CONFERENCE REPORT AND CONCLUSIONS ON THE LONDON SOMALI YOUTH

IN SEARCH FOR A UNITED VOICE: ESTABLISHING A LONDON SOMALI YOUTH FORUM

A SYDRC REPORT

Prepared by
Mohamed Aden Hassan and Hussein M. Samater with Ilse van Liempt, Wesley Jordan Oakes and Mohamed Obsiye

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Executive Summary

The Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC) organised and facilitated a London Somali Youth Conference on 27th May 2008. The conference was designed to unite the Somali youth in order to explore and establish a platform for dialogue in relation to issues of relevance to the Somali youth and to address the importance of social integration and positive contribution to the wider British society. The platform would be an umbrella organisation, which would make it easier to communicate a two way dialogue between Somali youth and national/local authorities.

SYDRC took the initiative to bring together young Somalis across London to explore ways in creating this platform and to have a united voice. With SYDRC facilitating, the London Somali Youth Conference was independently led by young Somalis. It was attended by 151 participants, comprising Somali youth, national politicians, council leaders, metropolitan police services, and researchers. Following a number of key opening speeches, three conference workshops were facilitated.

This one day conference was a historic event, as it was the first to be conducted on a wide scale with representation from many London boroughs. Participants exchanged ideas with the aim of exploring the possibilities of establishing a London Somali Youth Forum (LSYF) to tackle the growing challenges in anti-social behaviour, crime, education, generational issues, health, housing, and radicalisation facing the Somali community. The atmosphere during the conference promoted and built upon positive achievements, while at the same time acknowledged and addressed the obstacles for further success.

Somali youth actively participated in the conference. They felt that the conference was beneficial to them as it provided an opportunity to:

- Voice their concerns regarding various law enforcement activities.
- Discuss relevant cultural and religious aspects of life within a multicultural society.
- Demonstrate their socially active participation to the wider public.
- Familiarise themselves with different obstacles facing law enforcement through conference workshops and personal dialogue.
- Develop a better understanding of the role that the LSYF can play in the development of their common interest.
- Explore options for further engagement with other likeminded stakeholders.

Key policy makers and law enforcement officials also attached significant importance to the conference. They indicated that they drew specific value from the opportunity to:

- Demonstrate the importance of reaching out to youth groups.
- Achieve a better understanding of the Somali youth through personal dialogue.
- Enhance further engagement with Somali youth at a borough level.

The report concludes with the following key recommendations to the Somali Youth, Somali Elders/Parents/Community, Home Office, Metropolitan Police Services (MPS), Borough/Council officials, and to the Preparatory Committee of the London Somali Youth Forum:

1. Create and maintain channels for youth to air concerns and grievances in a comprehensive manner, which assist in circumventing antisocial behaviour, criminal conduct, and radicalism.
2. Promote a role model status for the Somali youth by becoming active in educational matters and other socially active positions.
3. Consult the Somali youth/community directly through diverse channels to build links and alleviate community distrust.
4. Participate in the process of reaching out to Somali youth in a borough related format to build grass-root structures with the youth.
5. Appoint an inclusive internal committee comprising education, housing, policing and other relevant authorities to examine and coordinate borough procedures that relate to the Somali community.
6. Establish a central working committee between Somali youth representatives and borough officials on social service deliveries.
7. Share good practice by exchanging views from various borough programmes via an online forum.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Somali community is the second largest ethnic minority community in many London boroughs, including Camden and Tower Hamlets. As a growing community, Somalis face numerous challenges including cohesive integration into the British system. Police and social services have raised concerns that the Somali community has been slow to organise and effectively represent themselves. Strong suspicion exists amongst the Somali community of police and social service agencies, commonly viewed as authoritative arms of government, and this has led to poor communication and understanding of each other's role and needs.

The Somali community feel that they are often overtly stereotyped in the media and in policy briefs, thus leading to frustration between the elder members of the community and the youth (the former often seeing the youth as causing this present impression). These factors together with issues affecting the wider UK Muslim community have compounded the feelings of exclusion within the Somali community and the belief that they are being singled out by the wider British community.

It is possible that many disaffected youth within the community are particularly susceptible to gang culture and radicalism as a means to establish self esteem and respect from their peers. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that Somali gangs use more aggressive methods to establish themselves. Further, evidence also notes that members of the Somali youth are known to distribute or use drugs including cannabis, cocaine, heroin, and khat. The impacts of gang/individual activities have developed a negative representation of Somalis, which has caused the Somali community great concern.

1.2 Conference Objectives

It has become essential to build stronger links both with and within the Somali community by providing a focal point of contact between the community and all relevant agencies including police and local authorities to share good practice. Attempts to form a London Somali Forum with adult members of the Somali community have often been unsuccessful in the past due to a lack of mobilisation and tensions regarding clan identity. It was acknowledged that clan identity amongst active Somali youth was not a high factor. Hence, it was decided to try and shape a London Somali Youth Forum that would motivate and encourage the wider Somali community to participate.

The Somali Youth Development Resource Centre (SYDRC) was established in 2000 with the help of the London borough of Camden to address the needs of Somali children and young people of Somali origin. SYDRC has successfully organised a wide range of activities for young people including the running of a youth club, girls' activities, residential programmes, and has organised accredited training for young people to acquire a host of confidence building skills. The organisation is entirely youth led, and was seen by the

Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team at New Scotland Yard, as a well-positioned partner to help facilitate a London wide Somali youth umbrella organisation.

The key objectives of the conference were to:

- Encourage the Somali youth to channel and express their opinions.
- Build confidence and respect between both the Somali youth and MPS.
- Highlight the challenges and constraints facing the Somali youth.
- Explore the establishment of a London Somali Youth Forum (LSYF).

1.3 Conference Structure

The conference was held at the Grange Holborn Hotel in Central London on 27th May 2008. Speakers invited included: The Rt. Hon Tony McNulty (Minister of State for Security, Counter-Terrorism, Crime and Policing), Richard Barnes (Deputy Mayor of London) and Tim Godwin (MPS, Assistant Commissioner). 151 participants attended and a lively discussion took place in the conference, which included 3 workshops exploring issues around:

1. Somali Identity & British Integration.
2. Youth, Family & Education.
3. Crime, Substance Abuse, & Radicalism.

These workshops were managed and conducted by researchers from the Migration Research Unit, University College London (UCL), School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Kings College London (KCL), University of Edinburgh and University of Sussex. Among the facilitators were also members from Nomad International, a youth organisation that focuses on the development of educational and health programmes, and Pupil Parent Partnership, a youth organisation that provides alternative education for children that are either permanently excluded or are on the edge of exclusion.

2. Conference Workshops and Assessment

2.1 Somali Identity & British Integration

Introduction

The 'Somali Identity' and 'British Integration' workshop set out to explore the perceptions of Somali youth. Facilitators of the workshop had one thing in mind and that was to guide participants in a lively and open discussion on a number of issues. Four overlapping themes set the workshop's agenda:

1. British identity.
2. Cultural tradition & generational differences.
3. Gender and 'appropriate behaviour.'
4. Islam.

Each overlapping theme was accompanied by an introductory 'ice breaker' question and a section-specific *You Tube* video projected on a large screen overlooking participants. The two minute pre-selected video-clips were played at the very start of each thematic section, as an alternative and fun way to stimulate discussion. Video-clips referenced everything from hip-hop to images of Somalia in the 1970s.

Though a rough thematic agenda guided facilitators, participants were encouraged to take control of the discussion. For example, although gender formed part of the topics that the facilitators wanted to address, issues of racism and religion generated more interest and discussion and therefore received more attention.

The workshop comprised roughly 35-40 participants closely seated in a semi-circle. The majority of Somali participants were predominantly males in their early twenties. Several senior Somali participants were also present. Other participants included members of other visible ethnic groups, notably Bangladeshi and Afro-Caribbean. A small group of Somali women were seated at the periphery whilst a noticeable delegation of police officers and council members sat in the front row.

1. British identity

Despite the fact that a show of hands revealed that the majority of participants were either born in Britain or schooled from an early age in Britain, mixed feelings emerged around the idea of being 'British.' In 2006, over 9,000 Somalis were granted British citizenship, thus making them the largest African nationality to be naturalised in the UK[1]. Indeed, though most participants claimed that by law they were British citizens, reservations about belonging to the dominant society was shared by almost all. Participants differentiated between being a legal citizen (i.e. a British passport holder) and being 'British.' Many expressed the opinion that being a citizen did not grant them automatic acceptance within

[1] Home Office, Statistical Bulletin, 22 May 2007

the dominant society i.e. it made you a Brit but not 'British.' Participants indicated that becoming British had more to do with cultural identity rather than legality.

