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LETTER
PETITION FROM THE SOMALI YOUTH LEAGUE, BRANCH OF MERCA
CONCERNING SOMALILAND UNDER ITALIAN ADMINISTRATION

Note by the Secretary-General: In accordance with rule 85 and supplementary rules F and L of the rules of procedure for the Trusteeship Council, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the Trusteeship Council, to the Government of Italy as the Administering Authority of the Trust Territory of Somaliland, and to the Governments of Colombia, Egypt, and the Philippines as members of the Advisory Council for the Trust Territory of Somaliland, a communication dated 30 July 1951 from the Somali Youth League, Branch of Merca, concerning the Trust Territory of Somaliland under Italian administration.

This communication was transmitted to the Secretary-General by the United Nations Advisory Council for the Trust Territory of Somaliland under Italian administration.

SOMALI YOUTH LEAGUE

Branch of Merca

Merca, 30 July 1951.

To: The United Nations Advisory Council,
Mogadiscio.

Chief Administrator of Somalia,
Mogadiscio.

Command of "Gruppo Carabinieri",
Mogadiscio.

Central Committee, Somali Youth League,
Mogadiscio.

This Committee has the honour to submit respectfully a petition to the honourable Advisory Council and to the Chief Administrator to demand justice from the "Tenenza Carabinieri", Merca, for the following occurrences which took place, from 15 May of the current year up to date, as reprisal against both our Association in particular and the population in general.

The circumstances being as set out below, we request the honourable Advisory Council and the Chief Administrator to intervene with the "Tenenza" at Merca in order to stop the degrading and inhuman methods applied in the fascist manner in Merca:

a) On the occasion of the 15 May anniversary although this Committee had obtained from the Resident permission to make a public demonstration, the Lieutenant with his motor vehicle seriously endangered (the life of) both demonstrators and public, composed of women and children, thus jeopardizing what had been settled by the Political Authority. Having been requested by this Committee to explain why (he behaved in such a manner), he did not deign to answer, snatched away the drums from the people who carried them, driving his motor vehicle several times recklessly in the midst of the population, mad with fright. Not satisfied with what he had set about to do, later on he called together the members of the Committee and delivered to them the following speech: "that he would allow nobody to believe or to shout to the four corners of Merca that Somaliland is for Somalis; so long as there is a single white "carabiniere", people must just obey and not discuss his orders. On the same occasion he told

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this Committee that listening to the radio after 8 p.m. is forbidden, to deliver lectures to members of the institution after 9 p.m. is forbidden; that there was no permission to play after 8 p.m. the accordion with which the band was equipped. Despite the Lieutenant's unjust orders, this Committee obediently left the "Tenenza" very late, thus missing the feast for the 15 May anniversary.

b) The town of Merca is a connecting centre between Mogadiscio and Kismayu as well as for centres in the District itself. Therefore the population is continually increasing on account of the rains which block the roads. The Lieutenant, probably annoyed with the daily increase of the population, lets loose in town more minions than during the fascist period, and stops in the streets traders and drivers and other people, locking them in prison for the first evening, without asking what their business is and where they come from, and then deports them to their village of origin, even if the road is blocked, or else he keeps them in prison several days and then deports them. Many relatives called at the "Tenenza" to have the prisoner free, but the Lieutenant always received with angry and disrespectful words anyone complaining of such unjust actions.

c) As soon as he arrived at Merca, the Lieutenant delivered a speech to the Police constables and told them to abide by the following rules: 1) for no reason whatever to frequent public places managed by members of the SYL; 2) not to speak to or even greet, anybody, but particularly SYL members. Therefore owners of bars, holders of a regular licence to sell drinks to the public, were compelled to forbid Somali soldiers to enter their premises. Quite differently are allowed to behave the "Carabinieri" who frequent brothels, concessionnaires' private club, and are even allowed to travel on concessionnaires' cars to take trips to the farms and sow terror among the peaceful Somali farm workers. As concerns places now out of bounds to Somali soldiers, there are not places where political lectures are held, but places where people go to get a drink. With regard to interdiction to Somali soldiers to greet any people, several had to request to be dismissed from service, because they could not shake their close relatives' hand. We cite an example: the refusal by sergeant Barre to forbid Somalis to set chairs outside the premises. Request of dismissal of plain clothes constable Hassan Mudei, request to be transferred by several soldiers who preferred to leave Merca and be transferred elsewhere. Therefore, in

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this field too terror prevails, since one must either obey orders or be considered a bad lot.

d) Perhaps the Lieutenant has reasons to justify his way of arresting people, although they are guiltless, of handcuffing Somalis together in an Indian file in the public road, even if simply charged with something or other or because they had a fight for futile reasons, and of having them escorted by "Carabinieri" with sub-machine guns and big pistols, so that the poor guiltless man feels as though he were led to the gallows.

