

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MUJAHID AHMED JIMALEH,  
*THE FOUNDING FATHER OF SOMALILAND*

By

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**ADEN: CHILHOOD & YOUTH**

Ahmed Mohamed Gulaid, better known as **Ahmed Jimaleh**, was born in Aden, Yemen on June, 16, 1930. His father, Jimaleh, immigrated to Aden during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Ahmed's family consisted of four boys and two girls. He completed his elementary education at Ba Zar'a primary school. He finished his A- levels (advanced level courses of the British General Certificate of Education – GCE) at St. Joseph's Secondary School in Crater, Aden. Only students with high grades were granted admission. The school was founded by missionaries and was run and staffed by British teachers. Ahmed then, completed a two year certificate program in business management and commercial transactions. In addition to excelling at school, Ahmed was a model son who helped his mother around the house. His hobbies included reading, writing and swimming. He also enjoyed listening to music. Listening to Om Khalthoum while reading the poetry of Omar al-Khayyam, was a favorite pastime. Aden, at that time, was a cosmopolitan city in comparison to other cities in the region. As a British colony, it attracted

immigrants from the various colonies of the British Empire. The inhabitants of the city reflected the racial, ethnic and religious diversity of the Empire itself. There were native Yemenis, British, other European nationalities, Somalis, Indians and Yemeni Jews.

### **SAUDI ARABIA: YOUNG ADULTHOOD & EARLY CAREER**

Following his graduation, Ahmed worked in the administration department of a British firm that did business with the Aden port.



Additionally, Jimaleh was a community activist for the first established Somali Community League (SCL) as well as a part time teacher for various institutes around Aden. He subsequently was offered a lucrative position in 1950 by the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. After several months, the management was so impressed

with his skills and industriousness that they appointed him Chief Interpreter for the legal department.

The American lawyers in the department coined for him the nickname: “we can rough it” Gulaid. They gave him this nickname because he never turned down a challenging task or assignment.

Some of the more demanding tasks included trips to the Shariah courts in

Riyadh. Life in Riyadh was so strict that even cigarette smoking was prohibited. Chattel slavery was still legal as well. Most other interpreters would do their best to avoid them

However, Jimaleh would shrug his shoulders and say: “we can rough it for a few days.” Among the more colorful characters for which Ahmed worked was the notorious prince, Bin Jelawi, the governor of the Eastern province well-known for his beheading orders and other cruel and harsh sentences. Interpreting for such a man required the utmost tact and diplomacy not to mention a mastery of the nuances of the Arabic language and its various dialects.

Meanwhile, Jimaleh continued his activism as an advocate and spokesman for the Somali and Yemeni workers at Aramco. Ahmed was at this time under the influence of Arab socialism and supported national self-determination for all colonized peoples. Consequently, he participated in the organizing of the first and last labor strike at Aramco. He spoke to the striking laborers and informed them that there was no law prohibiting their striking for better conditions and wages. One of the more memorable on the job labor actions took place when a large number of the Yemeni workers walked off the job. The managers and the interpreters - all the interpreters were Lebanese except for Ahmed- were dumbfounded. Ahmed asked for a truck with a microphone installed on top of it. He drove to where the Yemeni employees were congregating. He came back after a short period

of time, followed by the Yemenis. One of the Somali workers who witnessed the event compared it to “locusts coming down to work”. No one knew what he told the Yemenis to persuade them to report back to work. Shortly thereafter, a law was passed which made labor strikes illegal. This event represented the culmination of many ideas that were growing in his mind about the future and where he can make the most contribution. The answer came in the form of his ancestral home, Somaliland. There, the British government was more enlightened and agitation for independence was rapidly growing. He kept himself informed by talking to Somalilanders who were returning to Aramco. He finally decided to make the move to Somaliland. Such move was opposed by his family who knew that the future in Aramco was quite bright for a man of his talents and ambition. His success, they argued, would contribute to the success of his younger siblings. As well, Aramco lawyers were reluctant to part with such an outstanding employee. They accepted his resignation but offered him an open invitation to resume his duties at any future date. Moreover, the Saudi government representatives in Aramco offered him Saudi citizenship and a place in the new Ministry of Petroleum. Ahmed’s answer was in the negative. Interestingly enough, decades later, he would give the same reply to a similar offer. The Saudi government, in the early 1980s, offered Jimaleh and his family Saudi citizenship. The price for this largesse was for Ahmed to cease all political activities against Siyad’s regime. The latter

had become a close Saudi ally after throwing in his lot with the Western Bloc in the Cold War proxy wars.