A facilitator proposed that Britishness suggested acculturalization at odds with Somaliness; however, participants replied that on the contrary it was British society that was at odds with them and, as one participant remarked it was "Somalis who were the victims." The group was adamant about making it clear that the youth wanted to be involved in the dominant society. In fact, many participants claimed they had an affinity for British culture as most of them had grown up in Britain. More importantly, they saw a future here. An elder in the group referred to British Somali youth as Somalia's "fish & chips" generation, which he claimed had more in common with Britain than with Somalia. According to him, the fact of the matter was that, whether the youthful participants accepted it or not, countless Somali youth were undeniably British in parts of their outlook.

A major obstacle in gaining acceptance by the dominant society was attributed to ethnocentrism, racism, and Islamophobia. Participants described being portrayed as unintelligible people, whose practices and culture were essentially incompatible with 'Britishness'; all of which some felt took a turn for the worse following the attacks of 9/11 and July 7, 2005.

2. Cultural tradition & generational differences

Participants made it clear that identifying themselves as Somali was absolutely important in describing who they were. Some explained that culturally their 'Somaliness' came through in their language and the way they sometimes dressed and the practice of religion and traditions. However, while many felt proud to be Somali or better yet British-Somali, certain participants indicated that they felt their parents did not always share their views. It was explained that parents and elders shared a common belief of one day returning to Somalia/Somaliland. Some parents had difficulties adopting the so called 'British way' of life. Participants felt that because their parents never harboured long term objectives of remaining in the UK, their attention was focussed on Somalia/Somaliland rather than on building a life in Britain. For the participants, this dissonance was seen as a decisive generational cross road. It goes far to explain why Somali youth in Britain who wish to have a future here feel torn between two cultural realities.

3. Gender and 'appropriate behaviour'

Although gender featured highly on the agenda, participants were somewhat less enthusiastic about the topic. This could have been explained by the overwhelming male majority at the workshop. Indeed, the gender ratio did not encourage a great deal of participation from the young women in the group. Despite the group's initial disinterest, the topic of 'appropriate' dress for women generated some discussion. When asked whether women in the community were obliged to wear the *hijab* or the traditional Somali *abaya* (cabaya), some men quickly reacted. They explained that women in the community were free to wear what they desired and that no one had the right to force them to do anything. One participant exclaimed "that was not the Muslim way of treating women." One female participant described herself as a devote Muslim, but said she never felt the need to wear the

traditional shroud. On a closer look, the majority of the women in the group had indeed chosen to cover their hair to some degree. The general consensus was that women choose to wear the *hijab* out of free will. The topic of gender and issues of gender norms, roles and genital circumcision within the context of Muslim society has always generated a degree of Western criticism. Surprisingly, both male and female participants chose not to dispute these stereotypical views. In hindsight facilitators could have also framed 'gender' beyond issues that relate to women and instead could have discussed other topics such as masculinity.

4. Islam

The discussion on religion revealed that Islam is indeed an important part of being Somali. Some participants claimed that they identified themselves as Muslims before Somali or British. However, as one participant commented, though Islam holds a certain universal currency within the community, the practice of Islam has undergone many transformations both in Somalia and in the UK. One gets the feeling that Islam is gaining increasing momentum in the community and translating into new orthodoxies. For another participant, an example of this was the recent wave of women wearing the *hijab*. He claimed that few women in Somalia wore the veil at the time he left the country. When asked if Islam still had a role in the UK, a country which is predominantly Christian, a significant majority of participants answered yes. General feedback suggested that Islam remains relevant in the lives of Somali youth but while universal in its values, it is practiced in different ways.

Assessment

Throughout the workshop it was noticeable that Somali youth felt isolated from the dominant society in a variety of ways:

- Many have experienced racism and various forms of discrimination based on their cultural, ethnic, and religious identities. One respondent described being black, young and Muslim, as the worst possible identity for someone in Britain today.
- Nevertheless, Somali youth see a future for them in the UK and genuinely wish to share in a British sense of belonging. On the whole, many felt it possible to be both Somali and British (something many felt they were already).
- Generational differences exist and gender and sexuality within the community remains a topic which requires further attention.
- Conclusively, the group's discussion revealed that Somali identity in Britain is undergoing a transformation, whose locus is the under-researched younger generation.

2.2 Youth, Family & Education

Introduction

This workshop was facilitated by an experienced former school teacher who was familiar with both Somali parents and Somali children's school achievements, and focused on the

question of whether Somali youth themselves are intrinsically the cause for underachievement.

This was a lively and engaging workshop as the majority of the 20 participants were young adults. The workshop was constructive, in spite of the under-representation of female youth. Nonetheless, the Somali females who attended the workshop made thought-provoking contributions. Participants expressed diverse and contrasting views on issues which Somali youth face in Britain. In this report we give a summary of the main points raised in the discussion.

There was an initial consensus that Somali youth were facing serious problems in the area of education. There were, however, different views as to the possible causes of those problems. Participants suggested that second generation Somalis are at risk of dropping out of school, facing high unemployment rates and being drawn into gang culture. There was a general agreement that these were not just a few incidents blown out of proportion, but a fundamental problem with the great majority of the youth heading for the wrong direction.

1. **Lack of Role Models**

Participants suggested that Somali youth are lacking appropriate role models to follow. With first generation Somalis either unwilling to integrate into the British society or unable to do so, participants spoke of the dire need for proper guidance. It was recognised that not all Somali youth were 'up to no good' with reference made to the youth who organised and who attended the conference. Their achievements need to be recognised and actively used to encourage other young people. However, a basic problem preventing such use of role models is the lack of a network association that can facilitate mentoring among Somali youth. Participants felt a lack of association was a lack in organisation, leaving young Somalis with no platform to discuss concerns and issues they face. There was a feeling that information is often not channelled to the youth, especially in the areas of job opportunities, leisure activities and cultural events.

2. **Cultural Differences: *Cause and effect***

- **Poor parenting**

In relation to the role of Somali parents, two views emerged from the discussion. First, participants said that Somali parents are not ready to be part of the UK educational system. One of the workshop participants expressed her frustration with the lack of engagement on the part of the Somali parents. A general consensus was that most Somali parents have a different conception regarding the responsibility of teachers. The Somali word for teacher '*ma'alin*', with its connotations of parenting, carries more weight than the English word. In Somali culture, parents expect the teacher's role to include a parenting aspect as well as that of education. This is a view which is at odds with the UK model, where teaching, as a participant noted: "is a joint venture between teachers and parents." Second, participants also noted that Somali parents are more involved in the situation back in Somalia/Somaliland than with the schooling of their children in the UK.

- **Inter-generational problem**

Some participants believed that the problem lies in the inter-generational differences between parents and their children, who are often second generation. Sometimes parents are not able to relate to their children because there is a cultural/knowledge gap and thus a communication breakdown between the two generations. This could be viewed as parents having lost touch with their children. When parents are disconnected from their children, they often have no knowledge of what their children are up to, and are thus unable to guide them through life. Some participants even went on to suggest that the first generation sowed the seeds in difficulties currently facing them.

- **Problems of growing up in two cultures**

Whilst Somali youth are confronted with the problems of growing up in a culture that is alien to their parents, Somali parents have no idea what it is like to be growing up in contemporary Britain. The participants claimed that parents were often just focussed on developments back home, thus paying no attention or unable to provide guidance to what their children are going through. They blamed the problems of the Somali youth on the lack of engagement from their parents. An important question meriting additional examination is how Somali youth compare to other second generation communities' in terms of coping in Britain today?

- **Time factor**

A number of participants suggested that unlike some other communities, the Somali community is still new in this country and will require more time to adapt and integrate effectively. The Afro-Caribbean community was cited as an example that also went through a similarly difficult process of adjustment. However, this was disputed by a participant who explained that it was too simplistic to imply that the Somali community still needed time to settle in despite being around for twenty years.

