

Reflection of two week visit in Jigjiga Somali Region of Ethiopia:

My experience in visiting my home town of Jigjiga in my second week is amazing. Let me start by expressing where I left it about 30 years ago during the Derge Era. The country was in crisis, war with Eritrea and the East was just recovering with foreign Cuban troops settling just outside Jigjiga in defense of security. The economy was based on redistribution of wealth, suppressing free market economy, and building military institutions. This trend has affected all Ethiopians including the current Somali region just surviving on their own. We were forced to participate in communist ideology, even working in forced state farms picking weeds just outside of Jigjiga. I am sitting just a few yards of the Cuban military barrack where I was a frequent visitor at the same time surviving the recruitment of youth for military service to fight in Eritrea.



The housing and infrastructure seemed frozen in time for decades. While there was only one high school I could count only a handful of Somalis attending. We could say the Derge totally ignored and marginalized the Somalis leaving them to survive on their own with little or no opportunities for education, development, and inclusion I have lost many in my generation to the brutal system and just couldn't imagine in a majority Somali town a handful would attend high school also disregarding small towns in the East to promote education. It's evident the system has affected everyone without discrimination. Let's ask ourselves where we stand right now socially, politically, economy, and education.

I had the opportunity to talk to ordinary citizens, students, and political leaders during my visit. The fact is ESRS (Ethiopian Somali regional state) within the framework of federal government came a long way in addressing the concerns of citizens in development, education, basic civil services, and education. It seems like the marginalized people were hungry for opportunities in education, autonomy and political inclusion as equal proud Ethiopians. The Youth who couldn't have the chance to go to school are participating in every university across Ethiopia.

There are health facilities and many pharmacies in Jigjiga and other small towns operated by trained Somalis. There is established University in Jigjiga and witnessed its expansion. For the first time I came across Somali men and women sitting behind a desk in a chair working in offices which was odd. The old system was brutal to all Ethiopians but the majority in Somali Regional State was discounted in every way. Old narrow roads I used to walk and houses are being swallowed with the master plan expansions.

There are many banks and financial services taking advantage of the economy and variety of businesses. My favorite time is 10 am and 6 pm where the streets are full of people indicating the social fabrics. Signs of development are visible everywhere beginning with basic infrastructure, roads, businesses, street vendors. This effort isn't limited to Jigjiga, it has reached far and beyond. The government of President **Abdi Mohamoud Omar** managed to solve the formula that works for the region that is development programs, political stability, and security which energized the people to catch up.

The legal system is working well with slow processing time. The confidence and support to President **Abdi Mohamoud Omar** can't be measured in words that he did it where others failed. I could walk anytime peacefully and observe very little security personnel in the streets. I give the security straight A that the government invested in bringing peace through reconciliation using stick and carrot.

There are many challenges ahead that need addressing in education, roads, and equal opportunity to all. I had hard time finding old high school friends and many moved to mainland. I put a question to a well respected friend of mine about minorities moving away from Jigjiga. He mentioned that there was a security problem, injustices, and even bombings. He mentioned that since the government of **Abdi Mohamoud Omar** solved the problem they are happy and feel part of the system. This and his development program made him a unique leader who is the most powerful heard leaders in the federal government.

During my visit to Diaspora office for processing I came across people from many parts of the world to prove and feel proud Ethiopians. While the roads and traffic system is in place people don't respect making it dangerous in crossing.

You could come across aggressive street people overcrowded and hope they are made to work for better life. A little girl about seven years old came to sell me chewing gum. I picked two packs and she told how many in it and the price which was eleven Birr. I gave her fifty Birr and without delay she reached out with thirty nine Birr. I gave her all the change and the smile will stick with me forever. This smart girl should be in school and if she earn money this way, why can't others do it I have enjoyed my stay with my children and my interest in and enthusiasm in participating is infectious. Challenges will be tackled because; they have the stability and security in place. I have no doubt the future is bright and my observation is positive in comparison to where I left it.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to thank **Dr. Nimaan Hamarre** and **Ahmed Deeq Hussein** who encouraged me to come home after such a long time abroad.

By: eng: Ilyas Elmi Abdi,

An oil field professional (petroleum) in Canada, Member of international brotherhood of iron workers union, member of international brotherhood of electrical union in Alberta, an electronic Engineering Technologist and computer system technologist professional welder and stru

ctural fitter journeyman and red seal license holder.