with UIC. On the other hand, Ethiopian military intervention after the defeat of UIC, and reemergence of insurgency with the subsequent humanitarian disaster created new challenges to Islah programs and activities. The whole notion of moderation in politics and religion had been weakened during and after the emergence of the Islamic Court Union and the subsequent Ethiopian Intervention. As a result, civil society organizations are marginalized, their activities curtailed, their leaders targeted and many of them were killed in cold blood<sup>39</sup>.

However, Islah holds adamantly to its principles and strategy of peacefulness, the commitment to dialogue and reconciliation, the provision of social services and political participation. It also repeatedly denounced Ethiopian intervention and indiscriminate killing of Somali people in the clashes between the forces of insurgencies and the TFG allied with Ethiopian forces. Moreover, Islah sees the only way-out from the current Somali peril is through genuine reconciliation, improved security, refraining from

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committee. For the historical record, TFG accepted the reconciliation initiative, but UIC categorically rejected it and sent a letter of admonition to Islah Movement warning it not to get involved in any future reconciliation. A copy of this letter signed by Sheikh Sheriff, the Chairman of UIC, is available at the Islah secretariat.

<sup>38</sup> See Islah communiqué dated 17/08/2006 in which Islah expresses its dissatisfaction with the prohibition of its celebration of its 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary, see <http://www.islaax.org/arabic/bayaan>.

<sup>39</sup> Prominent civil society activists eliminated in Mogadishu include the peace activist, Abdulqadir Yahye, the prominent Islamic scholar, Sheikh Mohamed Sheikh Ahmed (Kashk), a well-known military commander, General Mohamed Abdi, The civil society activist, Ali Iman Sharmarke, the business leaders, Abdikarim Sheikh Ibrahim and Abbas Mohamed Du'ale, the women peace activist, Medina Mohamud Ilmi and many others.

arbitrary violence, avoiding monopoly of religious interpretation and conducting popular election to produce legitimate state institutions for Somalia.

## **V. Islah's policies and views on contemporary issues**

Thirty years of uninterrupted work with its immense challenges and experiences has cultivated Islah movement in ways that have sharpened its common vision, mission and improved its views, strategies and operations. These views are shared among all Muslim Brotherhood affiliated organizations with slight differences regarding their diverse social realities.

### *1. Opening up to society*

Organizations face difficulties in the transition period from underground movement to open organization. This process requires not only changes of attitudes and norms, but also projection of a clear set of rules and policies. Social and political realities in Somalia changed drastically after the collapse of the state in 1991 and the transition from the rule of the state to clan supremacy. In reality, Islah were not well prepared to deal with new situations during the initial stages. The reason being that its training programs were focused mainly on reforming society ruled by state institutions and not in conflict. Theories of dealing with the clan conflicts were not well developed in the Muslim brotherhood literature. In particular when the scope of the conflict was so wide and causes the total collapse of state institutions. Moreover, in the general understanding of the members of Islah was that the clans were very much connected with that clanism that is abhorred and disavowed in Islam. Furthermore, after the collapse of the state, leadership of communities shifted from the state bureaucracy to the traditional leaders and armed political factions. To interact with such situation, the policy of "Dealing with the Reality" was finally adopted in 1995. The core philosophy of this policy was to break isolation of the movement and to open it up to the society at large. Objectives of this

policy included encouraging members of Islah to participate actively in the existing social and political organizations and to engage assertively with all groups. The syndromes of isolation from society and assimilation with the clan culture are not healthy symptoms of modern Islamic activism. Instead, prudent and positive engagement is the only right way for the Islamic reformers. Indeed, it was realized after the implementation of this policy that Islah members could play skillfully the role of “cement or glue” to hold together the segmented blocks of Somali society.

## *2. Focusing on the educated elite*

Islam is a religion based on knowledge that shows great respect to scientists and the educated (ulama)<sup>40</sup>. Social change not only requires an enlightened elite but also understanding of the core philosophy of the movement, undertaking that change, inculcating the masses and taking a leadership role. Bearing these imperatives in mind, Islah generally recruits to its ranks young and educated segments of the society; young because they are energetic and open, educated because they may grasp the message easily and convey it to others<sup>41</sup>. This means that majority of its members is from young educated generations. Moreover, Islah had discovered that its perception and outreach program to the Somali intellectuals was poor. The new policy adopted had considered these intellectuals as partners for reform and looked for communalities instead of seeking uniformity. The fruits of this policy were tremendous and its application in the field brought tangible benefits for the Somali community. The space and reservations between modern Islamic activists and Somali intellectuals has been narrowed, whereas both the nationalistic intellectuals and Islamic activists were marginalized during the civil war by

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<sup>40</sup> In the Holy Qur’an the word *al-Ilm*, knowledge, and its derivatives are used more than 780 times. The first few verses that were revealed to our Holy Prophet (SAW) mention the importance of reading, the pen, and teaching for human beings. In the Qur’an Allah says: “*Say: Are those who know and those who do not know alike? (39:9)*”

<sup>41</sup> History of Islam shows that the age of the Prophet Mohammad (PBH) was 40 years when he was sent as a messenger and all his early believers were younger than him except his wife Khadija.

the warlords and the bearers of clannish banners. Finally, Islah believes that creating a common front and forging an alliance of nationalists and moderate Islamists is the only way to dislodge clannish and extremist forces and to restore a functioning Somali state.