- **Popular youth culture**

Finally, issues facing Somali youth were discussed in the much wider context of youth in today's society. In this respect, some participants suggested that problems are not confined to the Somali youth, but instead form part of a more general youth trend. Indeed, popular youth culture may have something to do with the problem. At this point, there was some discussion as to whether Somali parents have an understanding of what it means to be a young person today. Although parents want their children to conform to cultural and traditional values, Somali youth are also attached and influenced by Britain's youth culture. The question was then raised as to why popular culture has a negative impact on the Somali youth. The word 'value' was mentioned several times with some asking 'what values?' and 'whose values?' School values, youth values, street values, Somali values, and Muslim values were suggested as encompassing the various meanings and contexts of the word.

Though there were some hints that Somali youth are themselves the problem because they do not meaningfully engage with educational and employment institutions or appreciate the

facilities and opportunities available to them, some participants mentioned that the blame lies with an education system which is failing Somali children. The correlation, a participant suggested is the fact that most of the Somali youth problems come to the surface with undesirable GCSE results. If schooling was effective, such problems could be picked up and addressed earlier. Participants reinforced that parents need to engage with the education system much more closely than they currently do in order to pick up warning signs earlier.

Assessment

There needs to be a comprehensive study into the specific issues facing Somali youth. Areas that will need further research include the family role in education:

- A robust study would explore the perceived problems further and use statistical and other sociological approaches to define the issues clearly. Despite the general feeling that Somali youth are facing problems, the issues facing them remain vague and ill-defined.
- Research is needed into how families could be encouraged and supported to improve their ability to interact positively with the educational system. It was recognised that many parents are not familiar with the complex education system in the UK.

2.3 Substance Abuse, Crime, and Radicalism

Introduction

From the plenary session, it had already become apparent that this workshop was a 'hot' topic. Ibrahim Isse from SYDRC said, "The time for denial is over. We must do something to end the violence." Tim Godwin, MPS, Assistant Commissioner added, "We want to make London unsafe for those who are carrying weapons. That is the biggest challenge, alongside terrorism." With those strongly worded opening remarks, the conference tone was set. The Crime & Substance (Ab)use workshop was the key entry point, around which the conference evolved. It consisted of 30-40 participants from the police services and Somali youth and focussed on 6 questions:

1. Is there a culture of anti-social behaviour and/or criminal activity (gang/culture) in the Somali community?
2. Is there a gender difference in crime related incidents?
3. Do you feel victimized by the authorities?
4. Do you feel safer with the new Stop and Search scheme?
5. Is there an increase in drug and alcohol (ab)use?
6. How best to (collectively) solve these problems?

1. Substance (Ab)use

▪ Khat Dilemmas

Right after the questions were introduced, a participant from the workshop commented that khat was the underlying cause of all these problems. He had been addicted to khat himself and spoke honestly about the damage this drug had done to him and his family. According to him, khat was the biggest barrier to integration and the only solution was to ban it. A lively discussion followed on whether criminalising khat would be the solution. Some individuals were of the opinion that the same will happen as happened with cannabis i.e. it will be pushed underground. Two men from the audience who had previously lived in Denmark and Sweden commented that in these Scandinavian countries khat is considered an illegal drug with the result that users of khat are considered criminals. They added that this criminalisation has a wider impact for the Somali community, who may suffer from the criminal label that gets attached to their ethnic background. A police officer commented that the difference with khat and cannabis is that khat is not grown in the UK so there are more opportunities to prevent it from entering the country. But a participant remarked: "Somalis are not stupid; they will get it [khat] in anyway."

A female participant commented that "we do not necessarily need consensus from the Somali community whether we should ban khat or not." She remarked: "15 years ago we were discussing banning khat already and look at us now. Here we are again." According to her, Somalis do not have one voice on this issue and she did not agree with the fact that solutions in this case need to come from the bottom up. Her point was that when khat is criminalised, there will finally be recognition of the problems this substance is causing. According to her, she feels it is an insult to the Somali people that khat is not considered a problem for the wider society and adds: "Khat related problems are considered a Somali problem, but females and children are suffering from the fact that their husbands and fathers are using it." She asked the question, how can we solve the problems when the source is still there? She remarked that: "Somalis have lost their culture of khat use. Chewing khat used to be something special. For example, it used to be chewed at weddings. Overuse is not part of our culture and we need to get rid of this problem." Another participant commented that as long as the concern was not acknowledged at the grassroots level, legally banning khat would in reality not matter. By this point the debate on khat had become a convoluted discussion.

▪ Hard & Soft Drugs

The discussion also focused on other forms of addiction and substance overuse in both hard drugs (cocaine) and soft drugs (cannabis). A problem related to addiction was raised by a participant who works with drug addicts. He explained that there is a lack of facilities for khat users. The services are all aimed at cocaine users and there are neither special treatments nor special centres for khat users. It was also remarked that the general use of khat was consumed through elder men, but that young Somalis are also users. Other drugs Somali youth are mentioned to use include cannabis and harder drugs such as cocaine. Some Somali children, especially those who underachieve at school, may easily find jobs related to drugs and start working as dealers. One participant commented that "it was time

to speak openly about these problems." Very often these problems are solved within the local Somali community by, for example, sending youth to Somalia/Somaliland when they have chosen the wrong path in the United Kingdom. A participant commented: "is that really a solution?" Another participant further elaborated that a lack of community outreach and or fear of UK authorities often meant that parents were ill-equipped to address the difficulties facing their youth.

- **Gender Roles**

With regard to gender, it was remarked that young Somali females also use drugs and that there are Somali female offenders in prison for violence relating to alcohol abuse and drug dependence. According to participants, it is not a large percentage, but these crimes are often underreported or not mentioned in the community out of a sense of shame. A participant commented that it is now also very fashionable to smoke shisha (water pipe) and that gathering in shisha places may result in anti-social or even criminal behaviour. Often the principal cause for such an outcome is the mixing of both male and female Somali youth. This provoked some reactions and many individuals commented that one cannot compare shisha with hard drugs as there is not even tobacco in it and, in addition, there is a lack of places where young people can gather without negative stigmas attached to them co-mingling. A policewoman then enquired why young people cannot socialise without 'stimulating substances' and whether they need to be more self confident so that they do not rely on drugs/alcohol to entertain themselves or project a certain image. This thought was received as an ideal that all youth should be encouraged to aspire to, but also one that, in the Somali community, is in any case a religious obligation.

2. Crime

- **Anti-Social Behaviour**

When participants talked about the issue of gangs, it was first of all acknowledged that it is a very genuine dilemma. Tragic incidents have made that clear, but it is the causes which are important to ascertain. A participant asked what a gang actually is, "If two Somali youngsters are hanging around in the street, it is soon considered to be a gang." Participants stressed the need to know exactly what we are talking about when we are discussing the issue of youth and gangs. Some participants suggested the toughest crimes are often blamed on Somalis, but that this was an inaccurate account. Issues concerning housing arrangements and the lack of extracurricular activities were mentioned as contributing towards Somali youth exhibiting criminal and anti-social behaviour. It was also emphasised again that Somali youth are actually graduating from universities and are doing well, but that these positive achievements are often undercut by negative news.

- **Stop and Search**

With regard to the 'Stop and Search' programme, it was first of all claimed that the police look at how you are dressed and then treat you accordingly. A female participant said that profiling is needed, but the police need to be accountable for the way in which they use it. She also raised the gender issue and said she was never searched herself, but that her

brothers were. In terms of racial profiling, the issue of Islamophobia was also raised. Somalis, being both black and Muslim, are viewed with a greater degree of suspicion. Participants also claimed that Somalis are ethnically very recognisable and hence more prone to being profiled. A participant from Enfield gave an example of an outreach program he runs for boys between 9 and 18 years old, who do not chew khat, but have all been stopped and searched several times. He even had to go to the police station to pick up some of the boys who were arrested. He added that sport is a solution for many problems as it keeps the youth off the street.

3. Radicalism

While the issue of radicalisation was raised during the workshop, time limitations prevented further exploration of the issue; however, it was identified as a significant subject for in depth study in the future. Participants acknowledged the potential threat of extremists reaching out to radicalise discontented and vulnerable Somali youth, but also cautioned authorities in unjustly labelling Somalis with anecdotal evidence, which may further marginalise and add to the existing "feeling of exclusion".

Assessment

A girl from Lewisham remarked: "We are brought into a country, we are expected to adapt, but how do you adapt when your parents don't speak English? There is a lack of understanding and what I would like to know is where the fathers are?"

