



## **Somalia – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 27 August 2015**

### **Information on the Eyle community in Somalia, including their traditional trades and way of life.**

The Executive Summary of a 2002 report from the *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs* refers to the Eyle minority group as follows:

“Minority Groups have tended to be targeted by dominant clans during conflict, and have frequently lost assets such as land as a result. These minorities include the Bantu, Eyle, Galgala, Tumul, Yibir, Gaboye, Bajuni, Benadiri and Bravanese. Some of these groups such as the Eyle and Galgala have assimilated into some of the dominant clan groups, Rahanweyn and Issak respectively. However, they still remain marginalized.” (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (1 August 2002) *Internally displaced persons: Combined report on Somalia*)

In a section titled “Background” this report states:

“The origin of the Eyle community is controversial. Some associate their origin with the Bantu, while others with the Rahanweyn and other Somali communities. The Eyle are hunters and gatherers who predominantly live in the regions of Bay, Lower and Middle Shabelle and Hiran.” (ibid)

A *Minority Rights Group International* report, in a section titled “Hunters”, states:

“Eyle constitute a separate, small group of farmer-hunters who are a distinct minority community. They live in villages in parts of the inter-riverine area. They reportedly number up to 12,000 people in four villages in Middle Shebelle Region, and smaller numbers in a Mogadishu IDP settlement. They live separately from others, have rarely been to school, suffer prejudice from local Rahanweyn clans, and are very poor and ill-treated.” (Minority Rights Group International (23 November 2010) *No redress: Somalia's forgotten minorities*, p.13)

A report jointly published by the *Norwegian Refugee Council*, *UN Habitat*, and *UNHCR*, in a section titled “The major “minority” groups”, states:

“There also appears to be a sub-group known as Eyle, who cultivate during the rains and hunt in the dry season (with dogs, considered dirty creatures by the ‘noble’ Somali). Lewis notes that both the Hawiye and the Digil ‘despise them, and there seems good reason to regard them as a pre-Cushitic aboriginal population’.” (Norwegian Refugee Council, UN Habitat, and UNHCR (July 2008) *Land, Property, and Housing in Somalia*, p.53)

A report published by the *Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior*, in a section titled “Occupational Differentiation, Adoption and Social Stratification”, refers to an article published by the professional anthropologist Virginia Luling in 1984 as follows:

“Luling stressed that caste groups and farming villagers were not categorically separated. Particularly in southern Somalia, there was in some cases considerable overlap between them, and, e.g., the Eyle, who were both farmers and hunters.”  
(Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) (September 2013) *Somalia: Security, Minorities & Migration*, p.68)

A *Danish Immigration Service* report published in 2000, in a section titled “Eyle” (sub-section headed “8.1 Groups and sub-groups, geographical distribution”), states:

“According to Mr Fara Oumari Mohamud, a representative of the Eyle (Eile) community in Nairobi, the Eyle centuries ago had their own kingdom, ruled by King Gedi Ababo, around the hill Bur Eyle close to Bur Hakaba (Bay region). The Eyle were hunters and agro-pastoralists. They believe themselves to be of Falasha (or Jewish) origin before they were Islamised. They were treated by the main Somali clans as religious outcasts. Fara Oumari Mohamud said that before the war there were some one thousand Eyle families living scattered throughout southern Somalia up to and including the Hiran region, but the majority lived in two districts, Bulo Burte in Hiran region, and Bur Hakaba in Bay region. These remain today the principal areas where the Eyle live in Somalia. Presently, there are approximately two to three hundred Eyle families in Somalia.”  
(Danish Immigration Service (24 September 2000) *Report on Minority Groups in Somalia*, p.47)

This section of the report also states:

“Lewis (1994a) considers the Eile (Eyle) of Bur Eibe as a Negroid people, living in the area between the two rivers. They cultivate during the rains and hunt in the dry season (with dogs, considered dirty creatures by the 'noble' Somali). Both the Hawiye and the Digil despise them, and there seems good reason to regard them as a pre-Cushitic aboriginal population. They comprise three primary sections, one of which appears to be related to a dynasty of chiefs that ruled the Bur region at some time. Smaller Eile groups are found at Dafet, on the lower and mid-Shabelle, and among the Shidle. Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi adds that in the 1960s and 1970s the Eyle had some hunting and farming communities in the vicinity of Mount Eyle (Bur Eyle, Bur Eibe), some 60 km south of Baidoa. Their numbers have been constantly in decline since the 1960s due to assimilation with the Rahanweyn and Bantu agricultural communities or through migration to large towns such as Mogadishu where they found employment as butchers. In Mogadishu, before the civil war, the Eyle occupied a large squatter camp beside the grounds of the National University, to the consternation of the university officials who demanded their eviction. The civil war has scattered the few communities that the Eyle had. Abdullahi considers the Eyle an endangered community that would have difficulty in reconstituting its former settlements around the plains of Mount Eyle.” (ibid, p.47)

In a section headed “Relationship with other groups and clans” (section 8.3.1) this report states:

“Fara Oumari Mohamud informed the delegation that the Eyle were treated as slaves by the main Somali clans. They had no protection from any clan and their relationships with the clans in their home areas (Rahanweyn, Hawadle) were not good. Also for religious reasons, they were treated as outcasts. There are no physical differences between the Eyle and the surrounding Somali clans. There was no intermarriage between the Eyle and the major Somali clans. There were no Eyle in government institutions, and there are no Eyle involved in the Arta peace process at the present time. Eyle could intermarry with some Benadiri and with Tumaal, but not with Yibir.” (ibid, p.48)

In a section headed “Occupations” (8.3.2) this report states:

“The Eyle are hunters and agro-pastoralists. According to Lewis (1994a) they also make pottery, and their home area is one of the centres of pottery making. Abdullahi mentions that in Mogadishu the Eyle found employment as butchers.” (ibid, p.48)

An eligibility guidelines document published by the *UN High Commissioner for Refugees* in 2010, in a section titled “Clan Protection and Customary Legal Justice”, states:

“UNHCR discussions with Eeyle in Bayhdaba in early 2009 revealed that their women were not even allowed to collect water from the same well as the dominant Rahanweyn; while, despite their desperate poverty, the Eeyle asked UNHCR not to be provided humanitarian assistance for fear that they would be looted by dominant clan members as a result.” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (5 May 2010) *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Somalia*, p.47)

A 2008 report from *IRIN News* states:

“Officials in Somalia's Middle Shabelle Region have raised the alarm over the plight of a community of drought-stricken hunter-gatherers there, who are in urgent need of food and water. ‘We have visited four villages and what we saw was heart-breaking; the villagers were cooking ‘aramo’ [green leaves normally used as a laxative] for food,’ Badir Mahammud Ahmed, the regional coordinator for humanitarian issues, told IRIN on 16 July. He said a team of government officials and aid workers had visited the villages of Doonka Haarey, Bowdo Gaabo, Damalka and Gaaway, with an estimated population of ‘1,500-2000 families’ (9,000-12,000 individuals). The villages are populated by the Eyle community, a hunter-gatherer people looked down upon by most Somalis. Ahmed said until their visit, the affected people had not seen a government official or aid agency representative for 18 years. ‘I would call them Somalia's forgotten people,’ he said. ‘They are an unarmed minority and it seems they fell into a hole and no one sees them.’” (IRIN News (16 July 2008) *Somalia: Plea for aid for “forgotten people”*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit 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.

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