

Somalia

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Somalia, officially the Somali Republic and formerly known as the Somali Democratic Republic, is a country located in the Horn of Africa. It is bordered by Djibouti to the northwest, Kenya on its southwest, the Gulf of Aden with Yemen on its north, the Indian Ocean at its east, and Ethiopia to the west. Major climatic factors are a year-round hot climate, seasonal monsoon winds, and irregular rainfall with recurring droughts. Somalia is a semi-arid country with about 2% arable land. The civil war had a huge impact on the country's tropical forests by facilitating the production of charcoal with ever-present, recurring, but damaging droughts.

Somalia has a population of around 10.7 million according to U.N. estimates in 2003, 85% of which constitute ethnic Somalis. Because of the civil war, the country has a large diaspora community, one of the largest of the whole continent. Millions of Somalis live abroad, and this excludes those who inhabit the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, Yemen, northeastern Kenya, and Djibouti. Somali is the national language of the Somali people and is used virtually everywhere by almost all ethnic Somalis as well as a few minority groups. A considerable number of Somalis speak Arabic due to close ties with the Arab World, the far-reaching influence of the Arabic media, and religious education. The Somalis are entirely Sunni Muslims.

Somalia has had no effective national government since 1991. The Somali state currently exists largely in a de jure capacity; Somalia has a weak but largely recognized central government authority, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), but this currently controls only the central region of Somalia, and before the end of 2006 controlled only the city of Baidoa.

Despite the lack of effective national governance, Somalia has maintained a healthy informal economy, largely based on livestock, remittance/money transfer companies, and telecommunications. Agriculture is the most important sector, with livestock normally accounting for about 40% of GDP and about 65% of export earnings. In the absence of a formal banking sector, money exchange services have sprouted throughout the country, handling between \$500 million and \$1 billion in remittances annually. Mogadishu's main market offers a variety of goods from food to the newest electronic gadgets. Hotels continue to operate and are supported with private-security militias. Somalia's arrears to the IMF continued to grow in 2006-07. Statistics on Somalia's GDP, growth, per capita income, and inflation should be viewed skeptically. In late December 2004, a major tsunami caused an estimated 150 deaths and resulted in destruction of

property in coastal areas. In late 2008 and early 2009 the problem of piracy in international waters off Somalia became much greater, leading to international condemnation and a military task force being sent by the European and African Unions to protect international shipping.