With regard to solutions it was considered:

- A crucial first step is to admit that there are some problems in the Somali community.
- Working together with the police was mentioned by participants, as a positive step, in the sense that it was considered important to report crime to the police and to work together to try to prevent future crime.
- The issue of family and role models came up several times during the discussion. Women are in many cases having to be both father and the mother as they earn income and take care of the children. An equal involvement of both parents as well as that of elders is needed in addressing generational issues.
- Issues of housing and local council outreach programmes were a step in the right direction and would also help local boroughs work with their Somali communities.
- Maintaining an open and frank channel of communication between all relevant parties was also crucial.

3. Conclusions, Lessons and Recommendations

3.1 Challenges Faced & Lessons Learnt

A number of challenges were faced, and lessons learnt, in the course of organising and overseeing the conference. These included:

- A key challenge for the conference was ensuring the participation of relevant individuals at the conference. It was decided that the target beneficiaries of the conference would be aimed at Somali youth, but a key dilemma was the low turnout and representation of Somali female youth. It is imperative that in the future, other means are employed in ensuring the participation of Somali females.

- Another challenge for the conference was to ensure the presence and participation of a significant representation of key decision-makers. In designing the conference objectives and agenda with the MPS, other local representatives from relevant agencies were vastly underrepresented. Although this was expected, in hindsight, their attendance in the conference workshops could have led to a more dynamic environment. In the end, the conference was largely successful, but such policy makers would need to be involved in the future.

- A strategic decision was made to provide a platform for the voice of Somali youth to be heard. However, it became apparent at the conference that there was a need for representation from the older generations in order to ensure a generational dialogue. Given the pressing need to involve youth in dialogue, future forums of this sort should also include other essential members of the Somali community.

- The scheduling of the conference in May was an effort to hold it before the summer break and was held in an accessible venue in central London. Nonetheless, a particular challenge was the venue layout. It lacked a viable space for in-depth engagement, especially during workshop sessions. It might have been more suitable to have reserved larger or additional rooms.

3.2 Key Findings

Constructive dialogue between Somali youth and law enforcement

Some participants indicated the conference had changed their perception of the law enforcement authorities. Many participants felt more confident in addressing issues of concern with these officials. Informal discussion over lunch was also very useful as both parties used the opportunity to raise specific issues related to their boroughs. The benefits to the Metropolitan Police Service included a route for reassurances to the wider community, a point of contact to deliver information to the community, a direct and quick access to groups across London in times of critical incidents, and a possible source of police recruitment.

Greater awareness of achievements and dilemmas

The discussions and workshops provided a greater awareness and understanding of dilemmas facing the Somali youth, as well as their achievements. The conference was instrumental in delineating the issues of relevance to youths, as well as facilitating a candid understanding of policing strategies. A sense of increased awareness of each other's obligations was evident. Additionally, the conference was considered a first step and participants agreed that they would continue to maintain a central point for communication with the creation of the London Somali Youth Forum.

Sharing experiences and cooperation

As this was the largest gathering of Somali youth in London, participants used the conference to network, share and exchange information and to learn more about how to co-operate with each other through the exchange of experiences. The London Somali Youth Forum currently consists of a preparatory committee with a network (including Somali individuals and youth organisations) that stretches over 16 London boroughs. The LSYF preparatory committee currently aims to develop the best approach to bring together stakeholders working with the Somali youth across London. The establishment of a London Somali Youth Forum does not present itself as the only point of contact for the MPS or other agencies when needing to contact the Somali community, but it is hoped that due to its London wide structure, the organisation will play a constructive role in corresponding with national/local authorities.

Awareness amongst the wider public

The conference received good media coverage, particularly from local Somali radio, TV, and internet sites. It is hoped this outreach can reach larger mainstream media outlets including BBC London and BBC Somali Service. One of the issues raised by the participants was the negative image provided of the Somali communities (especially Somali youth) in UK and Somali media channels. The further coverage, publication and dissemination of findings of the conference can be particularly successful in this respect.

3.3 Recommendations

The effectiveness of the conference and the establishment of a London Somali Youth Forum are to a large extent dependent on the level of support exhibited by various stakeholders. It requires a holistic approach which enhances the aims and objectives of the conference. Consequently the Somali community, national government, local authorities, policing authorities and all other stakeholders should invest in the conference outcomes and take it forward as follows:

Somali Youth:

1. Create and maintain channels for youth to air concerns and grievances in a comprehensive manner, which assist in circumventing anti social-behaviour, criminal conduct, and radicalism.

2. Support generational dialogue between Somali parents, elders, clerics, and community leaders.
3. Network amongst the wider British Somali youth to maintain dialogue on youth experiences.
4. Assist preparatory committee members to steer the development of the London Somali Youth Forum.

Somali Elders/Parents/Community:

5. Encourage Somali youth by giving support to their dual identity as British Somalis.
6. Promote a role model status for the Somali youth by becoming active in educational matters and other socially active positions.
7. Support efforts of adolescence development, notably amongst young males and offending youths.
8. Challenge support for cultural condoned practices (e.g. khat use).
9. Assist the central and local government with shared interests intended to advance cohesiveness in Britain.
10. Support the prevention of radicalisation by constructively working with disillusioned youth, the MPS and the wider Somali community.
11. Demonstrate a sustained commitment to homeland development by realising that political and socio-economic progress in Britain is part and parcel of that objective.

Home Office:

12. Reassure the British Somali community of the commitment to multiculturalism and community cohesion in British society.
13. Demonstrate a genuine commitment to British Somali predicaments by working with all members of the community on issues other than radicalism.
14. Consult the Somali youth/community directly through diverse channels to build links and alleviate community distrust.
15. Encourage the political and social activeness and employment of British Somalis within government structures.

Metropolitan Police Services:

16. Participate in the process of reaching out to Somali youth in a borough related format to build grass-root structures with the youth.
17. Increase support for a united front against crime, substance abuse and extremism with the support of the Somali youth and community.
18. Clarify to Somali youth the rational behind ‘stop and search’ and address their grievances of profiling.
19. Initiate a transparent and accountable review of police activities with particular attention to the levels of Somali youth offending and the dissemination of these findings to the Somali community.
20. Review the process of youth arrest and incarceration by giving greater weight to a preventative approach and consider rehabilitating current Somali youth offenders in a constructive process.

21. Actively seek to recruit from the Somali community for policing and community strategic and support roles.

Borough/Council Officials:

22. Appoint an inclusive internal committee comprising education, housing, policing and other relevant authorities to examine and coordinate borough procedures that relate to the Somali community.
23. Strengthen the capacity of the LSYF to sustain the aspirations of the youth.
24. Provide technical/financial assistance to the LSYF i.e. office space.
25. Support youth ambassadors– i.e. cover transport costs.
26. Promote and place emphasis on the voluntary activeness of Somali youth.
27. Become visible and approachable to Somali youth by listening to their views.
28. Investigate and support the creation of out of school centres and extracurricular activities for the Somali youth.
29. Create service outreach programmes and activities for the Somali youth and community on drug prevention.
30. Increase efforts to address Somali generational issues by assisting and partaking in workshops on the subject.
31. Support dialogue between the Somali communities and the wider inhabitants of the borough.
32. Encourage the political and social activeness of British Somalis within the local borough/council process.

London Somali Youth Forum (LSYF) Preparatory Committee:

33. Become the main forum for Somali youth in London, giving Somali youth a coherent voice.
34. Use this forum to develop links with local/national governments and the MPS by facilitating a two-way dialogue between Somali youth and the authorities.
35. Influence government policy to communicate with, and improve relations with, the Somali community.
36. Aim to promote and represent the wishes and interests of young Somali people in London through positive attitude and active membership.
37. Advocate equality, representation, and transparency for active citizenship and cohesion of Somali youth.
38. Facilitate the contribution of young Somali people through youth organisations at the local and national levels.
39. Actively create safer neighbourhoods, as safety in its wider context is and has become a mainstream concern for society and for young Somalis in particular.
40. Reinforce the position of Somalis in London by encouraging Somali people to vote and become part of the wider British system.
41. Encourage and facilitate the undertaking of development projects in Somalia/Somaliland.
42. Share good practice by exchanging views from various borough programmes via an online forum.

