

Speech delivered by Dr. Nomfundo Xenia Ngwenya, Head of the South African Foreign Policy programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs, at the launch of the book *Somaliland*¹ by

Professor Iqbal Jhazbhay. Senate Hall, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 11 March 2010

In order to avoid any protocol-related faux pas, allow me to follow in the footsteps of Prof. Landsberg and say “all protocol observed.” Ladies and gentlemen, before I proceed to the notes I have prepared, I just want to share something. Shortly before entering the hall this evening, I heard from one of my sources, and since the source is none other than Naseema -Iqbal’s wife, I am inclined to believe that it is a reliable source. She told me that not only are we celebrating Iqbal’s achievements this evening, it’s also his birthday today. Happy birthday Iqbal-*ukhule ukhule kodwa ungakhokhobi*.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I speak this evening on behalf of my boss, the National Director of the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), Elizabeth Sidiropoulos, who could not be here this evening since she is travelling abroad. But it is a happy coincidence that she could not be present and I had to step in her shoes. I am indeed pleased because I feel like I have watched this book unfold from the day that it was conceptualised...I’ll come back to that later. I am here to give a few thoughts on why we at SAIIA are so proud to be associated with this book, which we co-published with the Institute for Global Dialogue (IGD). I won’t go into extra detail on the content of the book since I believe our previous speakers, Ambassador Nhlapo and Prof. Landsberg have really done justice to the task of giving a solid synopsis of the substantive issues raised in the book. In sum, the book offers a quadrilateral framework for understanding the case of Somaliland. This framework is based on four R’s: **Reconciliation, Reconstruction, Religion and Recognition**. But I would like to offer my own quadrilateral framework, based on the four R’s of why SAIIA published the book and why I think it will prove to be a worthy piece of scholarly work for those who buy it.

Rigor- The first ‘R’ of my quadrilateral framework refers to ‘rigor’. On page 22 of the book, the author describes his research methodology. It is remarkable that the research was conducted over six years, between the years 2000 and 2006; it involved 9 trips to Somaliland and the region; approximately 100 interviews; extensive use of archives; and finally he made use of discussion groups, which particularly struck me as important since, when I visited Somaliland I learnt of the powerful impact of the Somali oral tradition on just about every aspect of Somali life. This actually speaks volumes about Iqbal’s quality as a researcher and his appreciation of the local dynamics and nuances that go beyond mainstream forms of conducting research.

¹ Iqbal Jhazbhay. *Somaliland: An African Struggle for Nationhood and International Recognition*. Johannesburg: Institute for Global Dialogue & South African Institute of International Relations. 2009. ISBN 978-1-920216-20-7 Available from Kalahari.net or from SAIIA’s Publications unit. See:

<http://www.saiia.org.za/books/somaliland.-an-african-struggle-for-nationhood-and-international-recognition.html>

http://www.kalahari.net/page_templates/searchresults.aspx?searchText=Jhazbhay&navigationid=1&displayShop=home

We should also recall that Iqbal has been intimately involved with the government and people of Somaliland. Therefore, it would have been easy for him to simply adopt a single position and only consult those individuals that would endorse his line of thought. Instead, through this skilful combination of research methods, Iqbal has demonstrated his commitment to rigor by successfully verifying information received from one source and checking for fabrications or inconsistencies.

Robustness- The second 'R' of my framework speaks to the robustness of the book. In his foreword renowned African scholar Ali Mazrui writes, "...it would have been tempting to study the Somali story not as a case of nation-building but as one of national demolition, not as a case of political development but as one of political decay. Part of the originality of Iqbal Jhazbhay's approach has been to transform this agenda. Instead, of focusing on the disintegration of the Somali Republic, he has turned his attention to the resilience of Somaliland..." (page 13). What Prof. Mazrui is essentially saying is that Iqbal's study is robust. What does a robust study do? It takes a subject that is commonly viewed through a single prism, turns it on its head and challenges the reader to engage with the study in a manner that they had never thought of before. A robust study takes us out of our comfort zones and forces us to think alternatively and that is precisely what Iqbal has done in this book.

Research excellence- Mr Ahmed Aideed's review of the book, which appeared in the Kenyan *Sunday Nation* newspaper builds onto what Prof. Mazrui has said. Aideed observes, "Although Prof Ali Mazrui suggests in his foreward [sic] to the book, that the study significantly contributes to our understanding of the Somali predicament, I am of the view that in terms of its theoretical contribution, there are bits where most African post-conflict societies can reflect on and even find useful and relevant, to their own progression."² I stand in agreement with Mr Aideed as his words emphasise the third 'R' in my quadrilateral framework: research excellence. The value of a study in the discipline of International Relations should surely go beyond research for the sake of it. Given the multitude of challenges that foreign policymakers and practitioners grapple with, I do believe it is incumbent upon any researcher in the field to conduct research that not only satisfies the curiosity of the researcher, but also provides new ways of analysing and implementing policy. It is for this reason that I believe this book is an example of research excellence. Iqbal not only kept himself busy on a topic that excites him, he also thought beyond the Somaliland case study into the broader realm of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction in Africa. This book will certainly give many practitioners in the area of African politics some tools with which to re-evaluate their approach to African conflict resolution.

Resilience- The fourth and final R in my framework is all about Iqbal's sheer resilience and it speaks to the personal, so please allow me to reflect. I have had the pleasure of knowing Iqbal for approximately ten years. In fact, he was one of the members of the panel that interviewed me for my lecturing job here at UNISA, so I guess I owe my first job to him! Ever since I met Iqbal, I've been struck by just how seriously he takes himself as a scholar. But as you said, Prof. Moeketsi, he has always been particularly

² Ahmed Aideed, 'Lessons learnt from Somaliland on self reclamation from mayhem', book review, Lifestyle section, *Sunday Nation*, Nairobi, 20 December 2009, page 12.

filled with passion for Somaliland as a country and as a subject of study so much so that, as he did for you Ambassador Nhlapo and your wife, he also arranged my trip to Somaliland in 2001. It was my first trip to the region and I had no idea what to expect. The one aspect of the Somali people that made a great impact on me was the co-operation between the diaspora and the Somali people at home. I had never seen this phenomenon and it fascinated me so much that it ultimately influenced my own PhD studies on the diaspora. So Iqbal, your passion and enthusiasm went beyond you, you found a way of passing them down to at least one person in the next generation of young scholars.

Iqbal truly enjoys what he does. In all the time that I have observed Iqbal undertake his research, he has only ever spoken of the joys of his fieldwork and analysis, never once complaining. But I know that it is not easy to sustain momentum and morale over the full period of a PhD. So, I think this book is not just about Iqbal but also about his wife Naseema and the boys. You allowed him the space to follow his passion and you supported him throughout. I remember meeting him in London when he was converting the thesis into a book. I'll never forget how excited he was when I taught him how to use Skype. Central to his excitement was the knowledge that he no longer had to think about the cost of calling home, he would be able to speak to his family regularly, because he simply missed you so much. So, once again, I think his family is as deserving of being celebrated today.

In conclusion, Prof. Moeketsi, I'm sure that you will agree that the funds you invested in his trips to and from Somaliland were indeed money well-spent. We at SAIIA are certainly delighted with the outcome and...we look forward to your next book!

Iqbal, long may you continue to produce outstanding scholarly work and long may you continue to inspire a younger generation of scholars!