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Working together to rebuild health care in post-conflict Somaliland

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Summary

In 1991, the Somali National Movement fighters recaptured the Somaliland capital city of Hargeisa after a 3-year civil war. The government troops of the dictator General Mohamed Siad Barre fled south, plunging most of Somalia into a state of anarchy that persists to this day. In the north of the region, the redeclaration of independence of Somaliland took place on May 18, 1991. Despite some sporadic civil unrest between 1994 and 1996, and a few tragic killings of members of the international community, the country has enjoyed peace and stability and has an impressive development record. However, Somaliland continues to await international recognition. The civil war resulted in the destruction of most of Somaliland's health-care facilities, compounded by mass migration or death of trained health personnel. Access to good, affordable health care for the average Somali remains greatly compromised. A former medical director of the

general hospital of Hargeisa, Abdirahman Ahmed Mohamed, suggested the idea of a link between King's College Hospital in London, UK, and Somaliland. With support from two British colleagues, a fact-finding trip sponsored by the Tropical Health and Education Trust (THET) took place in July, 2000, followed by a needs assessment by a THET programme coordinator. Here, we describe the challenges of health-care reconstruction in Somaliland and the evolving role of the partnership between King's College Hospital, THET, and Somaliland within the context of the growing movement to link UK NHS trusts and teaching institutions with counterparts in developing countries.



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