### *3. Respecting and cooperating with traditional Islamic scholars*

Islah considers itself as the continuation of the endeavors of generations of traditional Islamic scholars and the leaders of the national movements for independence. In fact, traditional Islamic scholars were the sole intellectuals until colonial schools produced new elites. They represent the spirit of Islam, leaders and teachers of the communities, protectors of the faith, and saviors of the nation from the attempted Christianization.<sup>42</sup> Also, they remain the founders and core pillars of modern Islamic movements and always play a vital complementary role, particularly in the rural areas and among the mostly uneducated masses<sup>43</sup>. Islah widened its vision and discarded previous imprudent relations with the Sufi orders, by looking upon them as teachers, fathers and leaders of the communities and giving them due respect, encouragement and support. This deep understanding of the social dynamics of Somalia is antithesis to the prejudiced isolationist views that loomed early in the circles of the Islamic movement. These ideas were as a result of late *Salafia* influence that focuses on the traditional scholars of the Sufi orders and consider them as innovators and an obstacle to the revival of Islam. Conversely, while promoting and advancing authentic Islamic teaching and knowledge within the context of Islamic moderation, Islah respects and cooperates with the Sufi brotherhoods.

### *4. Respecting the leaders of the nationalist movement*

Leaders of the national movement for independence and statehood in Somalia have also received great respect and admiration from Islah. Certainly, considering the scarcity of

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<sup>42</sup> The French Roman Catholic Mission established in 1891 was located in Daimole near Sheikh and abolished by the Dervish Movement.

<sup>43</sup> The modern Islam movement cannot move forward without having on hand thousands of young educated students graduated from the Qur'anic schools and Islamic education circles in the Mosques.

human capital and the limited organizational capacity that was available in the 1940s and after, these leaders had an exalted vision for Somalia. Their vision for Somalia was to establish a strong and all-inclusive Somali state in the Horn of Africa, where all Somalis might live in peace, harmony and dignity. To give them due respect, one has simply to imagine what Somalia would have been without their sacrifice and struggle. Modern activists of Islamic movements are graduates from the schools they established and beneficiaries of the opportunities they provided. Understanding this, Islah is very proud of what earlier fathers of the nation achieved with meager resources and limited capacities. This perception, based on respect and acceptance of all the good things they did, departs from the previous idea looming among Islamic movement circles of calling these leaders, secular anti-Islamic and colonial lackeys. Inclusiveness instead of sectarianism, and tolerance, patience and focus on major issues, agreed upon by the majority of the Somalis, is the only way to rebuild Somalia with a new vision rendering due respect for its historical personalities and sacred heritage. In doing so, it does not mean relinquishing critical review of our past in order to rebuild new Somalia.

##### *5. Downplaying disputed issues of religion*

The basic references of Islam are the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Mohammad (pbh). However, these fundamental sources have been variously interpreted by scholars in different Muslim regions and times. Therefore, differences of interpretations in the doctrinal and legal aspects appeared, yielding four famous Sunni legal schools of thought: *Shafi'i, Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali*. Somalis adhere mostly to the Shafi'i school of legal thought, so to protect community cohesion and avoid religious squabbles; Islah chose to adopt Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, while being open to the views of other scholars. Moreover, Islah rejects all divisive discourses and disputations on the detailed legal matters and focuses on major fundamental issues, mostly agreed by all Muslims. It also cooperates with other religious organizations, groups and individuals, to safeguard the

religious unity of the Somali people. Furthermore, modern studies of Islam on state building and its institutions, and on what is in accord with Islamic principles and what is not, remain academic discourses. Certainly, politics is less developed field in the Islamic thought; hence, there is a plenty of space for *Ijtihad* offering many options to various organizations.

