

Shaping Somalia's Political Landscape: Profile of Halima Ismail Ibrahim – Co-Chair Technical Selection Committee

At the age of 15 Halima Ismail Ibrahim was already advocating for women's rights at her high school in Afgoye, 30 km from Mogadishu.

With or without a functioning state, as a passionate and committed human rights activist and recently appointed the Co-Chair of the Technical Selection Committee (TSC), Halima has been working for the poor, human rights and with youth for decades.

"I was teaching agriculture and working in the field carrying out research when I realised that women's rights were being ignored. I saw women working very hard cultivating the land, working at home, bringing up children but had no rights when it came to land ownership so I raised this with the legislators," she said.

Halima cited an example of widows who have no right to their land after the death of their husband and are often left penniless. To help these women and others the activist formed a women's farmers cooperative in the 1980's, placing pressure on the then government to agree to issue them land.

After war broke out in 1990, the situation of human rights in Somalia degenerated even further. Halima and nine other women decided to form an NGO called the IIDA women's development organisation to promote and protect women's rights and to keep their cause alive.

Halima's tireless efforts to improve the lives of Somali women recently earned her a place of leadership on the TSC, the body of people responsible for vetting candidates nominated by traditional elders to stand as legislators in the new federal parliament.

"I really feel proud to have been part of the TSC and it is amazing to see representatives from all clans in Somalia in the committee. We put our differences aside to be objective when vetting the candidates standing for seats in Parliament," Halima explained.

Comprised of 27 people, with an additional two non-voting members from the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), each of them representing a different clan in the country and 7 international observers, the TSC has been instrumental in helping to shape the political landscape in Somalia. The committee's main function was to ratify or exclude candidates who had a history of violence or intimidation. The committee rejected some 70 proposed candidates who failed to meet the criteria.

"We spoke to the elders and asked them to be objective. We told them, 'you are here to save Somalia, you are here to help create the best Parliament we have ever had, you are here to lead the way for a new era in Somalia,'" she added, stating that the inclusion of the elders throughout the selection process had helped to create the most qualified parliament in Somalia today.

Halima said she fought hard to ensure that a 30% quota of seats were reserved for women in Parliament. However, only 15 % of seats have been taken by women so far.

"Somalia used be to a country which was up and coming, there was free schooling for everybody in the 70's and women had opportunities. I hope we can return to this era".

Women in Somalia can be categorised in two ways, while they are respected at home as a mother and are revered as the boss of the house, outside of the home they are voiceless as many remain uneducated and powerless," Halima explained.

"We convinced the elders to nominate good female candidates and now we have some very strong educated women in the parliament. We have some young and enthusiastic women who want to make changes in their country. We need to support these young women to help promote their causes."

Now that the President has been elected Halima says she will continue to push for human rights and justice."The first thing is to work on the law of the land and make sure that it is implemented properly so that people can feel safe and so they are protected".

Whilst shying away from standing for MP herself, Halima says she will continue to work closely with parliament and advocate for changes in legislation to better protect the Somali people. "We have shown the world that Somalis can own the process and can change something for the better in their country".

Protocol to Establish the Technical Selection Committee:

English

<http://unpos.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=S4IVZB7V9YA%3d&tabid=9705&language=en-US>

Somali

<http://unpos.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=dgSbKEsV1n0%3d&tabid=9705&language=en-US>

Video clip of Halima: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/unpos/sets/72157631535657391/>

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