

Empowering Tomorrow:

Somaliland Professionals in Unity

Summit Recap Report

This memorandum presents an in-depth account of the Empowering Tomorrow: Somaliland Professionals in Unity Summit, a three-day event hosted in Atlanta, Georgia from May 24th to May 26th, 2024 by the Somaliland Professionals Association of America (SLPA). Designed to unite and empower a diverse group of accomplished Somaliland-American professionals, the summit stood as a beacon of cultural celebration, a dynamic networking environment, and an exceptional educational experience. **The event garnered significant participation with a total of 307 attendees, including medical experts, engineering leaders, educational innovators, professors, legal minds, entrepreneurs, financial and tech pioneers, alongside the next generation of promising leaders – our student attendees. Among them were 7 vendors, comprised of business owners, corporate leaders, and accomplished authors, who added depth and richness to the summit's vibrant atmosphere. Key areas of priority were highlighted throughout the discussion leading to the need for a call to action in addressing these priorities.**

“The SLPA conference in Atlanta was an unforgettable experience! Three days of connecting with the brightest of Somaliland’s minds in North America – entrepreneurs, doctors, educators, and more. We were inspired by visionary leaders like Dr. Edna Adan and Dr. Osman Sheikh Ahmed, and the insightful panels featuring experts like Senator Kayse Jama and Dr. Yousra Mohamoud. A huge thank you to SLPA for a truly empowering event. Here’s to a brighter future for Somaliland!”

- Abdishakur Mohammed attendee of the SLPA Unity Summit

Key Priorities:

1. The importance of preserving Somaliland's rich oral traditions, the foundation of national identity both in Somaliland and in the diaspora.
2. The need for infrastructural development (transportation, telecommunications) and future opportunities in power and water sectors in Somaliland.
3. The potential for economic growth through modernization and infrastructure development, to meet rising demand and the need to diversify the economy.
4. The need for effective strategies for mobilizing to drive social change in the diaspora and to explore how Somaliland officials could strengthen ties with diaspora communities.
5. The importance of advocating for increased health education and community engagement to empower individuals to manage chronic illnesses.
6. The importance of giving back and leveraging technology to empower communities both in Somaliland and the US, fostering a collective advancement through innovation.
7. The importance of broad educational goals for Somaliland – encompassing equity, quality, and lifelong learning – as the cornerstone for a thriving educational system.
8. The need for systemic change and support for multifaceted approaches to strengthening Somaliland's healthcare system for long-term impact.
9. The need for spaces in the diaspora to support the experiences of the Somalilander community.

All of the key priorities emphasize the need for cross-sector skills and community collaboration to address Somaliland’s pressing priorities. Through mentorship and a professional network SLPA along with others aim to work to drive social change in the diaspora and Somaliland.

- **CULTURAL NIGHT: A CELEBRATION OF HERITAGE AND UNITY**

The summit commenced with Dr. Jama Muse Jama's captivating keynote address. Amidst a vibrant display of cultural attire, Dr. Jama emphasized the importance of preserving Somaliland's rich oral traditions, the foundation of national identity. He championed digital archiving initiatives like the Somali Corpus for analysis and safeguarding traditions, ensuring their relevance for future generations. Collaboration was a recurring theme, with Dr. Jama advocating for partnerships between technologists, archivists, educators, and the community. Literacy programs and digital language resources were highlighted as crucial for strengthening the Somali language and fostering a deeper sense of national identity. Through collective action, Dr. Jama envisioned a future where cultural heritage empowers communities and unites Somalilanders across the globe.

- **PANEL DISCUSSIONS**

Engaging panels were held, covering a wide range of topics. Our 34 esteemed panelists brought diverse perspectives and expertise to the following sessions:

State of Nation

Dr. Edna Adan provided a social and political perspective, highlighting advancements in healthcare and education while acknowledging challenges in international recognition, and political stability. Dr. Osman Sheikh Ahmed offered a complementary economic perspective, detailing progress in livestock production, remittances, and small businesses. He emphasized the need for infrastructural development (transportation, telecommunications) and future opportunities in power and water sectors.

Business Panel: Developing Strong Leadership Acumen and Scaling Successful Business

This panel, featuring business professionals including Said Ali, Adan Abbey, Abdisalam Mohammed, Abdihalim Ali, and Mustafe Artan, explored investment opportunities in Somaliland, highlighting agriculture's potential for growth through modernization and infrastructure development, similar to Ethiopia's success. Additionally, panelists emphasized the need for a domestic sugar industry to meet rising demand and diversify the economy. Beyond opportunities, the discussion addressed the challenges faced by entrepreneurs, including navigating regulations,

securing financing, and understanding local markets. Strategies for scaling businesses while minimizing risk were also explored, emphasizing consistent revenue, strong cash flow, and a scalable model. Said Ali, Senior Partner at a Big Four Accounting Firm and Adan Abbey, Senior Consultant in the insurance industry provided guidance on how to reach the highest pinnacles of corporate success. Finally, the importance of professional networks and mentorship for aspiring professionals was highlighted, with success stories like Said Ali and Mustafe Artan serving as an inspiration.