#### *6. Rejection of Extremism and Violence*

Islam is a religion of peace, mercy and humanism, and forbids its believers to commit any acts of violence against innocent human beings. Thus, Islah rejects such violence and all forms of extreme views such as the idea of inevitability of clash of civilizations. Instead, it promotes cooperation, dialogue, understanding and co-existence of all people, races and religions. Islah understands that extremism and violence is a product of frustration, humiliation, feelings of injustice and lack of true understanding of religious values. Therefore, it is the conviction of Islah that respect of multiculturalism, democratization, narrowing of economic and political marginalization, and better understanding of cultures and religions will eventually create an environment of peace and cooperation among nations. In accordance with this understanding, Islah has denounced and rejected all forms of violence currently taking place in Somalia.

#### *7. Restoration of national state institutions*

Many postcolonial African states have been pushing themselves to the brink of abysmal failure due to misguided programs of nation-building and economic development. Somalia is a classic example of such a collapsed state that polarized the population into clan lines and led to continuous clan fighting and conflicts. Reviving clan consciousness and weakening national awareness was evident during the civil war. Islah, being a national organization, strongly believes that reviving national consciousness and disowning clanism is the only way to recover the Somali state. Divisive clan interference in the

affairs of the state and clan competition for winning political power is the major element threatening to the existence of Somalia as a state. Accordingly, Islah contributed to the reconstitution of the national state during the Djibouti reconciliation conference in 2000, and always defends and supports national institutions, even if these institutions are established imperfectly and weakly, like the current Transitional Federal Government. The worst scenario and greatest disaster for Somalia would be the absence of the national state, which would eventually lead to the total disintegration of the nation into clannish cages and ghettos.

#### *8. Promotion of civil society organizations*

Islah believes strongly that without vibrant civil society organizations, Somalia will remain at the mercy of segmented clannish groups. In pursuit of that viewpoint, from 1994 to 1999, the movement worked towards promoting more organized civil society organizations in Somalia. Members of Islah were encouraged to establish community-owned organizations and/or to join existing civil society organizations. Particularly in Mogadishu, many networked social and professional organizations emerged during these years, and Islah members were part of them<sup>44</sup>. These organizations had succeeded in unifying the public voice on the issues of peace, human rights and democracy. In the area of reconciliation, Islah established the Somali Reconciliation Council in 1994 to offer logistical support for reconciliation efforts in Somalia. As a result of these policies, hundreds of community initiatives in the fields of education, health, reconciliation, and developmental programs were directed to the communities. Civil society values, such as protection of human rights, promotion of democratic values and good governance, and promotion of peace received wider participation and support from Islah members. The growth of civil society organizations, such as professional bodies, charities, women and

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<sup>44</sup> These are Peace and Human Rights Network (PHRN), Formal Private Education Network (FPEL), Grass Roots Women's Organization (COGWO), Medical Doctors' Association, Lawyers' Association, etc. The author of this paper was the chairman of PHRN in 1999.

youth organizations, those promoting human rights and political parties, is the only way out of messy political clanism.

### *9. Promotion of democracy*

Democracy is a western terminology; nevertheless, in its essence as a process is no different from the Islamic concept of consultation (*Shura*)<sup>45</sup>. Some scholars have said that democracy is similar to *Shura* that have developed modern institutions of political parties; and consultation is like democracy that is bounded by the Islamic ceiling and conforms to the general Islamic principles<sup>46</sup>. The concept of consultation is characterized in Islam not only as necessary code to healthy faithful communities, families, and individuals but also as a required value for piety<sup>47</sup>. Simplifying this notion, democracy in its ideal form is like pure water that does not have a shape and color; however, takes the shape and color of its container. Likewise, democracy takes the color and the shape of the society in which it is applied. Therefore, democracy exists in different forms corresponding to the will and the choice of the different people. Since nations are different in their culture, religions and system of governance, their application of democracy eventually takes different forms. This means that democracy is applicable to all races, religions and cultures. Western democracy is not unique; it is necessarily secular and takes a color and shape in accordance with the western society's culture, values and belief system. On the other hand, democracy in Muslim societies has to abide with the Islamic values, and culture of the people. In that understanding of democracy, *Islah* promotes democracy and stands firmly against any form of dictatorial rule in any place in the world and under the pretext

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<sup>45</sup> Hoffmann, Murad. *Islam: The alternative*. (Maryland: Amana publications. 1999): 81-82. Also, see Osman, Fathi. "Modern Islamist and Democracy" *Arabia*, London (May, 1986): 6. Also, see Gazali, Abdulhamid. *Hawla Asaasyat al-Mashru'c Al-Islami Li Nahdat Al-Ummah*. (Qahira: Rar Al-Tawzi'c WA Nashr Al-Islamiyah, 2000): 178-80.

<sup>46</sup> Sadiq Al-Mahdi. "*Al-Shura ka Asaas li-Nidum Al-Hukm Fi Al-Alam Al-Islami*." Unpublished paper submitted to the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Muslim Affairs held in Cairo (May, 2003): 9-12.

