

Query response a-6754 of 20 May 2009

Ethiopia: Treatment of Madhiban/Midgan/Medigan minority clan originating from the Ogaden area by Ethiopian forces in the area and by members of majority clans

This response was commissioned by the UNHCR Status Determination and Protection Information Section. Views expressed in the response are not necessarily those of UNHCR.

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to ACCORD within time constraints and in accordance with ACCORD's methodological standards and the *Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI)*.

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.

Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

General remarks on the Madhiban/Midgan/Medigan minority clan

According to a fact-finding mission report on Somali minorities by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) of November 2000, Midgan are one of three occupational castes (collectively referred to as sab). Terms used for Midgan in different regions of Somalia include Gaboye (also used as collective term for all three groups), sab, Madhiban and Boon. Sometimes, the Madhiban are seen as a sub-group of the Midgan:

„The northern Somali pastoral society distinguishes three occupational castes, the Midgan, Tumul (also called Tum Tum, Tumaal, Tomal) and Yibir (also called Yibro, Hebrew), referred to collectively as sab (which means low-caste). These names are also used by the southern Darod. Another collective term used for these groups in northern Somalia is Gaboye (Geboyo), but Gaboye is also used as another name for the Midgan only. A third collective name used for the three groups is Baidari. The terms Midgan, Gaboye and sab are derogatory terms. According to Perouse de Montclos the word sab refers to professional castes without territorial, genealogical or ethnic foundation, less than 1% of the country's population. Three quarters of them are shoemakers or barbers who carry out circumcision: they are called 'untouchables', Midgan, and try to impose a new name since the beginning of the war, the 'harmless' Madhiban. [...] Here, the occupational castes were collectively known as boon or gum. But again, by others, Boon and Midgan were used interchangeably. [...] The delegation met with Mr Yassin Hersi Jama, a representative of the Madhiban, who had lived in Mogadishu from 1980 onwards and in Nairobi from 1990

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onwards. He used the term Midgan as a collective term covering the sub-groups Madhiban, Musa Dheryo, Tumal, Yaher, Yibir and Jaje." (DIS, 1 November 2000, p. 49)

According to Joakim Gundel, consultant and political science researcher with specialisation in complex emergencies, who spoke on clans in Somalia and minorities at a workshop organised by ACCORD on 15 May 2009, the Somali clan system applied to the Somali region of Ethiopia (the Ogaden) as well. According to him, minorities belonging to the sab group were not living in particular regions but were scattered all over the area inhabited by Somalis. Thus, small groups of them could also be found in the Ogaden, where the relationship between majorities and minorities was the same as in Somalia. (Gundel, Joakim, 15 May 2009)

Thus, information about the situation of the Midgan both in Ethiopia and Somalia is provided below.

Midgan in Ethiopia

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints only little current information could be found on the subject of the Midgan in Ethiopia.

In a report on land ownership in the Godey Zone of the Somali region of Ethiopia published by the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research "North-South" (NCCR), an organisation facilitating research partnerships between institutions in Switzerland and developing countries, in 2005, the Midgan are mentioned to be a minority group inhabiting the Ogaden, who live among Somali clans and provide them with services:

„Apart from Somali minority groups inhabiting the Ogaden, the other minority groups practice flood recession irrigated agriculture along the Wabi Shebelle, Genale, Weib and tributaries of these rivers. The minority groups include Rer Barre, Woredubbe, Shebelle, Gurantee and Gerimaro (Ayele Gebre-Mariam & Tadesse Haile 1990). Minority groups such as Boni, Yibir and Midgan live among the Somali clans and are providing services such as blacksmithing, leather making, artefacts, etc. (Ayele Gebre- Mariam 1976).“ (NCCR, 2005, p. 12f)

In a report by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UN CHR) of July 2004, Midgan-Madhiban are described as an outcast group forming the lowest rank of the society's stratification among the Somali population in Ethiopia, who face discrimination and violence by dominant clans:

„Large Somali populations have existed, for generations in many cases, in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Djibouti and Yemen. In a submission to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination during a thematic discussion on 8 August 2002, prior to the adoption of the Committee's general recommendation XXIX on descent-based discrimination, Professor Asha Samad of the Somali International Minority Association (SIMA) declared that in all of these populations, Midgan-Madhiban and other outcast groups are the lowest rank of the society's stratification. [...] According to Professor Samad, the Midgan-Madhiban and members of other outcast communities face ongoing discrimination, abuse

and attack by members of the dominant clans even in the refugee camps. She says that in those Somali communities that have been admitted to other countries through asylum and other immigration processes, "clan and caste continue". (UN CHR, 5 July 2004, p. 16)

The report by UN CHR of July 2004 adds that:

„Some reports indicate ongoing discrimination against Midgan-Madibhan in the Somali diaspora, and in certain West African diaspora communities. However, relevant information in this area is very limited and further study is still required.“ (UN CHR, 5 July 2004, p. 13)

Asked for protection against abuse by the state, Joakim Gundel said at the ACCORD workshop on 15 May in Vienna that, given the current conflict in the Ogaden, the Ethiopian state was not strong enough. According to him, minority protection was not effective under current circumstances. (Gundel, Joakim, 15 May 2009)

Midgan in Somalia

According to the most current country report on human rights practises by the US Department of State (USDOS) of February 2009, minority groups in Somalia include, among others, the Madhiban. Minority groups are disproportionately affected by discrimination, violence and social exclusion:

„Minority groups and low-caste clans included the Bantu (the largest minority group), the Benadiri, Rer Hamar, Brawanese, Swahili, Tumul, Yibir, Yaxar, Madhiban, Hawrarsame, Muse Dheryo, and Faqayaqub. Inter-marriage between minority groups and mainstream clans was restricted. Minority groups had no armed militias and continued to be disproportionately subject to killings, torture, rape, kidnapping for ransom, and looting of land and property with impunity by faction militias and majority clan members. Many minority communities continued to live in deep poverty and to suffer from numerous forms of discrimination and exclusion.“ (USDOS, 25 February 2009, Sec. 5)

In February 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) reported that discrimination and human rights abuses against minorities, including the Midgan (Gadoye), continued unabated:

„Rights of the minorities: Discrimination and abuses against minorities and vulnerable groups continue unabated. Somali minorities such as the Benadir/Rer Hamar, Midgan (Gadoye) and Tomal, in particular the African Bantu/Jarir population, who have been traditionally discriminated against in Somali society, continue to face abuses and human rights violations because of their ethnic origin. During the Siad Barre regime, the vice-president was from the minority Tomal ethnicity, and the minorities were perceived to have enjoyed some protection. However when the regime collapsed and clan protection replaced State protection, the stronger clans managed to establish their own protection mechanisms leaving the weaker minority clans virtually unprotected. The fighting in South and Central region has adversely affected their ability to earn a livelihood as labourers,

metalworkers, herbalists and hunters, their traditional occupation." (UN HRC, 24 February 2009, p. 16)

Amnesty International (AI) reported in March 2009 that:

„Extra-clan minorities in Somaliland include the Dami, Tumal, Midgan, Yibr and others. These traditionally castebased groups have historically experienced economic, social and political discrimination in Somaliland and throughout Somalia." (AI, March 2009, p. 28)

According to a March 2008 UN HRC report, minorities such as the Midgan (Gaboye) were at greater risk of international displacement, discrimination, exclusion and abuse. Sexual and gender-based violence against minority women was a problem:

„Discrimination and abuse of marginalized groups and minorities also appeared to continue unabated. Predominantly landless, destitute and unarmed minority groups such as the "African" Bantu/Jarir, the Benadir/Rer Hamar and the Midgan (Gaboye), were at greater risk of international displacement, discrimination, exclusion and abuse in the period covered by the report. [...] The fighting taking place in south and central Somalia also adversely affected their ability to earn a livelihood as labourers, metal-workers, herbalists and hunter-gatherers. They also reportedly faced greater difficulties in accessing humanitarian assistance and were more at risk in IDP camps. Sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation of minority women and girls, especially of the Bantu ethnic group, appeared more pronounced last year." (UN HRC, 17 March 2008, p. 11)

References: (all links accessed 20 May 2009)

- AI – Amnesty International: Human Rights Challenges - Somaliland Facing Elections [AFR 52/001/2009], March 2009
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