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"Let's utilize the talents of our ingenious people to rebuild our nation"

**Fears of fraud and sham elections
appear to be growing with the 'first
elected MP'**

A formal dispute has been raised against the election of one of the two northern/Somaliland MPs elected in Mogadishu on Monday, 1st November 2021. The said MP is none other than Mr Mahdi Guuleed, the Deputy Prime Minister, a close associate of Mr Farmaajo, who is said to have won by 97 votes out of the 101 electoral college votes as opposed to three votes garnered by his opponent, a little-known woman by the name Mushtaaq Ibraahim Yuusuf. One ballot was said to have been spoiled.

The previous occupant of the seat (HOP#239), Mr Hussein Arab Iise, has lodged a legal disputation with the Electoral Dispute Resolution Committee (EDRC) claiming that all the standards that were meant to ensure the election was free and fair were violated. This led the EDRC to order the postponement of any formal announcement of Mr Guuleed's win.

This is what Mr Iise had to say about the complaint he had made to the EDRC: "This was an improper use of authority by someone who has that authority because he holds a public office with an oversight on the administration of Somaliland elections and is yet claiming to be a candidate for those same elections. [That person] has unlawfully taken the parliamentary seat of another clan with a completely different set of numbers to the seat that belongs to his clan".¹

Mr Iise added: "For an unknown person to be presented as the candidate (opposing Mr Guuleed) was an act that brought shame on the whole Somali elections, and the political trust citizens were supposed to have on them. If the election committee is asked to bring

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the lady who contested that day's election today, they won't be able to find her. She wasn't even registered."² The woman contestant was said to have had her face covered.

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For their part, the EDRC published a letter the following day in which they acknowledged that a complaint was made against the election of HOP#239 seat by Mr Iise and ordered the Federal Election Implementation Committee (FEIC) to delay the formal announcement of the results pending an investigation into the matter. They promised that they will complete their investigations within 7 days and communicate their decision to the complainant and all relevant bodies.³

Sadly, we've already been there! Remember the complaints of irregularities that was made against the recent elections for the Upper House! I'm not clear about what became of those complaints! My view is that there are always political considerations that stand in the way of resolving these issues to implement what the rest of the world calls 'free and fair elections'. Rumours abound that the same political pressures that made these institutions toothless in the face of the widely publicized irregularities in the UH elections are being heaped on them again, and that will make them do nothing about it. We'll see about that!

A free election is one in which all citizens are able to vote for the candidate of their choice, and a fair election is one in which all votes have equal power and are counted accurately.⁴ Of course, in our context, we do not have a free election as defined above. What we have is an indirect election in which an intermediary body, an electoral college of 101 persons, selected from among the people, is responsible for the outcome of the election.

May I ask, even with our indirect clan-based election, why could we not have a fair election in which not only all votes have equal power and are counted accurately, but an election where voters have access to a reliable information about candidates and people cannot intentionally spread misinformation about themselves or others; an election where people who want to run for office can run for it without being intimidated; an election where voters are able to freely cast their votes and can do so free from intimidation; an election where voting is free

from fraud – where the institutions we created ensure that elections are protected from fraud; an election where ballots are counted accurately and the correct results are announced; and lastly, an election where once the outcome is decided, the results are respected?

Why could we not have an election where we treat everyone in a way that is right and reasonable; an election where we treat all groups and all people equally without allowing our own prejudices or personal opinions to influence our judgement?

I am sure you'd tell me that my ideas are not realistic, and that they will never be more than a pipe dream. You'd tell me that such good and honest elections did not happen in Somalia last time round, and the one before it, and the one before it, and so on and so forth. And I agree!

But I can also see another reason why people are concerned about electoral fraud and sham elections. Mr Farmaajo is the elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about! We have him on record saying: 'the only election worth going into is one that you know you can win before it happens.' That was his Addis interview in February last year. A lot has happened since then including his attempt to unconstitutionally extend his term for two years, and the serious consequences that we all know came to pass.

Mr Mahdi Guuleed is also on record saying that the upcoming FGS presidential elections should yield results that are not dissimilar to the ones produced by his boss's installation of compliant allies as presidents in the regional governments of South-West state in December 2018, Galmudug state in February 2020 and, November 2020, in Hirshabelle state. On the basis of this engineered trend, according to Guuleed, Mr. Farmaajo will be the strongest candidate and should easily win outright in the first round.

Dictators and despots make a habit of fine-tuning their strategies in order to hold elections that only they can win. Mr Farmaajo is full-on! He has the means, motive, and opportunity to rig the elections using strategies both old and new, because

he has by now learnt a simple but sad truth: it is easier to stay in power by rigging the elections than by not holding them at all.⁵ An even more uncomfortable truth right now is that Farmaajo seems to be outfoxing not only the Somali people and their leaders but also the international community.

The methods being used to overcome resistance include the so-called art of electoral bribery, divide and rule, violence as a political strategy, fake news propagated by hired social media loonies, and fooling as well as threatening (by the unstated threat of a PNG, à la Nicholas Haysom, former SRSG) representatives of international partners in Somalia. Just today, a new PNG was issued against Uganda's Simon Mulongo, the African Union Commission's deputy special representative in Somalia.⁶

The dictionary definition of rigging is to manipulate or control by deceptive or dishonest means. If we apply this definition, the election is already rigged. Intentionally, everything to do with the election is being done piecemeal in violation of all election agreements and to confuse the public and to undermine the confidence or morale of Farmaajo opponents and their supporters.

The Somali civil war was mainly caused by a regime that not only oppressed and brutalized the Somali people for more than two decades but continued to lord over them beyond its own expiration. Mr Farmaajo continues to betray the trust and confidence of the Somali people over a long extraconstitutional period of nine months beyond the expiration of his term. History shows the potential for peace breaking down is great in the face of arrogance and folly. A serious engagement by Somalia's international partners with Farmaajo is extremely urgent if our country is to avoid a full-on replay of what happened last April in Mogadishu.

Stay tuned for my follow-up article on the leadership qualities of the President we need to elect in our hoped-for presidential elections.

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