However, Jimaleh had already made his decision and moved to Hargeisa, Somaliland in 1956.

### **SOMALILAND: A RETURN TO ROOTS**

Once in Hargeisa, Ahmed immersed himself in the local culture, studying in depth the language and its nuances, poetry, proverbs as well as clan history and structure. He spent time with elders and poets, and clan leaders to observe and learn. His efforts paid off and his mastery of the Somali language both amazed and impressed the locals, specially the elders who dubbed him “Pharaoh” or “ Fircon Jimaleh” as a homage to his intelligence and resourcefulness. In a friendly competition with a native speaker, a local teacher called Heero, who was known for his eloquence and linguistic abilities, over who was best at knowledge of the Somali language, Ahmed easily won. Heero conceded defeat but added, tongue in cheek, that those who learn Somali as a second language are bound to come out ahead of native speakers.

On another level, Ahmed joined the National United Front (NUF), one of the political parties struggling for independence from Britain. He quickly rose through its ranks to become the General Secretary of its central committee. The NUF held the view that union with the South should be carefully considered and that Somaliland should remain a member of the

British Commonwealth even after independence. The NUF eventually merged with the Somali National League (SNL) after independence to form a coalition party called: the Somali National Congress (SNC).

In 1964, Jimaleh was among the distinguished political figures such as Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, Abdillahi Isse, Haji Abdirahman (Gadyareh), Ahmed Yusuf Dualeh, Suldan Rashid Suldan Abdilahi, Aw Ahmed Hassan and Michael Mariamo who were contesting for a parliamentary seat.

On the personal level, Ahmed proposed to and married the daughter of his good friend, Mohamoud Ahmed Ali (aka “father of education”). Their marriage was, however, short lived due to personality conflict. He subsequently married a girl who was to remain his wife for the rest of his life. She belonged to the family that held the traditional sultanship of the Eidagaleh sub-clan.

Meanwhile, Ahmed did not neglect his writing abilities and ambitions. He co-founded with Abdillahi Omaar, a local businessman, the first Arabic weekly newspaper al-Liwa (The Banner) in 1958. As editor in chief, he wrote extensive articles and editorials on a wide range of issues including the meaning of national liberation, colonialism in Africa, Pan-Africanism and mass education, especially that of women. Coincidentally, his youngest sister, Amina, whom he enrolled in school against their parents’ opposition, submitted articles while working as a teacher. Similarly, his brother, Abdirahman, who read law in England, contributed articles and poems.

Many others also wrote for the paper. However, since Mr. Omaar was primarily a businessman, the duties of writing, editing and managing a newspaper took their toll on Ahmed. As a result, the two partners decided to hire two more individuals to assist Jimaleh. One of them was a teacher and an aspiring journalist by the name of Ahmed Yusuf Dualeh. The two were sent to Cairo for an intensive training in journalism. Upon his return, Mr. Dualeh joined the paper as a fulltime journalist. He later became its editor in chief after Jimaleh departed to concentrate on his other interests. In addition to his other activities, Jimaleh was an intrepid entrepreneur. He founded the Hargeisa-based Somali Trading Company. As general manager, he struck a deal with the Soviet government to import affordable civilian cars and trucks and as a result much needed commercial transport flourished in the North. The deal was the result of a delegation of Somali businessmen who were invited to visit the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. One of the other Northern members of this delegation was Haji Ali Botan. Moreover, under Jimaleh's leadership, the Somali Trading company introduced into Northern markets a modern method of tanning livestock hides for quality export products. He was also one of the first Somaliland businessmen to engage in long-term real estate investing. Some of the properties he purchased in the late 1950s and early 1960s are today pieces of prime real estate, a tangible testament to his business acumen and foresight.

## A Brief Biography of Ahmed Jimaleh

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Jimaleh, however, did not abandon politics entirely. Consequently, in 1969, he was elected mayor of Hargeisa, the second largest city in Somalia and the capital of the North. Among his enduring reforms was the introduction of the emblem of the city of Hargeisa, represented by the famous Two Hills (Naaso Hablod).



