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PETITION FROM THE SOMALI LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE SOCIETY  
CONCERNING SOMALILAND UNDER ITALIAN ADMINISTRATION

(Circulated in accordance with rule 85, paragraph 2, and supplementary  
rule F of the rules of procedure for the Trusteeship Council)

Note by the Secretariat: This communication was transmitted  
to the Secretary-General by the United Nations Visiting  
Mission to Trust Territories in East Africa.

COPY

TRANSLATION

SOMALI LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE SOCIETY  
c/o Somali Youth League

P.O. Box No. 352  
Mogadishu  
3rd October, 1954

J.S. Reid,  
United Nations Visiting Mission,  
c/o United Nations Advisory Council  
Secretariat  
Mogadishu

It is the desire of Somali Language and Literature Society to put  
forward the question of Somali language for the kind consideration of the  
Trusteeship Council.

It is undoubtedly well known that the national language of this  
territory is the Somali, the language of the inhabitants of this part of  
Somaliland under Italian Trusteeship, British Somaliland, French Somaliland,

Ogaden and the Northern Territory of Kenya. And though the Greater Somaliland is politically split up into five parts, the inhabitants are of the same family with a common history, tradition, religion and language. The artificial boundaries between this family are ethnologically meaningless.

Somali people are on the whole very responsive to education. They have pursued the learning for a considerable time, but their present standard of knowledge is too low and shallow. They never had adequate education neither in English language nor in Italian, Arabic or French. In fact, only a handful of them can roughly correspond each other. The cause of this worthless situation is one: the lack of the vernacular language.

Let us take this part of Somaliland under Italian Trusteeship as an example. The mass speaks no Italian, Arabic or English, and are far from having the opportunity. To learn one or two books of any of these languages is not helpful. The student, though capable of reading and writing is always in an awkward position. He can not even write a short letter because he cannot express himself well. Therefore, the illiterate mass and those who can only read and write are alike.

Here are few Somalis on a higher standard though with other problems. These are the minority and can be classified in three distinguishable groups: Italian speaking group, Arabic speaking group and English speaking group. Few of them can master two foreign languages. An Italian speaking Somali chap can not dare write to his brother who reads only Arabic or English and differs them in character, ideas, political opinion etc. This unlikeness reflects in the social life and now and then endanger the interest of the territory. Few are the questions these three groups may agree with one another. They need something to solder them together, something that revives in them the spirit of nationalism and self respect and better the social life and brotherhood, i.e., the national language of the territory, the Somali. Without this vernacular the future organization of the Somali State, is likely to be handicapped. If we draw a picture mind of such organization, we imagine it as defective one. The leading body will certainly be composed by the said three groups. How they will correspond each other or organize their three-lingual

office papers is an enigma. Whether the whole energy be directed to the creation of a formidable translating body of the State or whether the most numerous group will eliminate other peacefully or otherwise, we do not know.

Such situation will surely arise in the near future and doubtlessly before 1960. If the present methodical system of somalization continues, these three different groups will fill the positions of responsibility and thus anticipate the ridiculous situation.

The difficulties arising from this multilingual system of education are more visible in the schools. A child of 7 or 10 years of age, who faces two foreign languages at a time, while he lacks altogether the knowledge of his own language is ill-omened. We do not know how the Italian and Arab schoolmasters make the child understand something, while they themselves do not know even a word of the child's tongue. The school text books present also another problem being books written for Italian and Arab schoolchildren. At the time of the British Administration the problem of school textbooks in English was light, because there were books devised for foreign students learning English.

As we have said before, the Somalization will never be effective unless the Somali language is adopted in the near future. We say near future and not now because though this language is rich and unique for the entire people of Somali race with an alphabet of its own, nothing important has been done yet to develop it, while a considerable percentage of Somalis are still far from understanding its importance. Add to that the hostile attitude of some foreign people towards our language. For example, the Administering Authority follow a double-hearted policy. Truly she is more polite than the Arab states, who are always to the contrary, and sometimes she even seems sharing the opinion of the majority of the United Nations Member States. She justifies her inertness in this field to the fact that she, being democratic, cannot force the people of the territory against their will. But interesting enough is her attitude here in Somalia. She has got a very successful expedient to camouflage her play. On one side she shows interest in the language of the

people and on the other hand she makes the problem more abhorrent by introducing the Latin alphabet, the only thing which can hinder the development of the language. It seems proper to make a brief comparison between the existing Somali script and the Latin one.

The Somali script is not very old. It was invented by a Somali man in 1922 at Obbia (Somaliland). Obbia was at that time an Italian Protectorate by name, but practically independent. Then the script met opposition and could not develop properly. This opposition became more evident in Fascist time when even the existing Italian schools for Somalis were closed. The native education was not tolerable. As soon as Italy lost the war and British occupied Somaliland a relief followed. The Somali people enjoyed the fundamental human rights. The spirit of nationalism and education sprang up and the political parties founded. It is at that period that the Somali youth felt the necessity of their language and script. Swiftly the script spread in this territory and British Somaliland and then among the Somali communities in Ethiopia, Aden etc. Schools were opened by the local political clubs. In 1949 our society was founded. More schools were opened and several Somali primers prepared. It disseminated the propaganda of the language and the script by means of the local newspapers such as the attached copy. A sample of the primers is also enclosed herewith.<sup>1/</sup>

The Latin alphabet presents first of all the disadvantage of not being fonetic and unsuitable for Somali language. Few Italian and English men are supporting it. The Administering Authority once opened some experimental Somali schools in Mogadishu taught first with Somali characters to entice pupils into the trap. These schools were in full swing, when the Administering Authority introduced one day the Latin alphabet and when the pupils refused to accept it, shut down the schools. This alphabet is - besides being unsuitable

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1/ Note by the Secretariat: The above-mentioned enclosures are being retained in the Secretariat and are available to members of the Trusteeship Council on request.

for Somali language - also hated for other reasons. The Somalis are religious people and oppose the introduction of this christian alphabet. The nationalists oppose it because they are very proud of having a script of their own. The Latin unsuitability consists that it fails to represent the whole Somali consonants and vowels. The Europeans who pretend to be interested in Somali knew that and invented for the purpose several types of transfigured Latin alphabets.

If these Europeans would desist their rigidity to pursue their unsuccessful plan of obstructing the way with this Latin alphabet and give the due respect to Somali opinion, our Society is quite sure that something tangible would soon be achieved.

Before concluding we have the honour to seek your answers and comment to the following four queries, which will certainly be a guidance for this Society:

1. What is the opinion of the Trusteeship Council towards our Somali script.
2. Can this society expect any technical assistance from UNESCO or from the Administering Authority.
3. Which is the easiest way to develop a language like the Somali.
4. May the Administering Authority be advised to set up a mixed body of Somalis, Italians and a member of UNESCO to study the question of the language.

Begging that this letter together the translation be circulated, we remain you obedient servants.

Sgd: Y.O. Kenadid

Società per la lingua e letteratura  
somala

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