Annexes

A. Conference Agenda

Conference on London Somali Youth

27 May 2008 9:00am – 3:00pm
The Grange Holborn Hotel 50-60 WC1 4AR

The Programme

9:00 – 10:00	**Registration**
10:00 – 10:10	**Chairs' Introduction**
10:10 – 10:15	**Rt. Hon. Tony McNulty- Minister of State for Security, Counter-terrorism, Crime and Policing**
10:15 – 10:20	**Ibrahim Isse – SYDRC Coordinator**
10:20 – 10:30	**Richard Barnes – Deputy Mayor of London**
10:30 – 10:35	**Don McCulloch– –Communities Together Strategic Engagement**
10:35 – 10:45	**Cllr Keith Moffitt – Camden Council Leader**
10:45 – 10-50	**Martin Orwin – SOAS Senior Lecturer**
10:50 – 11:00	**Tim Godwin- MPS, Assistant Commissioner**
11:00 – 11:20	**Break**
11:20 – 11:30	**Cllr Abdul Mohamed- (1st Somali) Southwark Councillor**
11:30 – 11:40	**Carl Wonfor- Association of Chief Police Officers**
11:40 – 11:50	**Richard Walton- Harrow Borough Commander**
11:50 – 11:55	**Mohamed Aden Hassan – PhD Candidate, UCL**
11:55 – 1:40	**Workshops**
1:40 – 1:55	**Selection of LSYF Preparatory Committee Members**
1:55 – 2:00	**Closing Remarks**
2:00 – 3:00	**Lunch**

B. List of Participants

No	Name	Surname	Borough	Organization/title
1	Hamse	Mohamed	Barnet	Youth
2	Rahma	Mohamed	Barnet	Youth
3	Fahad	Mohamed	Barnet	Youth
4	Quman	Akli	Brent	Youth
5	Hinda	Mohamed	Brent	Youth
6	Mohamed	Adam	Brent	Youth
7	Sucdi	Mohamed	Brent	Youth
8	Hussein	Omar	Brent	Youth
9	Fozia	Habane	Brent	Youth
10	Ishwaq	Mohamed	Brent	Youth
11	Muhumed	Abdi	Camden	SYDRC
12	Ayub	Farah	Camden	SYDRC
13	Yusuf	Deerow	Camden	SYDRC
14	Omar	Yusuf	Camden	SYDRC
15	Khalid	Farah	Camden	SYDRC
16	Walid	Sardeyeh	Camden	SYDRC
17	Abdikadir	Arshe	Camden	SYDRC
18	Zuhura	Mahamed	Camden	SYDRC
19	Muhumed	Omar	Camden	SYDRC
20	Farah	Egal	Camden	SYDRC
21	Abdullahi	Osman	Camden	SYDRC
22	Shueib	Barkhadle	Camden	SYDRC
23	Ibrahim	Isse	Camden	SYDRC
24	Mohammed	Nur	Camden	SYDRC
25	Abdiwahab	Ali	Camden	SYDRC
26	Salah	Mohamed	Camden	SYDRC
27	Nasir	Omar	Camden	SYDRC
28	Moahmed	Yusuf	Camden	SYDRC
29	Moahmed	Abdi	Camden	SYDRC
30	Abdikadir	Ahmed	Camden	SYDRC
31	Mahad	Hussein	Camden	SYDRC
32	Sharmarke	Hersi	Camden	Youth
33	Mohamed	Arshe	Camden	Youth
34	Suber	Abdikarim	Camden	Youth
35	Farahn	Abdi	Ealing	Youth
36	Hussein	Yusuf	Ealing	Youth
37	Abdikarim	Hassan	Ealing	Youth
38	Khalid	Dirir	Ealing	Youth
39	Andre	Deane	Ealing	Youth

No	Name	Surname	Borough	Organization/title
40	Abdullahi	Osman	Ealing	Youth
41	Ibrahim	Nur	Ealing	Youth
42	Elyas	Mohamed	Enfield	Youth
43	Mansoor	Mohmamed	Enfield	Youth
44	Said	Abdillahi	Enfield	Youth
45	Sharmarke	Abdi	Enfield	Youth
46	Farah	Farah	Greenwich	Youth
47	Faisal	Jama	Greenwich	Youth
48	Saeed	Abdi	Greenwich	Youth
49	Adel	Kharieh	Greenwich	Youth
50	Ahmed	Faray	Greenwich	Youth
51	Abdi	Jama	Greenwich	Youth
52	Zairia	Ali	Guest	Observer
53	Abdi	Omar	Hackney	Youth
54	Abdi	Farah	Hackney	Youth
55	Hassan	Abbey	Hackney	Youth
56	Junad	Egal	Hammersmith & Fulham	Youth
57	Mohamed	Yusuf	Hammersmith & Fulham	Youth
58	Yusuf	Dirir	Hammersmith & Fulham	Youth
59	Isharx	Elmi	Haringey	Youth
60	Cawo	Elmi	Haringey	Youth
61	Awale	Elmi	Haringey	Youth
62	Abdigani	Elmi	Haringey	Youth
63	Farid	Abdullahi	Haringey	Youth
64	Ismahan		Haringey	Youth
65	Firdos	Ali	Haringey	Youth
66	Ahmed	Sheikh Abdi	Harrow	Youth
67	Samatar	Dallal	Harrow	Youth
68	Abdi	Ahmed	Harrow	Youth
69	Mohamoud	Afey	Harrow	Youth
70	Osman	Egal	Hillingdon	Youth
71	Abdurrahman	Hussein	Hillingdon	Youth
72	Khadar	Hussein	Hillingdon	Youth
73	Muhumed	Omar	Hillingdon	Youth
74	Osob	Buraleh	Hillingdon	Youth
75	Mohamed	Ibrahim	Hillingdon	Youth
76	Mohamed	Yusuf	Hillingdon	Youth
77	Mohamed	Salad	Hillingdon	Youth
78	Nur	Hassan	Hounslow	Youth
79	Mohamed	Mohamed	Hounslow	Youth
80	Mohamed	Abdullahi	Islington	Youth

No	Name	Surname	Borough	Organization/title
81	Sahara	Hassan	Islington	Youth
82	Muniso	Noor	Islington	Youth
83	Sam Sam	Abdi	Islington	Youth
84	Mustafe	Mohamed	Islington	Youth
85	Khadra	Yusuf	Lewisham	Youth
86	Faysal	Ali	Lewisham	Youth
87	Faisal		Lewisham	Youth
88	Deqa	Mohammed	Lewisham	Youth
89	Ifrah	Ali	Lewisham	Youth
90	Sahara	Warsame	Lewisham	Youth
91	Saed	Warsame	Lewisham	Youth
92	Warsame	Nur	Muslim Youth	Youth
93	Fahmida	Khatun	Muslim Youth	Youth
94	Shahid	M Ali	Muslim Youth	Youth
95	Hoddan	Wias	Newham	Youth
96	Ifrah	Shekhey	Newham	Youth
97	Nimo	Hussein	Newham	Youth
98	Ilhan	Shikay	Newham	Youth
99	Amina	Omar	Tower Hamlets	Youth
100	Amina	Ahmed	Tower Hamlets	Youth
101	Fathiya	Ali	Tower Hamlets	Youth
102	Saynab	Mohamed	Tower Hamlets	Youth
103	Bashir	Ibrahim	Tower Hamlets	Youth
104	Saynab	Ahmed	Tower Hamlets	Youth
105	Addam	Diri	Tower Hamlets	Youth
106	Abdifatah	Hersi	Tower Hamlets	Youth
107	Abdi	Yasin	Tower Hamlets	Youth
108	Martin	Orwin	Lecturer in Somali and Amharic	SOAS, University of London
109	Mohamed	A Hassan	Facilitator	UCL
110	Hussein	Samater	Facilitator	UCL
111	Dr Ilse	Van Leimpt	Facilitator	University of Sussex
112	Wesly	Jordon Oakes	Facilitator	SOAS
113	Mohamed	Obsiye	Facilitator	KCL
114	Annalisa	Urbano	Facilitator	University of Edinburgh
115	Ahmed	Yusuf	Universal TV	Universal TV
116	Abdillahi	Olhaye	Camden	Camden Young Mayor
117	Adam	Demosthenous	Camden	Capacity Building Officer
118	Alisdair	Fergusson	Harrow	Chief Inspector
119	Paul	Morris	Camden	Chief Inspector
120	Mustafa	Samatar	Enfield	Employment Advisor /Job Centre Plus
121	Mark	Roe	Greater London	GLA