He also improved major roads, the garbage disposal system, and renovated and redesigned the local government building from the British model. He also introduced a distinctive uniform for local government employees. Moreover, he recruited and trained a special civilian force to collect municipal taxes. Furthermore, Ahmed succeeded in inviting the American Ambassador to visit Hargeisa, the second capital of the Somali Democratic Republic. The Americans were riding an unprecedented wave of popularity triggered by the historical first landing on the moon by American astronauts. To the American people as well as their official representatives, this event represented a welcome and unifying respite, from the polarizing impact of the bloody Vietnam conflict and the tensions of the Cold War. Jimaleh took advantage of this opportunity to introduce senior American diplomats to Hargeisa and its people.

On another level, Ahmed hosted President Abdirashid Sharmarke on his

final visit to the North. Mr. Sharmarke was assassinated few days after leaving Hargeisa. Jimaleh as a mayor, was one of the few individuals to see President Sharmarke alive as he bid him farewell at Hargeisa airport.

Ahmed was the last democratically- elected mayor of Hargeisa prior to Barre's coup.

### **PRISONER OF PRINCIPLE**

Soon after the military coup, Ahmed was summoned to Mogadishu like so many other top Northern officials. The new government did not imprison him initially because Ahmed's prior public record was clean of corruption (Musuqmasuq). At one point, the new government considered appointing Jimaleh as an ambassador to an Arab country or the UN. However, a prominent Northern political personality who had the president's ear suggested that sending Jimaleh abroad as an envoy might be a threat to the new regime. The new Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) eventually appointed him as Director of Planning and Research in the Ministry of Interior.

As Director of Planning, he pursued his grassroots approach to local government. He acted according to his famous motto "the mayor of Hargiesa should be from Hargeisa not Afgoyeh.

Even if that mayor is a thief, he will still spend the proceeds of his crime in Hargiesa". As part of his duties, Ahmed researched and reported on the conditions of local municipalities in the country and made solid

recommendations that were used by the Ministry throughout the 1970s.

Jimaleh, however, was not satisfied with the political status quo.

Ahmed's opposition to the regime was deep-seated as he was against the hasty union from the start. While working in the Ministry of the Interior, he joined a group of disaffected Northerners who met for Qat sessions at the mafrish of a well-known Sufi. Jimaleh, as usual, was outspoken and urged fellow Northerners to view events from a wider perspective. It so happened that Ahmed's conversations were being recorded by a government spy, a distant relative and an acquaintance of both Ahmed's and his brother Abdirahman's. The brothers helped out this man financially since the latter was unemployed at the time. Unknown to all the regulars as well was the fact that this spy was wanted by the Interpol. He was to become the government's material witness in the case against Jimaleh.

While this file was growing, the government issued what was called a "circular" (a consulting paper) regarding the introduction of Scientific-Socialism to Somalia. All the top officials were expected to state their positions. Jimaleh expressed his opinion quite candidly. He disagreed with the introduction of Scientific-Socialism for several fundamental reasons. He stated that even in Marxian theory, capitalism precedes the advent of socialism. Somalia, in his opinion, was light years away from that stage. Secondly, he argued, Somalis already possessed a native sort of socialism whereby wealth was spread among families and clans through kinship ties.

Moreover, the Islamic laws of inheritance applied by Somalis, tended to disperse wealth across generations, family members and relatives thus preventing the appearance of conspicuous and obscene personal riches. Therefore, Ahmed concluded in his response, Scientific- Socialism was inappropriate for Somalia at this time.