Civic Engagement Panel: Empowering Leadership- Navigating Civic Engagement and Public

The Civic Engagement Panel featured prominent figures like Oregon State Senator Kayse Jama, communication strategist Lula Dualeh, Ahmed Mahdi, former Fairfax County School Board candidate and Program Director with the US federal government, and Ayan Warsame, a political consultant. The discussion covered a range of topics, beginning with the panelists sharing their personal journeys pursuing a career in public service and managing nonprofit organizations. The panelists shared practical advice and insights on jump-starting a career in the public sector and how to navigate government and public institutions. The panelists emphasized the power of cross-sector skills and community collaboration. They discussed effective strategies for mobilizing diverse groups, particularly during election seasons, and the crucial role of grassroots activism in driving social change.

The Q&A session delved into practical advice for aspiring public servants and explored unique challenges, including how Somaliland officials could strengthen ties with diaspora communities and advocate for their nation in U.S. government circles.

Health Panel: Voices of Health-Somaliland's Diaspora Impact Medicine

The Health Panel explored advancements and opportunities in Somaliland's healthcare system. Panelists including Dr. Asha Mohamud, Dr. Amina Igeh, Dr. Noor Mohamed, and Dr. Hassan Nur emphasized preventative measures, advocating for increased health education and community engagement to empower individuals to manage chronic illnesses.

The session highlighted the personal fulfillment of healthcare careers, propelled by the impact on patients' lives. Bridging the gap between traditional and modern practices was discussed, emphasizing cultural sensitivity and a collaborative future. The panel concluded by celebrating the unique contributions of Somaliland healthcare professionals and the importance of mentorship in guiding future generations.

Technology Panel: Tech Horizons- Mastering the Expanding Tech Landscape

The Somaliland Tech Trailblazers panel offered a glimpse into the inspiring journeys of SLPA members Ismail Mumin, Mohamed Rage, and Yasmin Abdi. Their narratives, though unique, shared a common thread: navigating uncertainty within the vast tech landscape. Whether mastering technical skills, venturing into product design, or pursuing entrepreneurship, these individuals persisted through moments of self-doubt. Their unwavering confidence and growth mindset fueled their perseverance, transforming challenges into opportunities for learning. Their stories serve as a powerful message for aspiring Somaliland American technologists: with dedication, a supportive network, and continuous learning, success is achievable. The panel concluded with a call to action, emphasizing the importance of giving back and leveraging technology to empower communities both in Somaliland and the US, fostering a collective advancement through innovation.

Education: Global Minds and Local Roots- Education Perspectives from Somaliland the Diaspora

This panel discussion unpacked key factors for fostering student success in Somaliland and North American immigrant communities. Representing educators and student perspectives, panelists, Jonathan Starr, Sayidcali Ahmed, and Dr. Huda Hassan, emphasized the importance of broad educational goals – encompassing equity, quality, and lifelong learning – as the cornerstone for a thriving educational system. The discussion delved into practical strategies for implementing these goals, potentially showcasing successful classroom applications. Recognizing the influence of cultural and social factors, the panel also explored fostering inclusivity, innovation, and student engagement within classrooms. The crucial role of families in supporting student achievement was addressed, with a specific focus on considerations relevant to families in Somaliland and immigrant communities residing in the diaspora.

SAHA: Enhancing Healthcare in Somaliland- Real Time Progress

The Somalilander American Health Association (SAHA) panel outlined their multifaceted approach to strengthening Somaliland's healthcare system. Emphasizing long-term impact, they highlighted their annual Healthcare Convention for continuing education and workforce development, alongside successful Non-Communicable Disease Clinics providing chronic illness management. Recognizing the importance of diagnostic technology, SAHA offers Point-of-Care Ultrasound training to equip primary care physicians across Somaliland. Beyond healthcare professionals, they encourage participation from grant writers, IT specialists, and marketing experts to bolster their initiatives.

Empowering Women Together: Infusing Somali Culture into Modern Professionalism

This panel explored the experiences of Somali women navigating professional complexities. Highlighting the intersection of race and gender, panelists Dr. Yousra Mohamoud, Khadija Warsame, and Noura Aalen shared their career journeys, from initial aspirations to navigating work-life balance and unforeseen changes. Discussions emphasized resilience, adaptability, and self-care strategies for success. Panelists also explored calculated risks, faith, family, and career demands, offering a nuanced perspective on their journeys and the empowering decisions that fuel their continued growth.

Empowering Mentorship: Guiding the Next Generation on How to Make an Impact

This explored the multifaceted power of mentorship in shaping careers. Diverse participants, from students to seasoned professionals, shared how SLPA mentors equipped them with knowledge, boosted confidence, and propelled them forward. Cultivating professional networks early, even as a student, was emphasized as these connections can become invaluable sources of mentorship. Crafting impactful "elevator pitches" was addressed, with panelists offering insights on capturing attention and showcasing skills. Beyond individual success, "paying it forward" by becoming a mentor through SLPA's Mentorship Program was championed, fostering a culture of mutual support.