No	Name	Surname	Borough	Organization/title
122	Jenifer	Norman	Guest	Guest
123	Richard	Walton	Harrow	Harrow Borough Commander
124	Batric	Masquite	Camden	Head of Funding and Management
125	Olivia	Vincenti	Camden	Head of Partnerships and Commissioning
126	Ken	Withers	Hammersmith & Fulham	Met Police
127	Gary	Thomas	Greenwich	Met Police
128	Ben	Bennett	Barnet	Met Police
129	Gordon	Johnson	Harringey	Met Police
130	David	Stone	Hackney	Met Police
131	Keith	Lunson	Ealing	Met Police
132	Mahesh	Nandha	Harrow	Met Police
133	Waqas	Rehman	Harrow	Met Police
134	Aida	Alem	Harrow	Met Police
135	Paul	Evans	Harrow	Met Police
136	Harry	Hussein	Brent	Met Police
137	Salina	Elmi	Westminster	Met Police
138	Lorraine	Hibbitt	Hounslow	Met Police
139	Brian	Mitchell	Tower Hamlets	Met Police
140	Bob	Dubar	Newham	Met Police
141	Dan	Finn	Westminster	Met Police
142	Don	McCulloch	MPS	Community together and strategic engagement team in
143	Alaric	Bonthron	MPS	Team Leader of Community together and strategic engagement team in
144	Hanan	Ibrahim	Barnet	Mother/community worker
145	Carl	Wonfor	ACPO	National Police
146	Workneh	Dechasa	Camden	Senior Refugee and community advisor
147	Tim	Godwin	Assistant Commissioner	Met Police
148	Tony	McNulty	Minister of State	Home Office
149	Richard	Barnes	Deputy Mayor	GLA
150	Cllr Abdul	Mohamed	Councilor	Southwark
151	Keith	Moffat	Camden	Council Leader

C. Prepared Opening Statements

Rt. Hon. Tony McNulty – Minister of State for Security, Counter-terrorism, Crime and Policing

I promised to come here to listen rather than to talk, so it's not going to be a speech, but simply hopefully some words of congratulation because it is so important that every single community in London has a voice and that includes the Somali community and especially the Somali youth. I want to congratulate hugely the organisations in Camden ably supported by Harrow for organising today and welcoming all representatives of other boroughs. If authorities aren't listening than why should communities engage at all?

So the important thing about today is that this is built from the ground up. It's the Somali youth organisations across London having the chance to talk and engage in communities across all parties, across all authorities to get what we all collectively want and share for the development and the progress of the Somali community, which always starts with its youth, the precious flower that matters so much in every single community. I congratulate everybody who had anything to do with today and congratulations on being the first facebook driven conference. I am on facebook, so I am happy to have more friends on facebook. I have around 400 or 340, not that I am counting. But today is very important. When my borough commander Richard Walton said, if I can make time, please come, both as a Harrow MP and both as a minister of police and for all sorts of other reasons. This was a place that it is important to come, to show support at least for the short time I can be with you.

With that, because I do feel that it is slowly turning into a speech, rather than some welcoming comments, I hope that everyone has a very good day and let this be the start of something very very strong. That means that all of our Somali youth throughout London know and understand that they do have a voice. They have a chance and people in authority know that they matter because they are part of a vibrant and diverse London. So have a very good day today and congratulations again to everybody involved in the conference. I hope that you are successful. Thanks very much.

Ibrahim Isse - SYDRC Programme Coordinator

Mr Chairman, deputy mayor of London, police minister, assistant commissioner, borough commanders, distinguished participants, ladies and gentleman, friends.

First of all, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the SYDRC Advisory board; trustee volunteers, staff, conference workshop facilitators, and special thanks to Don McCulloch. Without him, this conference could not take place.

I am delighted to see how many of you are here today, and thank you for having accepted our invitation and in some cases for having travelled quite far to be with us. We are also happy to be the hosting organisation for this conference and welcome you in Camden.

Unfortunately I regret to inform you that this Friday, a young boy was shot in our community. He is in hospital in a stable but crucial condition. This past Saturday evening another boy in Camden was also shot, and over the weekend a rising star in the Harry Potter film was stabbed in Sidcup. Our prayers and tributes are with the families of all involved. The total amount of lives lost in the month of May 2008 is 7 young men. I trust something is clearly wrong and we must put all of our attention together and look at the bigger picture that is facing us now.

Just two years ago, Camden lost a young and gifted man. A family will never be the same again. We, the people, are grateful for every minute we spent with him although he had his life and future ahead of him. Mahir Osman was a friend, a brother, a cousin, we all would go and talk to him. If you were in trouble, he would bail you out of it. He could put a smile on your face if the day wasn't going how you had hoped. Mahir is truly missed by us and mainly his beloved family. We will see each other another day, Mahir.

It is really sad that so many young people still see violence as the answer to their conflicts. Now many lives have been permanently damaged and one has been taken away. Something must be done about youth violence in Camden and throughout London. I am not sure of how it can be achieved, but as a community we must work harder to look for solutions. The time for denial is over. We must face the reality and do something to help the young people in our community.

Police

To the police, I strongly urge that you and our communities work side by side together. As a team we can tackle the problems facing not only Somali people, but other common issues in London. There are some borough commanders with us here today who have problems in their areas. Some of the toughest crimes are blamed on Somali youths. This is wrong and untrue, but we must stand shoulder by shoulder and say enough is enough. I hope we continue the discussions on the path forward together. Yes, it is your job to keep law and order and make our capital the safest place to be and our community is ready and willing to support this mission.

The media have stereotyped Somalis as troublemakers and that our people don't contribute to this country that we just take. Well I say these comments are false because the majority of Somalis aged 19 to 24 hold Bachelor's degrees. That's an incredible figure. Many Somali men operate and drive buses in our capital and without these bus drivers, Transport for London would not be able to make as much profit. Do not forget the Underground. As someone said, "Never judge a book by its cover until you read it."

About the Somali Community

All Somalis who now live in Britain came here to make a life for them and their families. Somalia is our spiritual home but Britain is our homeland. This country has given us so much and more and we are grateful to Britain and its people for opening their doors for us, accepting our culture, and respecting our faith. I didn't believe this before, but UK is truly a multinational and multicultural nation that I love and will defend as a cause.

About the conference

Again I would like to thank you for coming to this conference, your attendance shows how much importance you attach to Somali youth issues and I am sure that together we can make a difference. As Obama said, "Change we can believe in." There is real progress to be made if we unite and have one voice. The conference is planned by the youth for the development of the youth. The conference attracted 151 guests, comprising of youth delegates, politicians, council leaders and borough commanders.

This one day conference will be vital in the establishment of a London Somali Youth Forum, as the youth participating in the conference will hopefully join a preparatory committee to explore the approach of the organisation. However, I urge you all to take part and get involved in a change, which will lead to the creation of a proper Somali Youth Forum. We have to remember two things, which are mission and vision. Vision without mission is nightmare and mission without vision is daydream. I wish you an important and inspiring day. I am sure that you will have a very fruitful conference. Thank you

Richard Barnes - Deputy Mayor of London

Ibrahim, A-salaam Aleikum! And can I congratulate you two for opening us off this morning and indeed for getting this conference together. It's a shame for the 31 other London boroughs that it is Camden that stands out on its own. This should be a conference for all 32 boroughs because the Somali community stands out in all boroughs and serenely in my constituency which is Ealing, which includes Southall. Those are very large Somali communities and very important communities.

Some two, three weeks ago we had a large conference about crime in Southall and there must have been nearly 1000 people there, men and women, and it was important to see both sides of the community there listening. They took and brought messages that were very hard for most of us to listen to and for many of us to take. I had the sad honour of meeting a mother whose son had been murdered in west London. Her life in many ways had been shattered by the loss of her son. The impact of that loss had spread into the community.

This weekend more families are grieving. Many of them have had life changing moments from the edge of a sharp object. We have to stop it. It has to stop. We can only stop it together as a community, as a borough, as a city, and as a nation. It is so important that the minister for police is here today. I am aware of where Somalis are in immigration. They have nowhere to turn so they turn to each other and form gangs. It has to stop and it can only stop if the school, police councillors and government work together. To create life chances and opportunities to your brothers and sisters that they so desire. We have to give them hope; we have to give them opportunities to benefit from education and to grow into real citizens for London. It is a challenge to all of us and we have to face up to the realities that are ahead of us. I believe that khat is one of the main contributions, as it is leading to mental health problems, physical health problems and the breakdown in families. It is leaving the mothers, aunties and grandmothers to hold the community together. If I could give you one plea, Minister, it is that Britain and Europe should make khat illegal and give the Somali families back their fathers.

