# Britain urged to recognise Somaliland as a model of democracy and stability in Africa



As discussions around international recognition for Somaliland gain renewed momentum, the historical context and ongoing developments highlight the unique situation of this self-declared republic. Alun Michael, a former MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, argues passionately for Britain’s readiness to acknowledge Somaliland as an independent state, framing it as a beacon of democracy in Africa. In his perspective, presented recently, he stresses the country's impressive track record of democratic governance, peaceful power transitions, and economic progress since it reasserted independence from Somalia in 1991.

Decades of struggle since the mid-20th century have shaped Somaliland's identity. After gaining independence from Britain in 1960, Somaliland merged with the former Italian Somaliland, a decision that ultimately led to years of turmoil under Mohamed Siad Barre’s dictatorship. Human suffering and violence marked this period, prompting many Somalilanders to seek refuge abroad, particularly in the UK. Michael recalls this historical grief and the contributions made by Somalilanders to British society, particularly during conflicts such as the Second World War, framing their ongoing quest for recognition as a vital narrative in British-Somali relations.

Despite Somaliland being a functional democracy — with features like robust electoral processes and clan-inclusive governance models — it remains unrecognised on the global stage. While Somaliland conducts regular elections, recent years have seen significant political progression. The 2022 presidential election underscored this, marked by the peaceful transition of power from the incumbent president to opposition leader Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, symbolising a stable political environment in stark contrast to the persistent chaos afflicting Somalia.

This lack of recognition has tangible consequences for Somaliland, particularly in terms of economic engagement and international support. According to reports, Somaliland's status prevents it from fully participating in global trade and receiving developmental aid, which has stymied its growth potential. Some countries, however, have established diplomatic presences in the region, including Ethiopia, which signed an agreement in January that allows access to coastlines in exchange for recognition of Somaliland’s independence. This deal not only highlights regional geopolitics but also positions Somaliland in a strategic partnership intended to bolster maritime security amidst regional threats.

The reluctance of larger entities such as the African Union to formally recognise Somaliland often stems from fears that it could encourage separatist movements within other member states. This hesitancy overlooks Somaliland’s distinct narrative: it is not seeking to fragment any existing state but rather to affirm its right to self-determination. Observers have noted that Somaliland's governance, which adeptly weaves modern political frameworks with traditional clan governance, has allowed it to maintain social harmony and achieve notable stability in a region frequently marred by conflict.

Critics of recognition efforts often cite the potential backlash from Somalia. However, as Michael argues, encouraging a robust democratic framework in Somalia itself may yield greater benefits than opposing Somaliland’s aspirations. He asserts that Somalia would do well to learn from its northern neighbour's successes rather than stifle its progress out of fear of regional instability.

As awareness grows around Somaliland's established governance and its contributions to regional security, the call for international recognition intensifies. Advocates like Michael urge the UK and other nations not only to acknowledge Somaliland's statehood but to also advocate for a broader understanding of its historical context and current achievements. The question now remains: will the international community respond to Somaliland's call, or will it continue to be left in diplomatic limbo, despite its compelling case for statehood?

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/britain-must-stand-ready-to-recognise-somaliland), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/britain-must-stand-ready-to-recognise-somaliland)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/britain-must-stand-ready-to-recognise-somaliland), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/britain-must-stand-ready-to-recognise-somaliland), [[3]](https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001417067/somaliland-still-struggling-for-recognition-61-years-after-independence)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001417067/somaliland-still-struggling-for-recognition-61-years-after-independence), [[5]](https://www.horndiplomat.com/2025/02/op-ed-democracy-stability-and-development-in-somaliland-a-model-of-success-without-recognition/), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/c4593986-94dd-478b-96db-ac070e99861e)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/somaliland-power-democracy/), [[7]](https://www.apnews.com/article/6a2abc5c16162dea0bffc46333f343bc)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/britain-must-stand-ready-to-recognise-somaliland> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/britain-must-stand-ready-to-recognise-somaliland> - In this opinion piece, Alun Michael, former MP for Cardiff South and Penarth, argues that Britain should be prepared to recognise Somaliland as an independent state. He highlights Somaliland's democratic achievements, peaceful transitions of power, and economic growth since reasserting its independence 34 years ago. Michael criticises the African Union's reluctance to recognise Somaliland, attributing it to fears of encouraging separatist movements in other countries. He also underscores the historical contributions of Somalilanders to the UK, including during the Second World War and in maritime services.
3. <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001417067/somaliland-still-struggling-for-recognition-61-years-after-independence> - This article discusses Somaliland's ongoing struggle for international recognition, 61 years after its brief period of independence in 1960. Despite declaring independence from Somalia in 1991, Somaliland remains unrecognised, hindering its ability to engage in international trade and receive foreign aid. The piece highlights Somaliland's democratic stability and economic progress, contrasting it with the instability in Somalia. It also notes that Somaliland hosts diplomatic offices from several countries, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Taiwan, the UK, UAE, and Turkey, despite lacking formal recognition.
4. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/somaliland-power-democracy/> - This commentary from the Royal United Services Institute examines Somaliland's democratic system, which blends modern state institutions with traditional clan structures. It highlights the peaceful transitions of power, citing the 2010 presidential election where Ahmed Mahamoud Silanyo won 49% of the vote against Dahir Riyale Kahin. The piece underscores Somaliland's commitment to democracy and stability, noting that these peaceful transfers of power are rare in the region. It also discusses the role of clan-based governance in maintaining social harmony and preventing large-scale conflicts.
5. <https://www.horndiplomat.com/2025/02/op-ed-democracy-stability-and-development-in-somaliland-a-model-of-success-without-recognition/> - This opinion piece discusses Somaliland's democratic stability and economic development despite lacking international recognition. It highlights the country's investments in productive sectors, infrastructure development, and social welfare improvements. The article notes that Somaliland's governance system incorporates both modern state institutions and traditional clan structures, with clan elders serving as mediators in disputes. It also mentions the challenges Somaliland faces due to its unrecognised status, including limited access to international trade and foreign aid.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/c4593986-94dd-478b-96db-ac070e99861e> - This article reports on Somaliland's agreement with Ethiopia, granting access to land near the Red Sea to enhance maritime security against Houthi attacks. The deal, signed in January, provides Ethiopia with coastal access in exchange for recognising Somaliland's independence, a move opposed by Somalia. Ethiopia plans to build a naval base and commercial port in Berbera, enhancing its strategic position and reducing dependence on Djibouti. Somaliland views the deal as pivotal for gaining international legitimacy and attracting investments.
7. <https://www.apnews.com/article/6a2abc5c16162dea0bffc46333f343bc> - This article reports on the presidential election in Somaliland, where opposition leader Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi of the Waddani Party defeated incumbent President Muse Bihi Abdi. Abdullahi secured over 50% of the votes, marking a significant moment for Somaliland's push for international recognition. The election saw a peaceful transfer of power despite prior delays due to funding issues. Observers have praised Somaliland's stable political environment, exemplified by its record of credible elections, contrasting starkly with the instability in Somalia.