This was the straw that broke the camel's back. Shortly thereafter, Ahmed's home was raided at dawn, his library and personal papers and even photo albums seized. He was arrested and detained in the notorious "Godka" -literally the hole -where he was tortured for 6 months without any charges being laid. This was 1972 and Jimaleh's life entered a new and challenging phase. The year 1972 was a crucial year as well for Siad Barre's budding dictatorship in ascertaining the limits of public tolerance for its repression. Imprisoning individuals like Jimaleh was one method of testing the boundaries. Another was the execution of three members of the Revolutionary Council representing three major clan families. When the expected opposition and public outcry did not materialize, the Fascist government realized the breadth and depth of its power. Therefore, by 1975, when Ahmed would be released, the government was brimming with self-confidence and proceeded to execute ten religious leaders with impunity despite both internal and international opposition. Ahmed's legal defense fell to his brother, Abdirahman. Other lawyers were reluctant for obvious reasons. Ahmed's brother, Attorney

Abdirahman, had his work cut out for him. Drafting and submitting a habeas corpus writ was no longer an option since the “Revolutionary” government suspended it two years earlier. Therefore, Abdirahman had to rely on his personal and professional contacts to locate his brother.

Similarly, he had to resort to his informal contacts and legal maneuvers, where possible, to get his brother in front of a court, even a kangaroo court.

Once in court, Abdirahman was surprised to see his brother charged with new-fangled “crimes” such as being an “Anti-Revolutionary” and

“Aminsharism”! Abdirahman’s legal strategy rested on demolishing the credibility of the material witness or Public Witness #1, the government

agent from the mafrish of the Sufi, on whose written reports, the court relied to charge Ahmed. Abdirahman proved that this agent was a

criminal wanted by the Interpol. He also showed the fundamental discrepancies between the spy’s oral testimony and written reports. The

attorney also pointed out the various contradictions between the oral

testimony of Public Witness #1 and Public Witness # 2. In sum, he was able to impeach the major witness’s credibility and his testimony.

Consequently, all charges, except one, were dismissed. The court found

Ahmed guilty of engaging in “Anti-revolutionary” activities and thus of being guilty of the “crime” of being an “Anti-Revolutionary”!

Ahmed was sentenced to three and a half years imprisonment and the

confiscation of his properties. It is worth noting that many years later when

he was in a position to take revenge on that same government undercover agent, Ahmed chose to forgive him.

While in prison, Jimaleh found himself in the company of countless other Northern personalities such as Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, Ahmed Yusuf Dualeh, Ali Banfas, Faisal Omar Mushteg and many others representing the cream of Northern leadership from every background. As usual, Ahmed quickly adapted to his new surroundings and decided to take advantage of all this free time. He volunteered to work in the prison library. It was during his work there for three and a half years that he completed a Somali-English dictionary containing thirty thousand (30,000) words. He also compiled a dictionary of three thousand (3,000) Somali proverbs with their English translation, divided into categories such as love, marriage, generosity, etc. Additionally, he wrote numerous poems in Arabic as well as some Somali quatrains (Afarray).

### **RELEASE & ESCAPE**

Ahmed was finally released in 1975 and the government gave him one month to visit his family in Hargeisa and then report back to Mogadishu. The government assigned two plainclothes informants to trail Jimaleh around Hargiesa. Both were related to the then governor of Hargeisa, Billeh Rafleh. Life under surveillance was both difficult and challenging for Ahmed. Wherever he went, one of these two would appear. Consequently, most people except the brave would avoid or flee the company of their

former mayor fearing guilt by association. He finally approached them together and informed them that he was aware of their surveillance. He further told them that he had an idea that would make everyone happy. Ahmed told them that his daily routine, outside his home, consisted of trips to two places: his brother's law office where he worked as a Notary Public and Sheikh Ali's majlis- a local sufi- in the afternoons. If they could not find him at these places, he told them, then, they should be alarmed. Moreover, they could pick up their daily Qat on his credit at a specific store. This ruse worked and the two undercover informants relaxed their tight grip. Subsequently, Ahmed and his brother Abdirahman had to act fast to prepare for his escape. First thing was to postpone his scheduled appointment with Billeh Rafleh on the pre-text of ill health. Secondly, they had to get hold of a passport and add his picture and other information. They also had to contact some of his friends in Djibouti such as Ali Arif and Mohamoud Obsiyeh. Ahmed sent six passport-size pictures to Ali Arif to be left at Djibouti's borders with Ethiopia and Somalia since he was not initially sure which border he will use to escape. Additionally, they had to buy a suitcase and clothes and bring them home at night, one item at a time. Finally, they had to rent a truck to take Ahmed to the Djibouti border. Ahmed was to be the only passenger. All this was done with the utmost secrecy. Finally, the day of departure arrived. Ahmed said goodbye to his family