Today should be and will be a message of hope. We are meeting and we are talking so that we can reach solutions. And can I give you a guarantee that from the mayor's office that we will do all we can to build on London! We will do all we can to ensure you have all the resources to stop your children from getting involved in gangs. We will try to give pride and respect back to the Somali community. We have extended our hand. Now it's time for the community to grasp our hand. Thank you.

Don McCulloch – MPS, Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team

Good morning and a very warm welcome to you all. My name is Don McCulloch; I am a Police officer with the Communities Together Strategic Engagement Team (CTSET). We are based at New Scotland Yard and part of our responsibility is to improve understanding and communication with communities in London.

Our role today has been to bring together 15 boroughs that have a sizeable Somali community and I am happy to report that a Police representative from each of those boroughs is in attendance today. I would also mention that the principal sponsors of today's event are Supt Walton from Harrow and Supt Morris from Camden. The young people in attendance have been invited by SYDRC.

Today is an opportunity to share good practise with the service and we will be hearing about initiatives on Harrow borough from Supt Walton and also from SYDRC and what they are involved with in Camden in addition to the organising this conference via a young person's committee.

This committee asked last week to have some more information about the new knife initiatives that have been announced and I am very grateful that Assistant Commissioner Godwin has found time to be with us today.

The plans for this event began a few months ago after I attended a committee meeting at SYDRC. I was very impressed by the energy of this group and the commitment they showed especially as they are volunteers and SYDRC has very little financial support. I heard about the work they were doing with young people in Camden and the difference they were making. I believe the model of engagement they are using could help many areas of London and that by forming a Pan London Somali Youth Forum will assist in the sharing of this model.

Other key benefits will be to give the community an improved voice to assist in funding applications, and give us the Metropolitan Police Service a single point of contact to relay information to the wider Somali community, access to groups across London in times of critical incidents, and a route to improve confidence and reassurance in the police service and ultimately it may provide a source of recruitment.

I wish you every success with today and eagerly await the findings from the workshops.

Keith Moffitt – Camden Council Leader

Good morning, everybody, and thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you and in particular I am very pleased indeed that this event is taking place here in Camden, which is one of the most multicultural boroughs in London and has one of the largest Somali communities with over 1000 children from Somali speaking households in our schools.

This has obviously been a very difficult weekend for the Somali community in Camden and when I was preparing my notes for this speech last week I could not have foreseen the events that occurred this weekend. It has been a difficult weekend for the whole country with crime involving young people, but we have had two particularly sad events in Camden and I want to convey my sympathy to the families of those young people that have been affected. We have already heard a young Somali man tragically died two years ago in Camden and I think that this was part of the reason, part of the momentum for this event being held here in the first place. I think it is great tribute to the SYDRC for organising what I have to say is an incredibly professional event. I go to a great number of events here in Camden and this is a serious and well thought out event that feels like it is going to really achieve something and I want to congratulate you on that.

The fear and reality of crime is something that cuts across all groups and all ethnic communities, but today we are talking in particular about issues facing the Somali community. But it would be wrong, if in some way, whilst recognising the specific problems of this community we did not recognise its achievements at the same time. I attended a wonderful event organised by the SYDRC just a few weeks ago and this was a very Camden thing if I say it was a Somali event organised at the Irish centre. That is the sort of place Camden is, I guess. But it was an event celebrating the achievement of young people from the Somali community here in Camden. It was absolutely packed out, there must have been hundreds of people there and it had a really lively and positive atmosphere. The event showed that we can all work together to provide role models for young Somali people in Camden and we can demonstrate that they can achieve to the best of their abilities.

I have got all sorts of details about youth achievement in front of me, but somehow it does not feel quite as appropriate as when I wrote them. Nevertheless it is quite worth mentioning that achievement at school amongst young Somali people is improving and attendance at school is improving. Attendance is incredibly important because children who don't attend school have less opportunity to succeed; absenteeism is a real problem later on in life which is something we all know about. So I am delighted to hear that the trend is positive here in Camden. We are doing a lot of important new work around English as a second language in Camden. As I said, we know that many of our young people come from homes where Somali is the first language, and it is very important for us to help parents, who at the moment speak little English, build bridges with the rest of the community. Therefore, we are gradually rolling out a new programme of English lessons for speakers of other languages.

I particularly want to thank SYDRC for the work it is doing and I think I should be quite frank today and say that there have been some problems around funding and I took that

message away very clearly from the events at the Irish centre that I talked about and we held a meeting in my office a few weeks ago with some of the key figures from the resource centre and I think we are well on the way to looking at a way forward financially. So this is clearly an organisation with a great deal of capacity and a very professional approach and I want to thank you again for organising such a fantastic event.

I look forward to staying for as much of the event as I can and speak to as many of you today and hear your views. It is really an important opportunity after such a difficult weekend for me personally to be involved today with the Somali community and hear what you are thinking. So thank you once again for inviting me today and I wish you an incredibly successful event. Well done!

Martin Orwin – Lecturer in Somali and Amharic, School of Oriental and African Studies

Just to say a few things in English. I work in SOAS, a part of the University of London teaching Somali and Amharic. I would like to thank you all for coming. I work in education so I know the importance of it. Another thing I would like to mention is that I feel that Somalis making strides here will further benefit home in Africa. We all know what is happening there. I would like to tell you all Somalis that the young people come together and build a better future for yourselves; this is the first step but the most important one.

Tim Godwin - MPS, Assistant Commissioner

Good morning everyone, it's a delight to be one of the first to be invited here and can I add the congratulations that we have already heard about the way that Yusuf and Ibrahim have managed to bring together so many people from the Somali community, so many young people to come and talk about some of the challenges we are confronted with across London. It isn't just amongst young Somali men - the violence and the use of weapons is an issue - it is all ethnic groups and it is the whole of London around youth and youth violence. In my day job, I am a member of the management board of the Met. I am responsible for running the 32 London boroughs in terms of policing and I have been doing that for 6 years.

The overall crime rate is falling, robbery is falling, burglary is falling, motor vehicle crime is falling, but the one thing that is stubbornly going up is actually homicide and stabbing and shooting of young people in our capital city. And that to me is to my shame, I take each one personally and this weekend has not been any better than previous weekends. I have a list of names here. I have got 5mins and I am going to read some names of the young people that have been killed since January of this year. There are 10 young men in their teens that have been stabbed. There is one who has been shot. There are 3 who have been assaulted and beaten to the point of losing their lives. We have a young man at the moment in Camden struggling for his life in hospital and my prayers also go to him, but equally to all the families that have lost loved ones since the beginning of the year. So what can we do about it? Ibrahim quite rightly pointed out that the police alone cannot tackle and solve this particular problem.

We have a history in the Metropolitan Police which is about policing by consent and I have to say that when I constantly read in the newspapers about the New York police I get agitated because the difference is that in London there are 31,500 police officers, 30,000 of those police officers will walk out of the police station without a gun and we are the only major city in the world other than New Zealand that will do that. New York police officers would not dream of walking out of a police station without a gun. In fact when they visit us, they get quite frustrated and ask why we aren't doing this? And the difference is by not having a gun it means we have to do things with the consent of the people and the citizens that we police. To do that we have as part of our ethic community policing at our heart. We have now rolled out 630 neighbourhood teams across London and their remit is to tackle the problems with communities to try to work out resolving crime and safety. We have a whole range of diversion schemes that we work with local authorities to give young people in our most deprived communities' opportunities to do something positive with time. We have just rolled out 64 football schemes with the Premiership to try to tackle those particular issues. I could go on and on. We have got 154 police officers within schools, working full time in schools to try to get engagement with young people to assist us in tackling the culture of carrying weapons. Despite all that, the stabbings continue and the shootings continue. Now for me, I cannot accept that and I can't allow that to continue.

As a result, we looked at the last 62 stabbings and shootings in London and what was the common factor? The one thing that people need to realise is that 9 out of 10 of the offenders get caught, convicted and get long sentences in court. So there are always two lives ruined at that point, the one who did it, the loss of life, and for those families. What is the common denominator? They are not pre-described assassinations, and they are not events where people go out with the specific determination to kill a person named. What they are, are street confrontations in the vast majority where a weapon is present. Someone's got a knife, someone's got a gun and when that confrontation occurs and when that trouble occurs, the weapon gets used. And instead of it being a punch, it is a stabbing or shooting.

