

A Bio of A. S. Abbas, MD; PhD

By

Dr Abdi Ahmed Farah (Pakistan)

**Emeritus Professor of Paediatrics and Former Dean,
Faculty of Medicine, Somali National University**

1. Dr A. S. Abbas, a Senior Citizen of Somalia and the UK, is a former Director General at the Ministry of Health, former Vice Minister of Health, international public health specialist, a long-time civic leader and peace activist.

2. Countless children all over Somalia had their lives saved or immeasurably enhanced through the work of Dr Abbas's early medical work as paediatrician in the 1970s. He was inspired to specialize in the field following his experiences as a child in Mogadishu in the 1950s when he witnessed the multiple health problems and high death rate of babies and young children.

3. Passionate about giving children the best chance in life, he went on to play a key role in the development of paediatric disease prevention, health promotion, and therapeutic management in Mogadishu. Later as Director General of Public Health in the 1980s, Dr Abbas instituted universal healthcare reforms that aimed at integrating public health with primary care. Unfortunately, most of the good things done by Dr Abbas and people like him have been lost through the protracted state collapse and decades of strife that wreaked mass destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods, since the beginning of the civil war in the late 1980s.

3. Today, the skills and expertise he taught young doctors continue to benefit child patients across rural and urban centers in Somalia. Astute, approachable and egalitarian, Dr Abbas enjoyed an almost celebrity-like status among the public and professionals alike as he faithfully served the poor people of Somalia – an achievement that had its roots in his Benadiri charm and urbanity. The Benadiri people are the

originators of Somali urbanization for hundreds of years in our history. They introduced Islam to the Horn of Africa, and founded our major urban centers, including Mogadishu and other coastal towns.

4. Upon arrival in the UK in the 1990s, Dr Abbas – always a man of action and involvement – formed a community organization of notable Somali citizens to identify and respond to the diverse needs of newly arrived Somali refugee communities across various stages of their settlement, and to provide them with services ranging from legal assistance to language education to job training. Dr Abbas and his team also acted as mentors to many individuals and community leaders in the community to take on roles as advocates, community organizers, and institutional liaisons.

5. Dr Abbas has been a tireless advocate for the advancement of the fellowship, unity, fraternity, sense of belonging and self-concept of every man, woman and child in the Somali community. He is a fearless defender of the freedom and equality of all Somali people, and for their inclusion in the contexts of education, health, housing, business and community development in their host countries across the globe.

6. In addition to his voluntary work, Dr Abbas has been an inspiring example of peace and reconciliation for the Somali people at home and abroad. He is a co-founder of the Somali Initiative for Dialogue and Democracy (SIDD) which was established in 2006. In his seminal work, *Ten Years of Somali Peace-making in the Diaspora* (co-edited with Peter Riddell, a noted British Peace Educator and Activist), Dr Abbas reflected on how our divided nation can heal and proclaimed, *“Our country, Somalia, is experiencing tragic events. The pain seems never-ending. But we have to believe and work for the time when Somalis will be able to hold their heads high up in the knowledge that we have found a way of accepting each other, acknowledging wrong-doing and putting the common good above sectional interests (p. 78)”*.

7. In his unflagging pursuit of peace-making and reconciliation for three decades from the diaspora, Dr Abbas continued to expound his views on the dire need for

meaningfully repairing damaged relationships among the Somali people and thus restoring a spirit of mutual trust, confidence and cooperation for the common good. He has shown a capacity for persistent effort to promote a new era of politico-social relationships grounded on equal respect for individuals and their agency; a commitment to the reciprocal sharing of burdens and benefits among the Somali people.

8. Dr Abbas is guided by a sense of moral purpose, clear mind and a generous heart. He believes that reconciliation may be the best wisdom of promoting peace and justice, as well as individual and societal healing in Somalia. He also believes that if reconciliation is going to have a lasting effect, it must be reconciliation among the people, not just between the leaders. Leaders may be involved in order to show a good example, but such actions by leaders will have only marginal effect. Effective reconciliation, according to Dr Abbas, will need to be both from the ground up, and also organized from the top. I wholeheartedly agree with him.

9. Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas is a man of great character and good faith, with much love and devotion to his country. He is a true humanitarian in every sense of the word, and his commitment to our country and our people as well as his selfless act of charity knows no bounds.

10. Dr Ahmed Sharif Abbas was born and bred in Mogadishu in 1945. He is married and has three adult children, among them a medical doctor. He is also multilingual, having the ability to use several languages including Arabic, English, & Russian in addition to his native Somali.