early in the morning. The children were told that their father was going to Berbera for a job interview. Late that afternoon, Abdirahman drove him to Sheikh Omar's majlis on the outskirts of Hargeisa. The truck picked him up later and drove him towards Djibouti. The first part of the trip went without a hitch. However, they decided to stop for a meal at a small town on the way. The restaurant was tiny and traditional. To wash your hands, one had to go to the tap where a paraffin lamp was the only source of light. As Ahmed approached the tap, he was shocked to see the face of a police officer he knew in the past. The man asked him where he was heading. Ahmed told him that he was going to the border town of Loya Adde to receive some financial help from his Djiboutian friends. He told the police officer that he was returning in a day or two through the same route. He also promised him a share of the money. Once at the border, Ahmed got off the truck and waited until it was midnight to take advantage of the shift change of the French border guards. He was also told to cross at an area that was legally a no-man's land. The crossing was nerve-wracking but successful. Ahmed made it to Djibouti, away from Siyad Barre's tyranny. However, the Barre government did not give up. First, it retaliated against his brothers. The National Security Service (NSS) confiscated his brother Abdirahman's passport. Similarly, the Somali embassy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, refused to renew his brother, Ali's passport. Finally, the Barre government sent an armed assassin to kill Ahmed while in a hospital in

Djibouti receiving treatment for a slipped disc caused by torture during his detention in the “Godka”. Fortunately, the Djibouti government assigned a policeman to guard his room. Ahmed’s life was not safe in Djibouti.

As a result, his brother Ali who was working on his Saudi visa, advised him to leave for northern Yemen and await the visa there which Ahmed did.

### **RETURN TO SAUDI ARABIA: THE SEEDS OF THE SNM ARE SOWN**

The visa arrived and Jimaleh was back in Saudi Arabia, the country that he voluntarily left in 1956. Now he was back as a political refugee. Once there, Ahmed turned down various lucrative offers, including one from Aramco. These were the booming 1970s in Saudi Arabia. Jimaleh, however, decided to work as an interpreter/translator and political consultant to the Saudi government. He chose this path in order to continue his fight against the Barre regime.

In addition to his job, he acted as an informal advocate for the substantial Somali community in Saudi Arabia. He prepared and submitted petitions to the appropriate authorities on behalf of those in deportation detention centers. Furthermore, he helped deserving individuals obtain residency permits for themselves and families. Ahmed did not charge for these services.

However, his focus was on hosting and attending meetings with other Northern activists to formulate strategies for defeating the dictator in

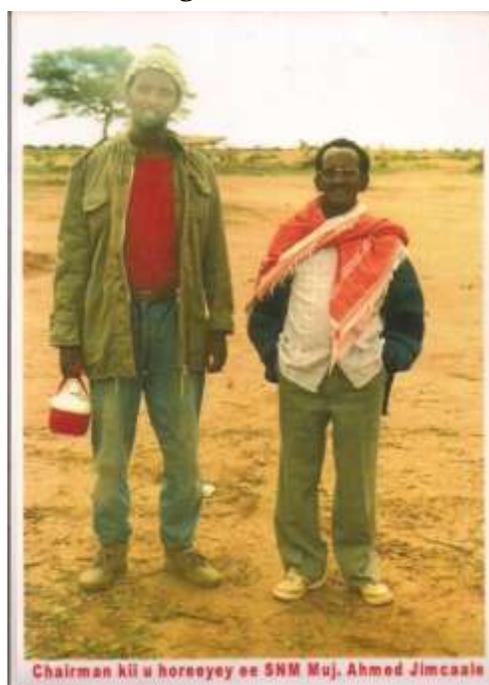
Mogadishu. He and his colleagues consulted with supporters inside Somalia via smuggled cassettes and Haj travellers coming from that country.

Even though he never believed in the original union of North and South, Ahmed accepted at this time, the compromise position of “Radical Decentralization” for practical reasons. Many Isaq businessmen and other leaders inside Somalia and outside were not supportive of full-fledged struggle against Barre. Events such as the Student Intifada (“Dagah Tuur”) and the emergence of civil society organizations such as the UFO group as well as increasing repressive measures by Siad would later help change that attitude.

