



Somalia: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 27 February 2009

Availability of documentary evidence of identity/nationality.

A report published by the *Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo)*, in a section headed “Somalia” (section 2) comments on the possibility of obtaining official documents in Somalia as follows:

“Somalia has not had a functioning state government since 1991, and large parts of the territory are under no actual central administration or governing. This means that Somalia’s inhabitants have been unable to obtain official documents such as ID cards, passports or various certificates for the past 17 years.”
(Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) (5 January 2009) Documents in Somalia and Sudan, p.7)

In a section titled “Public Registration and Population Data” (section 2.1) this report states:

“Somalia held its last census in 1975. Currently, no national or local authority administers or possesses population data. The Federal Somali Transitional Government, TFG, appointed in the autumn of 2004, has not yet established any state institutions mandated to issue or register official documents (Interviews with representatives for various international organisations in Nairobi in June 2008). However, the authorities started issuing new passports via the United Arab Emirate Sharjah on 1 April 2007 (see point 2.8). Consequently, all documents and certificates issued by various private agencies rely on information provided by the individual concerned (with witnesses when appropriate) or relatives. All archives and public offices were plundered or destroyed during the civil war, leaving Somalia with no remaining registers, copies or originals which can be used for comparing or referencing documents and certificates.” (ibid, p.7)

See also section titled “Passports” (section 2.8) which states:

“Because Somalia has not had a functioning central government since January 1991, very few countries have accepted the Somali passport as a valid travel document. There are reports that Somali embassies, during and after the 1990s, have issued (sold) passports to Somalis residing abroad (Reuters 2007). Somali foreign services have operated outside the control or command of central authorities, and have had no opportunity to verify documents presented to them (as proof of a person’s identity).” (ibid, p.10)

In a section titled “Citizenship and Nationality” (paragraph 30.03) a recently published *UK Home Office* country report on Somalia quotes the Economist Intelligence Unit as stating:

“The new passport issued by the TFG took effect on July 1st, when the head of the immigration department, Abdullahi Gafow, said that the use of the former Somali passport would no longer be recognised at the country’s airports. The new document, which is designed to be computer-readable, is often referred to as an ‘e-passport’ because it incorporates the latest contactless chip technology, incorporating facial and fingerprint biometrics. It is unclear how immediately useful the new document will be in practice, given its high price ‘US\$100 if bought within Somalia or US\$150 outside’ and the small number of places where it will be sold (the TFG does not control the whole country and has fewer than a dozen diplomatic missions abroad).” (UK Home Office (Border Agency) (24 February 2009) *Country of Origin Information Report – Somalia*)

An *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* response to an information request refers to the issuance of passports and other documents as follows:

“A media article reports that the Somali government has not issued passports since the internal conflict began in 1991 (AlJazeera 17 Jan. 2007). A statement from the Government of Canada explaining why Canada will not accept the Somali passport as a valid travel document states that, since 1991, Somalia has been functioning with virtually no government, and that satellite ‘Somali embassies’ with no oversight from a central government have sold blank passport stock to finance their operations (16 Dec. 1999). Numerous sources report serious concerns about the integrity and reliability of Somali passports.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (7 May 2007) *SOM102471.E – Somalia: Passports and other documentation that could assist with identification*)

This response also states:

“With respect to other documentation that could assist with identification, the Executive Director of the Somali Centre for Family Services stated that there is no birth certificate, identification document or driver's license available to Somalis” (ibid)

A similar *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* response states:

“A senior external relations officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Canada stated that given the absence of a functioning Somali government, she was not aware of other means of obtaining documentation from sources, apart from the refugee registration system conducted by host governments and the UNHCR, to assist in the identification process for Somalis.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (9 May 2007) *SOM102470.E – Somalia: Means, apart from the Somali government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to obtain documentation...*)

See also an *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* response which states:

“The Senior Protection Officer of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representation in Canada informed the

Research Directorate that the issuance of birth and death certificates has not been addressed by the Transitional Government in Mogadishu (UN 8 Apr. 2008). He continued that the responsible authority would normally be the Mogadishu Municipal Council led by the Mayor (ibid.). The United States (US) Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs notes that most official records including birth certificates, unless they were in the hands of private individuals, were destroyed during the course of the civil war in Somalia which began in 1990 (US n.d.). The Senior Protection Officer of the UNHCR Representation in Canada stressed that no 'legal documents' have been issued in Mogadishu since 1991 (UN 8 Apr. 2008). However, Somalis continue to use documents issued by ex-Municipality officials such as ID cards and birth certificates which are similar to documents issued prior to the civil war" (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (16 April 2008) *SOM102797.E – Somalia: Information on the types of identity documents...*)

References

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (16 April 2008) *SOM102797.E – Somalia: Information on the types of identity documents which have been issued in Mogadishu within the past two years, including the authority responsible for their issuance, and any significant physical and security features; availability of fraudulent documents*

http://www2.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451846

(Accessed 27 February 2009)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (9 May 2007) *SOM102470.E – Somalia: Means, apart from the Somali government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to obtain documentation from sources inside or outside Canada that could assist in the identification process for Somalis*

http://www2.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451196

(Accessed 27 February 2009)

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (7 May 2007) *SOM102471.E – Somalia: Passports and other documentation that could assist with identification*

http://www2.irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/research/rir/index_e.htm?action=record.viewrec&gotorec=451197

(Accessed 27 February 2009)

Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) (5 January 2009) *Documents in Somalia and Sudan*

http://www.landinfo.no/asset/769/1/769_1.pdf

(Accessed 27 February 2009)

UK Home Office (Border Agency) (24 February 2009) *Country of Origin Information Report – Somalia*

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/somalia-250209.doc>

(Accessed 27 February 2009)

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

Danish Immigration Service

Electronic Immigration Network

European Country of Origin Information Network

Google

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Landinfo

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UK Home Office