<sup>47</sup> See Qur'anic verse "Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation (*Shura*); who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance" [are praised] (42:38)

of Islam. Finally, Islah firmly exercises democracy within its organization and has been holding internal elections periodically over the last 30 years.

### ***10. Protection of human rights***

Somalia is one of the many nations suffering from the worst kinds of human rights violations. During 21 years of military rule and 20 years of intensive civil wars, the basics of human rights have been grossly violated. Protection of human rights is a divine obligation and a God-ordained concept. In Islam, the human being is dignified and the whole Islamic legal system is founded on protecting the rights of that human being<sup>48</sup>. Mostly, the non-binding Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 10 December, 1948, and the other two international pacts of 19 December, 1966 on civil and political, and economic, social and cultural rights do not contravene *completely* the Islamic law. Since these declarations are not binding, different religious groups and civilizations may have specific reservations and Muslims likewise, while abiding by the declarations in general, may disagree with some issues that could contravene Islamic principles. However, in general, Islah promotes the protection of human rights and believes strongly that without it civilized society can not be established.

### **11. Promotion of women's rights**

Women's rights, particularly their rights to political participation, are widely misunderstood by many Islamists and non-Islamists alike in the Muslim world and beyond. It seems that the ancient culture of societies and religious interpretations on the issues of women have been intermingled in the Muslim world. As a result, those communities where women's rights are undermined by the culture tend to justify those practices from the religious point of view. However, "*any fair investigation of the teaching of*

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<sup>48</sup> There are five main rights that Islam always bases its legal judgments upon: these are protection of religion (al-Diin), intellect (al-Aql), property (al-Maal), life (al-Nafs) and family (al-'ird).

*Islam or into the history of the Islamic civilization will surely find a clear evidence of women's equality with man in what we call today "political rights".*<sup>49</sup>

The position of Islah is very clear in this point. Islah openly advocates the advancement of the rights of women and strongly supports their social and political participation in community affairs. Moreover, Islah promotes women's education in all its social development programs. The effect of these policies was so great that Somali women are now playing important roles in politics and social life that were hitherto believed to be in the domain of men.

## **VI. Conclusions**

This paper aims to fill the knowledge gap in the study of Islamic movements in the Horn of Africa. It comprises of a brief background of the revival of Islam in Somalia and Islah's historical development since 1978 and its major views on the contemporary issues. The emergence of modern Islamic movement in Somalia is the culmination of a long process of Islamic revival since the anti-colonial resistance and the formation of the Somali Islamic League in 1952 linked with similar world-wide phenomena. From that time until the 1970s, traditional Islamic education, modern Arabic schools and graduates from the Arab universities have been paving the way for the emergence of the modern Islamic movement. The military regime (1969-1991) with its rigorous socialist programs provoked Islamic sentiments by executing Islamic scholars in 1975 and blocking the Islamic activism that was growing in the 1970s. Early years of the Islamic movements could be characterized as a period of immature and emotional attachment to the revivalist ideology, very low organizational capacity, and an idealistic approach with respect to social realities.

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<sup>49</sup> Badawi, Jamal. *The Status of Women in Islam*. (Plainfield: American Trust Publications, 1976): 23-24. Also, see *Gazali, Abdulhamid. Hawla asaasiyat*.

The Islah movement was established in July 11, 1978 with the goal of reviving Islamic values in the society, promoting harmonization of Somali culture, state laws, and policies with the Islamic legal framework and values. Islah is not merely a political party nor a social organization; rather it is a comprehensive movement for reawakening Islamic faith and promoting national consciousness in the Somali society. It functions as a decentralized grass-roots organization that shares common vision, mission, values, and broad strategy. Also, Islah focuses on education, reconciliation, and peace promotion to realize its objectives. The period of 1978 to 1992 is considered the early years of its formative period, facing challenges of establishment, persecution and survival during the civil war.

In the period 1992 to 2008, Islah had applied policies such as opening up to the society, focusing on an educated elite; respecting and cooperating with traditional Islamic scholars; celebrating the fathers of the nationalist movements; downplaying disputed issues of religion; rejection of violence and extremism; restoration of national state institutions; promoting civil society organizations, democracy, women's rights; and protection of human rights. Appliance of the above stated policies, flexibility of its organizational structures and internal democratic practices puts Islah Movement in the category of moderate Islamic movements.

Finally, Islah's continuous developmental programs and political participation, in a prudent manner that circumvent conflicts with other groups, gives it a unique position in the Somali society. Its future trend shows that it will consolidate these social programs and at the same time contribute more in restoring Somali state institutions. This will be done through engaging more assertively in the political process. In concluding remark, Islah's political participation will eventually promote the culture of good governance, social cohesion and Islamic moderation in Somalia and the Horn of Africa at large.

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