However, at this time, Ahmed and his supporters had to persuade these leaders and the masses of the idea that ‘Isaq was a nation, not a tribe’ for mobilization purposes. Preliminary discussions with the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), the only other existing opposition front, based in Ethiopia, proved fruitless. The Northerners, Ahmed realized, had to go it alone.

The intensive discussions and brainstorming sessions culminated in the decision to create the Somali National Movement (SNM) in April 6, 1981. The Isaq diaspora in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Northern Europe and the UK elected a representative delegation, including Jimaleh, to a conference that was scheduled for later that year in London,

England. The conference was duly convened in London in October 1981 and elected Ahmed Jimaleh as the first chairman of the new organization. Ahmed was uniquely positioned to assume the reigns of leadership of such an organization. He was the most senior and veteran politician among that group. Moreover, his fluency in Arabic, English and Somali enabled him to move with ease in various circles. While his liberal and westernized views attracted the intellectuals in the movement, his knowledge of Arabic, Islam and Somali culture gained him the admiration of the more conservative elements such as the merchants and traditional individuals. In addition, Ahmed had major contacts and influential friends in the region. More importantly, unlike the other members of the founding committee, he paid his dues early. He made his opposition to the Barre regime and its



Scientific-Socialist dogma crystal clear by 1971. As a result, he was arrested, tortured and imprisoned from 1972 to 1975. He and his family, both immediate and extended, paid the price of opposition quite early in the struggle.

As chairman, Ahmed was instrumental in establishing links with the Ethiopian government. Consequently, the Ethiopian government provided

bases, a radio station and other logistical support to the new organization. Jimaleh also contributed to the constitution of the SNM. He especially drafted the chapters dealing with foreign policy and the structure of the future state after Siyad's defeat. Additionally, he drafted the movement's press releases and communiqués in Arabic with an Arab audience in mind. More importantly, his name and track record attracted the trust of the Isaq diaspora and hence their generous financial contributions to the SNM. Unfortunately, Ahmed was illegally ousted before the end of his term by politically- motivated members of the executive committee. In response, the dues-paying members of the diaspora, threatened to stop funding the organization if Ahmed was not returned as a chairman. A dangerous stalemate developed as the members behind his ouster stuck to their guns. Ultimately, Jimaleh decided to resign. He did this for two reasons. First, he did not want the young organization to self-destruct due to the egos of its founders. Ahmed put the public good before his own self-interest. He did not want the SNM to end up like the SSDF: the property of one charismatic leader. He wanted the new movement to develop on the basis of compromise and consultation. The precedent of compromise for the common good set by Jimaleh continued throughout the rest of the organization's existence. It also remained democratic and went through four more democratically – elected chairmen before the Declaration of Independence on May 18, 1991. The movement also challenged and

eventually defeated one of sub-Saharan Africa's largest and best equipped armies in 1988.

Ahmed also agreed to resign because he found a worthy successor in Sheikh Yusuf Sheikh Madar, the chairman who replaced him. Mr. Yusuf was well-educated and was a scion of the prominent Sheikh Madar religious family. Sheikh Madar is considered the founder of the city of Hargeisa. Now that he was no longer an official member of the SNM, Ahmed focused on business. He started a thriving small business with some Saudi friends. Despite his busy schedule, Ahmed continued writing whenever he had a spare moment. One of the incomplete manuscripts he started at this time was a history of Somalia in Arabic. He finished the introduction and several chapters. He also completed a short essay in English on the role of the state in Islam.

However, this was not to last. The government of Djibouti refused to renew his UN stateless travel document. The Djibouti government informed Ahmed that they could no longer guarantee his safety as required by the UN Convention on Refugees to which it was a signatory. Jimaleh applied for asylum to the UN in Cairo, Egypt, where his family resided.

### **EXILE IN THE WEST: THE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE**

In 1985, his application was granted by Canada. Ahmed was on the move once again. He and his family were heading to unknown territory, far away from his familiar milieus of Africa and the Middle East. Middle aged, he

had to start life from scratch in a completely different environment where education and experience outside Canada counted for little.

