



## **Somalia: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 31 May 2011**

### **How is the term Midgan used in describing ethnic issues, including those of minority clans and subclans?**

A report from *Minority Rights Group International* notes in the Glossary the following information on the various groups:

“Gaboye: the commonly accepted term nowadays in Somaliland for Madhiban and Musse Deriyo minorities, historically called Midgan.

Midgan: the largest occupational ‘excluded’/discriminated against minority, traditionally mainly leather-workers and hunters, sub-divided into Madhiban and Musse Deriyo lineages, as they are more commonly named nowadays, and also known as Gaboye (see above).

Musse Deriyo: traditionally potters; see Midgan and Gaboye.” (Minority Rights Group International (23 November 2010) *Somalia: “No redress: Somalia’s forgotten minorities”*)

Under the heading ‘Somalia’s minorities: a legacy of institutional exclusion and discrimination’ the report notes:

“Occupational groups: historically known as Midgan (or commonly known nowadays as Gaboye, Madhiban and Musse Deriyo, and originally hunters and leatherworkers with other ritual and craft tasks performed for the majorities); Tumul (blacksmiths); and Yibro (ritual specialists). They are scattered throughout Somalia (Somaliland and Puntland), Ethiopia and Djibouti.” (ibid)

Page 12 of the report under the heading Occupational Groups notes:

“The three main groups are Midgan (singular Midgan, plural Midgo), also known as Gaboye in Somaliland,<sup>49</sup> who were traditionally hunters and leatherworkers but also undertook various arts and craft work and male circumcision and female genital mutilation (FGM); Tumul, traditionally blacksmiths; and Yibro (singular Yibir, plural Yibro), traditionally ritual specialists.”<sup>50</sup> (ibid)

Page 17 of the report notes:

“Though attitudes are changing, the legacy of historical discriminatory treatment at school remains with some minority adults, as reflected in the following testimony to MRG in Hargeisa:

When I was at school my teacher did not know that he had a Midgan in the class, so he went on with his lesson on minority clan culture and tradition. He said that the Midgan are different from the rest of the society, they belong to

an inferior culture...They lack language skills and eat different bad quality food. I did not react at all but all my schoolmates were shocked. I just waited till the end of the lesson and then ran home. I told my mother and sister. The teacher did not realize the moral damage that his speech had on me. He probably never thought he could have a minority student in his class.” (ibid)

The report also noted on page 20:

“MRG’s researchers visiting IDP camps in Bossaso in 2009 were told of a disturbing and persistent pattern of rape of minority women, perpetrated by majority men and sometimes by members of the Puntland police, army or security service. One woman had arrived in Puntland having been subjected to sexual violence in the south and en route to ‘safety’. Testimonies (with names withheld for safety reasons) were gathered from IDP Benadiri, Bantu, Madhiban, Midgan and Ajuran women.” (ibid)

Page 20 of the report notes:

[...] “My daughter is seriously injured and she needs medical intervention. If we had been from another clan we would have been given compensation but we are just ‘poor Midgan, who nobody cries for’.” (ibid)

Under the heading ‘No Access to Justice’ on page 21 the report notes:

“One Midgan man in Puntland’s administrative capital, Garowe, told MRG’s researchers that his pregnant sister was shot dead by her husband, from a majority clan, in July 2007. The case was reputedly settled out of court between elders of the minority and majority clans.

After discussing the matter, we were forced to accept blood compensation. We were told, ‘You Midgan, accept 40 heads of she camels [10 camels less than the normal diya] or leave us’ and we accepted because there was no alternative.” (ibid)

Under the heading ‘South Central Somalia’ the report notes:

“The situation of the minority groups in south and central Somalia is that of despair and hopelessness. They are considered sub-human and live under constant mistreatment by the so-called majority clans. People from minorities feel intimidated by merely mentioning and expressing pride in their ancestors and heritage. The minority but skilled individual does not have access to employment opportunities as the rest do. This problem is acute in south and central compared to Mudug [north-central] and northern regions.” (ibid)

A report from the *Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation* (ACCORD) titled ‘Clans in Somalia’ notes under the heading Gabooye/Midgan:

“In the North, the Gabooye are composed of the Tumaal (blacksmiths), Midgan (shoemakers, hunters and gatherers, poison makers, and hairdressers), and Yibr (see below for details). Groups which belong to Gabooye/Midgan include the Madhibaan, Muuse Dhariyo, Howleh, Hawraar

Same, and Habar Yaquup. These groups are also found scattered in Southern Somalia.” (Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) (December 2009) *Clans in Somalia*)

Page 45 of a report from *Oxford House* by Abdi Abby notes under the heading ‘Forgotten Minorities’:

“It is assumed that the largest minority group in Somalia is the Midgans. Its sub-clans include the Tumaal and Yibir. They are traditional workers who were confined to such things as herding, farming, metal and leather work and crafts. These minority groups tend to live in the north, central and southern regions of Somalia. Although the Midgans have a similar ethnic origin as the major clans they are not accorded equal rights.

The term “Midgan” itself is conceptually degrading, therefore in order to forestall the stigma that goes with the name Midgan they now refer to themselves as Gaboye. To be a Midgan means to suffer life long indignities. They are deemed to be impure, sinful and polluting. People tend to avoid them, abuse them and look upon them with disdain. Members of the major clans are not allowed to socialize with them and it is forbidden for a member of a major clan to marry a member of the Midgan clan. If intermarriage does occur between a Midgan and a member from a major clan, it results in serious persecution at the hands of the majority clans. This was substantiated by the mission findings.” [...] (Oxford House (October 2005) Field Research Project on Minorities in Somalia by Abdi Abby)

A report from the *Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum SOMRAF* notes under the heading ‘Social Exclusion Groups in Somalia’:

“There are groups of people in all societies who are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal system or the education and health services, as well as in the household and in the community.

In Somalia there several Minority groups which suffer from deep social exclusion in Somalia are (Yibir, Madhiban, Muse Dhariyo, Tumaal, Yahar, Jareer/Bantu, Waat of garre, Jaaji, Qalamashube of Banadir, Gabro of Barawe & Ayle etc). These clans are socially excluded minority groups, they are among the world’s poorest people and the most disadvantaged people among Somali population who live below the poverty line.

Vulnerable minority occupational groups are excluded community in Somalia from the overall development process of the country. They scattered all over the country, performing livelihood activities in almost all Districts and Regions of Somalia using locally available raw materials, with limited products differentiation based on culture, history and traditions.

They are performing the following livelihood activities & produce ranging from basketry, mats, agriculture, hand-crafts, small hand industries, fishing, boat building, blacksmith, carpentry, tannery, shoe-making and other leather products which is considered by Somalis as a menial casts work or tasks. These items are produced in almost all Districts and Regions of Somalia using locally available raw materials, with limited products differentiation

based on culture, history and traditions." [...] (Somali Minority Rights and Aid Forum (SOMRAF) (undated) *Minority Groups Targeted*)

## References

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) (December 2009) *Clans in Somalia*  
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<http://www.minorityrights.org/10370/reports/no-redress-somalias-forgotten-minorities.html>  
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[http://www.oxfordhouse.org.uk/download/Minorities\\_report.PDF](http://www.oxfordhouse.org.uk/download/Minorities_report.PDF)  
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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

## Sources Consulted:

Amnesty International  
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Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)  
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Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada  
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Lexis Nexis  
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Relief Web  
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