



People Groups: SOMALIS

Although 99 per cent of Somalis are Muslim, and 90 per cent speak the same language, they are divided into numerous clan and sub-clan groups that have been in conflict for centuries.

The five-pointed star on the nation's flag represents the five colonial divisions. In 1960 the British Somaliland and Italian Somalia united at independence, and then tried to conquer the adjacent portions inhabited by Somalis within neighbouring Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya. This led to a crushing defeat in the Ogaden War of 1977, followed by civil war.

Somalia was declared a "failed state" in 1991. Somaliland (formerly British in the northwest) broke away in 1992 and remains largely peaceful, while Somalia has suffered extreme violence and famine. The current government has gradually extended control with help from African Union soldiers, but over one-third of their territory is controlled by Islamist jihadists al-Shabaab. The still unresolved civil war led to a

global diaspora, with more than 10 per cent of the 15 million Somalis fleeing their homeland.

Somali people are livestock herders, and they enjoy the world's highest camel density. Camel milk makes it possible for nomads to survive two weeks away from wells. Commerce is also a key occupation. Many merchants and long-haul truck drivers across East and Southern Africa are Somalis.

Islam spread from Arabia in the eighth century, and by 1500 all Somalis were Sunni Muslims. Christian mission work began in the 1880s, and has faced significant challenges.

The people have long composed and appreciated complex poetry, with topics covering love, politics, war and peace. This poetic literature remained oral until the government imposed an official Latin orthography in 1972 for the Somali language. A national literacy campaign resulted in the remarkable figure of 25 per cent literacy. Providentially, these actions were made by the same government that had forced out missionaries.

At a Glance

- Despite decades of civil war, Somalia has one of the most widespread telecommunication systems in Africa.
- Somalis have a deep appreciation for mass media: radio, websites, chatrooms and social media.
- Currently, less than one per cent of Somalis are Christians.
- The rapid increase in literacy facilitated the printing and discrete distribution of the newly-translated Bible and other literature.

Ask God To:

- Lead Christians across the world to welcome Somali immigrants within their communities.
- Bless the formation of healthy house churches with inter-clan unity, both for the Horn of Africa and the diaspora.
- Help the Somali government restore control to all its territory, rule justly and allow religious freedom.
- Use Christian radio, websites and social media to help spread the gospel.

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