However, Jimaleh did not spend too much time lamenting his situation. The resilient, action-oriented side of his personality soon took over. He organized and became the first chairman of the Association of Somali-Canadians (ASCO), the parent organization of the Canadian society of Toronto. He also worked as an interpreter/translator for Somali and Arabic-speaking clients at Immigration and Employment Canada. He also acted as an immigration consultant. On another level, he acted as a mediator in conflicts between individuals as well as intra-family disputes.

Consequently, he was appointed as a board member of the Scarborough community legal clinics. His home remained the first stepping stone into Canada for countless Isaq refugees seeking asylum in Canada.

As soon as Ahmed was able to secure a Canadian passport in 1989, he started traveling again. First destination was Ethiopia where he witnessed in person the suffering and untold deprivation endured by his people in exile following the War of Liberation of 1988. Additionally, he attended the SNM General Conference where he was given a public apology for his illegal ouster and made a permanent member of the central committee of the SNM. Moreover, at Baligubadleh town, Ahmed gave one of his finest public talks: a powerful, mesmerizing and epoch-making speech which all those in attendance remember vividly to this day. It was as if he felt that he

will never address his people again.

Furthermore, he was urged to run for the chairmanship but he declined for health reasons.

However, he was appointed as a representative for the SNM in the Arab world, based in Aden, Yemen.

### A SOJOURN IN YEMEN

Jimaleh was back in familiar territory once again. He immediately negotiated an agreement with the Yemeni government which included the opening of a commercial relations office and the future resumption of air links between the two countries. As part of this agreement, Ahmed brought a delegation of al-Yemda Airlines representatives to a devastated Hargeisa in 1991. Furthermore, he secured an exemption for Somaliland businessmen from visa requirements by Yemen.

Meanwhile, his elementary school class mate, Mr. Abdikarim al-Eryani, a minister in the Yemeni government, offered him an ambassadorship in Ottawa, Canada. This was a tempting offer. Accepting it would have brought him closer to his family in Toronto, Canada. However, he turned down his friend's offer. Jimaleh preferred to continue pursuing the vision that consumed the best and most productive years of his life: a free, democratic and prosperous Somaliland. He was getting close to his first goal. Somaliland was free indeed and Siyad Barre was gone. Ahmed was there to witness it and savour it for a while. He, therefore, decided to

dedicate the rest of his life to the attainment of the other two. As part of his campaign to secure recognition and humanitarian aid to Somaliland, he embarked on an aggressive shuttle diplomacy throughout the Arab world.

### **THE END: DEATH IN EGYPT**

After a visit to Syria and Libya, he returned to Cairo to present a position paper to Mr. Ismat Abdilmaged, the Secretary General of the Arab league, requesting both recognition and aid for Somaliland. He also contacted the Saudi embassy in Cairo for a visa to the kingdom. As this was taking too long, Ahmed decided to visit Canada to see his first grandchild, Robleh, who was born in November of that year. Neither event was meant to happen. The Saudi visa came few days after his death. Similarly, he never saw neither his first grandson nor the rest of his family ever again.

He passed away on New Year's Eve of 1992 in Cairo. He is survived by wife Roun, his daughter Leila, an accountant and a homemaker, his son Gamal, a lawyer (the first Somalilander to graduate from law school in Canada), and his son Samater, a businessman.

He is also survived by his brothers Abdirahman, a retired lawyer, his brother Omar, a banker and his sister Amina, a retired teacher and homemaker. He was predeceased by his beloved younger brother, Ali, a musician and a pioneer Oud player in 1983. His other brother, Mohamoud, a court clerk, died a year after Ahmed's death. So did his mother Ibado. His father, Jimaleh, died in 1977 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Jimaleh's personality was both multi-faceted and complex. He was a writer and journalist, a community activist and union organizer, an entrepreneur and businessman, a politician and party organizer, and most importantly a father and a dedicated family man. However, the best words to sum up his character would include: innovator, trailblazer, and creator.

In a wider sense, however, his legacy is carried on by the millions of Somalilanders who are tirelessly working to attain Jimaleh's dream of a free, democratic and prosperous Somaliland.

The best tribute to his life's work is the very existence of an entity called Somaliland. He, indeed, was its architect.

He is buried in the Heliopolis neighbourhood of Cairo, in a cemetery near Kuliyyat el Banat School, in the family plot of Ms. Hagir Omar.