The session concluded by highlighting a specific mentorship program's benefits and providing details for participation. This empowering discussion equipped attendees with the tools to build relationships, craft pitches, and engage in mentorship – a launchpad for flourishing personal and professional development.

- **WORKSHOPS**

The summit also featured a series of enriching workshops that offered attendees valuable insights and practical skills:

Workshop: From Concept to Reality- The Creation Process of Everyday Product

This workshop, led by Mohamed Rage, unveiled the captivating journeys behind familiar objects and digital tools. Panelists dissected the fascinating metamorphosis of products, like smartphones and water bottles, from initial concepts to final forms. The intricate dance of design thinking, software engineering, and user experience (UX) in crafting popular apps like Facebook and Instagram was also explored. A central theme revolved around transforming ideas into reality, with an emphasis on iterative processes like prototyping and testing for functionality and usability. The session concluded with a deep dive into specific examples, equipping attendees with a newfound appreciation for the meticulous planning, rigorous testing, and creative problem-solving behind everyday products.

Workshop: Unleashing Potential Entrepreneurship, Financial Mastery and Self-Investment Strategies

This workshop, led by Mustafa Artan, challenged the traditional model of financial dependence on hourly wages. Instead, it championed value creation as the path to financial independence. The workshop emphasized building businesses or knowledge-based ventures that generate income independent of time invested. This shift in perspective empowered individuals to focus on value creation, with strategies including consulting or coaching services that leverage their expertise. The discussion addressed commanding premium value for these services, emphasizing the importance of recognizing expertise as a valuable asset. The session concluded by highlighting the growing importance of online ventures, citing their scalability and global reach as ideal characteristics for aspiring entrepreneurs seeking financial freedom in the modern economic landscape.

Hopeful Legacy: Closing the Empowering Somaliland Professionals Summit

The summit concluded with a surge of inspiration and community spirit. Jonathan Starr, founder of Abaarso School, ignited ambitions among attendees to lead and teach in Somaliland partner institutions. Dr. Osman Sheikh Ahmed captivated with insights into Somaliland's economic landscape and entrepreneurship opportunities, emphasizing growth and innovation. Dr. Edna Adan shared a powerful journey from UN service to rebuilding healthcare in Somaliland, inspiring transformative action.

The pinnacle was a celebratory gala honoring outstanding members and featuring electrifying performances by artists like Hodan Abdirahman and Mursal Muuse. A relaxed barbecue gathering closed the event, fostering intergenerational connections. The summit left a lasting legacy of inspiration and community engagement among Somaliland professionals.

TESTIMONIALS

The summit received overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees, highlighting its impact and value, including:

Senator Kayse Jama commended the informative sessions, strong youth participation, and "social aspects and delicious food," leaving the summit inspired to bring these voices and perspectives back to Somaliland in July.

Dr. Osman Sheikh Ahmed, hailing the conference as "one of the best " he'd attended, lauded the "high intellectual content" and commitment to development, encouraging other diaspora communities to emulate the SLPA's model.

Dr. Jama Muse Jama characterized the conference as dynamic, groundbreaking and inspiring, focusing on the collective potential of young professionals to build a better Somaliland

Adam Ahmed, From organizing the conference to DJing the cultural night, being part of the Somaliland Professionals of America Summit was a privilege. It reignited our passion for Somaliland's future – a future built on the sacrifices of our past and fueled by the power of our diaspora community.

Dr. Edna Adan emphasized the conference's role in showcasing Somaliland and countering misinformation. She highlighted the young professionals' potential, stating: "These educated, eloquent, and globally connected young professionals are perfectly positioned to combat these efforts," and expressed Somaliland's full support for SLPA. Dr. Edna Adan extolled the SLPA's conference as "the best-organized event ever executed by Somalilanders," a testament to its impressive execution.

Liiban Yusuf Gahnug, Deputy Ministry of Health, described the diverse gathering and the participation of current political leaders, noting valuable takeaways he intends to share with his cabinet to expand Somaliland's influence. The summit fostered collaboration and a renewed sense of hope for Somaliland's future, as evidenced by the enthusiastic responses from these highly respected figures.

Asha Hirsi, The Somaliland Professionals in Unity summit powerfully reignited my connection to our community. Discussing challenges and opportunities with fellow professionals was inspiring. SLPA, thank you for a weekend of unity and empowerment!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all our attendees for their enthusiastic participation and engagement. Your presence and contributions made the Empowering Tomorrow: Somaliland Professionals in Unity Summit a remarkable success.

We also express our deepest gratitude to our sponsors. Your generous support and commitment were instrumental in bringing this event to life and fostering a brighter future for our community.

Thank you all for making this summit an unforgettable experience.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the following individuals whose dedication and efforts over several months made this event a resounding success. Some worked full-time, while others balanced their commitment with school responsibilities. Your hard work and passion were instrumental in bringing this summit to life.

Master of Ceremonies: Salugla Dualeh

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