e) Illegal and unjustified arrests. On this subject, this Committee has been unable as yet to understand why the Somali driver who called at the station to be paid for transport of two Somali soldiers from Mogadiscio to Merca, when he asked to be paid his due, having already passengers on his lorry ready to leave, was arrested and kept in the guard-room for over four hours, and then released. On that occasion the Somali in question suffered a loss of not less than 350 or 400 (Somalos) for the trip he was going to make. Or the case of the lorry owner, also arrested, and his lorry unloaded inside the station. The lorry was loaded with miscellaneous goods and passengers, and he was arrested simply because he had requested payment for the transport of some Illalos from Mogadiscio to Merca. Or the unjustified arrest of two Somali women, belonging to good families. On that occasion, the "Carabinieri", who had a petrol lamp, asked the women to lift their veils, and threw light on their faces, and then arrested them because they had timidly asked the reason (for such request). Or, finally, the reason for the arrest, also unjustified, of the young man who had called at the station to lay information against a debtor of his; indeed, he was not only arrested, but had his face slapped and he was manhandled and locked in prison for the night.

Recently, to be exact on 29 July, a member of SYL was unjustly arrested because he had come between the Lieutenant and some Somalis, from whom he had confiscated some tables, on which, on the occasion of the "Idr el Fitr", they were playing a game of chance, quite an innocent game, since the stakes were not higher than 10 cents or 20 cents at the most. The Lieutenant intervened on that occasion on information supplied by this Committee and seized on the spot the tables in question. When the lawful owners called at the station, the Lieutenant, instead of satisfying their request, received them with ironical words, addressed precisely to this Committee (and saying) that he, as Commanding Officer, would

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probably be promoted from the rank of Lieutenant to that of Captain, and that he would arrest them, without giving any reason, if they insisted further. As a result, they asked the SYL members to make a petition on that matter. The SYL member, well aware of the full implication of what they were asking, assured them that he would somehow have a word with the Lieutenant, and asked him to give them full explanations. Unfortunately the member in question, not having found the Lieutenant in his office, met him in the street. At the member's request about what could be done in the matter of the tables, the Lieutenant told him not to ask for any explanation, and that if he thought that a petition was needed for the contestants, he could make not only one, but ten. The Lieutenant asked the Somali whether he had any intention of calling again the contestants, before him, and the reply was "no" and the exact words were that he would call nobody. But if the contestants would call, he would make a petition to higher authorities. Perhaps the Lieutenant grew angry at these simple words; he immediately arrested the Somali and kept him under arrest for not less than nine hours.

Finally for the unjustified reason of the arrest arising from it; because one speaks to an authority in the public street. Very nearly the town made common cause with SYL members, as the Somali was well known and held in high esteem by the population. Immediately afterwards, the whole population, roused, called at the Residency requesting immediate release. The Resident, considering the request to be fair, released temporarily. The next morning the Somali called at the Lieutenant's to have his position settled and the Lieutenant received him with words wholly out of place, advising him to secure the assistance of a lawyer because he would no doubt be put in prison for six years: the reason being because he had replied to a police officer in a manner that he did not like. Therefore this Committee, finding it difficult to cooperate with such police authority, requests the intervention of the honourable Advisory Council and of the Chief Administrator in order to look into what unjustly and inhumanly is in force at Merca. We wish to add, in connection with the incident of 29 July, that if the population's revolt had not been quelled by the Resident's decision and unpleasant disturbances had taken place, the fault would be entirely the Lieutenant's, who, for exceedingly banal reasons, roused the public indignation of the Somalis of Merca.

f) This Committee, making itself the interpreter of the feeling of SYL members of Merca, states that, as far as the District is concerned, it will be
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very, very difficult to aspire to independence or personal freedom, since we have daily to face trouble with Police authorities: the reasons are the happenings which occurred and which will no doubt occur in the near future, so long as there is in Merca a Lieutenant of carabinieri, whose ideas are opposed to Somalis' advancement.

As regards SYL members and a great majority of the population, in spite of their being peaceful and hard-working people endeavours are made all the time to terrorize them, in order to lead them to subject themselves to the imperialistic colonialism of the late fascist regime.

We, in our capacity of Committees' (members) note daily, with regret, actions which require patience and perseverance, but, in the present conditions, we are unable to maintain order and pacify spirits continually stirred up by the Lieutenant of carabinieri or his deputies.

Therefore we ask the honourable Advisory Council and the Chief Administrator, whether human rights really exist. Why such an occurrence was celebrated? Are they applied in Somaliland's centres? The Merca District is deeply wounded and expects justice. No doubt this appeal of ours will not have been made in vain.

And awaiting a better fate for our country, we tender our best thanks and humble greetings.

For the Directing Committee of
Merca District:

The Secretary,
Ali Malim (signed)

Somali Youth League,
Merca.

Merca, 30 July 1951.

Received by the United Nations Advisory Council at Mogadiscio on 1 August 1951.