We, the Metropolitan police, are working with communities, because we do talk to communities before we use a tactic, and have to make sure that we make London unsafe for anyone carrying a weapon. We have to change the balance and for that we will be looking at what the intelligence is telling us, where weapons are being carried regularly, who is carrying them, what venues do people go to carrying weapons. We have to be there with the community alongside us and one of the things we have been doing is having community observers with us and we have to stop people politely and we have to check them for weapons using stop and search methods. Now many young people including my own daughter can well get stopped and searched as a result in those areas, but that is the thing we have to do until we can stop this and until communities and youth forums can actually take charge again and get some common sense back into these young people that are carrying knives and weapons. It is the biggest single challenge that we have alongside terrorism in London at the moment in terms of our safety, of our community and young people. And we know how we can rise to the challenge as long as we are together and to do that we need to constantly talk, we need to share ideas, we need to develop new ways of doing it and the most important thing that we have to do is to respect each other and to respect that respect leads us to joint working and collaboration. I am really hopeful for today because I know that the tactics can only hold it for a short period of time. It is the stuff that you will be

talking about in the workshops that is actually going to make the real difference in the longer term, but we must now tackle weapons, we must tackle violence and it is not just in the Somali community, it is in all young communities in London. That is my mission over the next 2 years in terms of trying to work with communities to drive it down.

So I am really grateful that you invited me. But I did say, if anybody wants to ask me something specific than I am very happy to take those specific questions before I hand back the mic.

Abdul Mohamed – Southwark Councillor

My impression is that this meeting has been absolutely fantastic, and what has actually and totally impressed me is the amount of people who are here today. A lot of people want to make a difference, people have put in a lot of effort, and I think that you are an inspiration for yourselves. I think you know this is what the Somali youth have managed to do, and then there is a great hope for all of us. I think a lot of hard and intelligent work in those workshops and a lot of important things will come out. But I think it's been recognised we don't only need to be just a talking shop, something has to come out of it. As Yusuf said, this is the first step, we need to get organised because it's through only being organised and having a combined will together that things can take place.

There are lots of problems that face us as everyone knows. We spend so many hours here discussing a few of them. So many problems, there are so many people who want to make the difference and I think our first step is to try and get organised. And the way to get organised is obviously for all the boroughs to try and vote themselves in so we can get this Pan London Youth Forum organisation committee set up. And then we can go forward and get the government to listen to us, I'm sure the new mayor and his deputy here will listen to us if we get ourselves organised. In my group, we said we live in so many different places, you've got so many different identities, and I have been spending a lot of my time trying to convince Somali people who live in the city that they have to be part of this country. They have to take part in everything, including the politics, they have to get themselves registered to vote, because it is only by voting that your voice can be heard and can make a difference, there is no point in living outside the country and not being counted. I have been working hard with a lot of people to try and make sure people get themselves registered to vote, and live here and take part in the institutions of this country.

We have had quite an intensive session here, but some of the comments I can still remember, and what I am going to take from here is the fact that we need to be tolerant. So many divergent ideas and people have to listen from these kinds of meeting, because we know that people are absolutely interested in making a difference. We need to make sure that violence doesn't destroy us, to make sure we have the right amount of education, to make sure we not only help ourselves, but help everyone around us. We are also desperate for progress, to make sure the next year, the next week, the next time things have made a difference. We have stepped forward, and I think there is a lot of evidence to show we have actually made a big amount of progress, and there is still a ton of progress to make. I want to thank everybody who has contributed to that, and finally can I just thank Ibrahim Isse from the Somali Youth Development Resources Centre, as I think he has done a fabulous

job. And I wanted to thank all the other people, speakers, Councillor Keith Moffit, Camden Council leader who is here who has shown a commitment, and said he had learned a lot by attending workshops, and he is perhaps going to get the other councillors to come to functions like these, because "there is a lot to be learned from each other" and that was a incredible remark, councillor, thank you very much.

And also, Yusuf has thanked all the borough commanders and the police for being here and that I want to extend my congratulations to them. So thank you very much and I hopefully will see you soon perhaps next year, thank you.

Carl Wonfor - Association of Chief Police Officers

They say when you speak it's the worst when it's just before a coffee break, trust me it is worst after a comedian and before a coffee break. My responsibility is to work to stop terrorism and I work with young people so that we stop violent terrorism and extremism and the reason why I was keen to speak today is not because of that, but to talk about how important events like this are.

It's our job to go out there and make sure we create the right environment so the youth have the trust and confidence in us to come forward. In the past when you talk about youth issues you tend to talk to adults but its good to see so many young people here, but we never do that with any other community. What we need to do is engage with the young people directly. We still wear the same helmets we did in 1829. This just shows how slow to change we can be sometimes. Just to show the proof: 141 people have never known about the terrorism hotline, only one could tell us about terrorism.

The only other thing I want to tell you is take this opportunity to strengthen your community. I am sure events like this will benefit people all across the UK and would like to thank you all for your time and thank you for inviting me.

Richard Walton - Harrow Borough Commander

I am sensing a new energy and optimism amongst young Somalis in Harrow who are trying to better themselves. Yet, I often find them disarmingly honest about their lack of confidence, their insecurity and their concerns about their identity. A few weeks ago a young Somali told me he was "lost" - that was literally the term he used - he didn't mean geographically, he meant in life. I thought that that was a very honest comment. And it appears that some of the recent refugees from Somalia in Harrow are unsure about their identity, whether British Somali or Somali, but you know you could be any of these identities and in any case, most of us these days have multiple identities.

What matters is that you nurture a self confidence in yourself and in your future. I have actually stood on the border of Somalia on many occasions because I work with a charity in northern Kenya in a place you might be familiar with called Marsabit, right in the desert of Northern Kenya and I am very aware of the cultural differences between there and here and of the culture shock young Somalis must experience when they arrive here. My first suggestion to you, therefore, is to build your own self confidence and today is a great start.

Secondly, it is the young who shape the future and today is the start of something very special as young Somalis shape a new future for themselves.

I would also like to see you do three things. Firstly, get politically active. Secondly, talk and engage with the Met police, as we are here to help you and we are trying to listen. Thirdly, please join the Met. I would like to ask the following people to stand up as they have already applied to join the Met. Fahad please stand up. Fahad is hopefully going to be the 1st Somali police officer in the Met police and I am delighted for him and Abdi, where are you Abdi? Abdi is thinking about it and you too Aida. Aida is already a police community support officer in Harrow and she is doing great things for us there.

In Harrow we have undertaken a needs assessment commissioned by the council and HASVO and that research went on for a while and what we identified was the complexity and challenges of the Somali community in Harrow. For example, out of 500 families, there was not a single owner of a property and unemployment was as high as 18%. Real problems were evident around health and education also. We have put a task force together of different agencies to try to make a difference and do something practical. Helping to organise this conference is one outcome of this work I am delighted with today.

Finally I would like to say one thing about celebrating cultural differences. What makes Harrow unique is how we value different cultures whilst uniting behind common values that unite us all. These values are founded on respect for each other. Somalis, it's time for you to take your seat at the table and to have your voice. Thank you.

Mohamed Aden Hassan – PhD Candidate, UCL

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. The day has been very good so far and the speeches were promising, inspiring and setting the context for this afternoon's important workshops. I am pleased and very honoured to be part of this project and thank SYDRC for providing me and my research colleagues with this opportunity.

This event is important and unique in 3 ways: First, this initiative is taken by young Somalis, which is important to acknowledge. Second, these young people have managed to bring together such a large and diverse group with a significant high number of participants of young Somalis. Finally, this gathering is important not only because it has a high number of young Somalis, but it also represents a significant number of senior government and local authority representatives as well as borough commanders and policemen/women. If we want to effectively address important social matters that affect us all, we need a collective approach.

Young Somalis have taken the lead and demonstrated that they are capable, energetic and eager to deal with issues that concern them and their wider community. It is equally important to recognise the wider support and engagement from the government and local authorities. This is an important dialogue that, as far as I am concerned, should never end. It should be a dialogue that, while recognising and encouraging the independence of young Somalis, aims to bridge the existing gaps to foster mutual understanding.

Coming to the workshops: we have planned 3 workshops. Workshop 1 is on Somali Identity & British Integration; Workshop 2 is on Youth, Family & Education; and Workshop 3 is on Substance Abuse, Crime, & Radicalism. The workshops are colour coded – red, yellow and blue – which should guide you to your locations. At the end we will have a 5 minutes presentation from each workshop highlighting the main issues of discussion. Good luck.

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