**Introduction**

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The 11th annual SIRC/LuHAF conference on the Horn of Africa focused on the issue of peace and security in the Horn. The main objective of the conference was to provide a forum for those engaged in this issue and bring the agonizing and violent situation in the Horn of Africa to the attention of the Swedish public and key stakeholders in the international community. Knowledge and understanding of critical issues concerning the conflicts in the Horn of Africa should encourage stakeholders to become engaged and actively support local peace processes at track II and track III levels in the Horn.

More than 300 participants visited the conference and took an active part in the discussions inside and outside the conference facilities during these three days. The governments of the Horn of Africa countries were strongly represented, by both ministers and ambassadors. Representatives of the United Nations, the European Union, civil society organisations, international academia, think tanks and media contributed actively, giving statements, reporting on current research and participating in workshops. Their committed participation gave the conference depth and validity.

The conference started on a positive note when Albert C. French, from the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) reported on the progress that has been made, specifically in the political/constitutional process and the security sector. These on-going developments in the political and security landscape indicate a new reality for the Somali people. This is not to deny that the challenges facing the country are enormous. Much needs to be done in promoting outreach and reconciliation initiatives between and amongst clans and also with allies of the insurgents. The willingness of the business community to invest in the immediate post-war environment is another challenge to maintaining peace and stability in the country. Among other things it is necessary to intensify public and civic education for the Somali people to be made aware of the advancement on the political landscape and the security gains in various parts of the country, by harmonizing and disseminating messages on the achievements made so far through the printed word and electronic media.

These themes of political/constitutional processes, development of the security sector, the position of civil society, business interests and education formed the red threads running through the conference, with the addition of the role of religion and environmental issues. Interesting follow-ups to the conference of 2011 on the role of women in promoting peace and development were given in statements by Ms Lilla Schumicky från UNDP, who described the Women Civilian Protection Unit, which is strengthening security in Mogadishu and by Addei Sidi Nur Manguay on the bottom-up approach in enabling women to play a greater part in conflict resolution. Dr Shukria Dini put forward the importance of uniting female parliamentarians and women NGO activists in the struggle for gender equity and durable peace in Somalia.

The role of religion in state and constitution building was expounded by Dr Markus Böckenforde, while Dr El Haj Hamed Mohamed Kheir Hag Hamed elaborated on the relationship between fundamentalism and security in Sudan. The importance of good relationships and cooperation between the countries of the Horn was also made clear by the Minister of the Interior and Decentralization of the Republic of Djibouti, Hassan Darar Houffaneh, who spoke on the role of Djibouti in fostering security in the Horn of Africa. Other important areas where cooperation is essential are closer economic ties and environmental issues, such as the question of water supply and shared rivers.

The workshops of the conference focused on three different themes:

1. Local and community peace building and its effects on state-building in the Horn of Africa
2. The role of the media in peace-making vs. conflict-making
3. The role of the international community in local peace processes in the Horn of Africa.