FACTS AND FIGURES – Summary of Somalia waste dumping problem (and some fishing)

SUMMARY OF ARTICLES ON WASTE DUMPING:

- a lot of the waste dumping was discovered because of the Tsunami in 2004 (waves and stuff)

- UN special envoy stated that in Somalia there was dumping of solid waste, chemicals and probably nuclear (waste): *There is also lead and heavy metals such as cadmium and mercury*

- since 1992 there is a convention, signed in Basel by most of the countries (over 150 countries signed it) that prohibits waste dumping and toxic waste trade – especially in war zones, this is the »*Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal*«

- this convention is usually enforced, but in the case of Somalia – with no effective government it was not and dumping is enabled

- international convoy may see it but don't act (according to a professor of the University of North Carolina)

- some Somali pirates have reportedly claimed to be acting as "coastguards" protecting their waters from illegal fishing and dumping of toxic waste

- in 2008 Resolution 1838 of the UN condemns piracy and authorizes action against it – but doesn't tackle the problem of waste dumping / fishing

INVOLVED COMPANIES:

- In 1992, a contract to secure the dumping of toxic waste was made by Swiss and Italian shipping firms **Achair Partners and Progresso**, with Nur Elmi Osman, a former official appointed to the government of Ali Mahdi Mohamed, one of many militia leaders involved in the ousting of Mohamed Siad Barre, Somalia's former president.

- In about 10 years ago, in 1997/98 The European Green Party presented to the European Parliament and the media copies of contracts signed by two European companies and representatives of the then “President” — Ali Mahdi Mohamed — to dump in Southern Somalia **10 million tonnes of toxic waste in exchange for $80 million**. The Italian newspaper, Famiglia Cristiano, first broke the stories and wrote a series of articles exposing in detail the extent of illegal dumping by a **Swiss firm, Achair Partners, and an Italian waste broker, Progresso**. The deal in which Mr. Mahdi was receiving reportedly worked out somewhat like less then $10 per tonne, while in Europe the cost for disposal and treatment of toxic waste material could go up to $1,000 per tonne” in those days.
Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the U.N. envoy to Somalia, tells me: “Somebody is dumping nuclear material here. There is also lead and heavy metals such as cadmium and mercury – you name it.” Much of it can be traced back to European hospitals and factories, who seem to be passing it on to the Italian mafia to “dispose” of cheaply. When I asked Ould-Abdallah what European governments were doing about it, he said with a sigh: “Nothing. There has been no cleanup, no compensation and no prevention.”

At the same time, other European ships have been looting Somalia’s seas of their greatest resource: seafood. We have destroyed our own fish stocks by over-exploitation – and now we have moved on to theirs. **More than $300 million worth of tuna, shrimp, lobster and other sea life is being stolen every year by vast trawlers illegally sailing into Somalia’s unprotected seas.**

According to Ms. Aden (University of Minnesota) there are 3.5 million Somalis facing starvation. East African waters, particularly off Somalia, have huge numbers of commercial fish, including the prized yellow-fin tuna. Observers say the Somali coastline once sustained hundreds of thousands of people as a source of food and livelihoods.

**COST OF WASTE DISPOSAL:**

- »Somalia has been used as a dumping ground for hazardous waste starting in the early 1990s, and continuing through the civil war there,” he said. “European companies found it to be very cheap to get rid of the waste, costing as little as $2.50 a tonne, where waste disposal costs in Europe are something like $1000 a tonne.

**ACTIONS OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENTS AGAINST WASTE DUMPING:**

Fifteen people have died, more than 100 made seriously ill and several thousand more suffer lingering effects on their health, their livelihoods and their personal environments. **Trafigura has just settled a $200 million lawsuit with the government of Ivory Coast, while a class-action suit is making steady and slow progress through the British legal system.** When asked Sainab in if any legal action considered in the case of Somalia, she said “Somalia have no central government, so no one speak to speak, that what we hear quite often.”
PROHIBITED INTENSIVE FISHING:

- Foreign trawlers reportedly use prohibited fishing equipment, including nets with very small mesh sizes and sophisticated underwater lighting systems, to lure fish to their traps.
Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the UN envoy for Somalia confirmed to Al Jazeera the world body has "reliable information" that European and Asian companies are dumping toxic waste, including nuclear waste, off the Somali coastline.

"I must stress however, that no government has endorsed this act, and that private companies and individuals acting alone are responsible," he said.

Allegations of the dumping of toxic waste, as well as illegal fishing, have circulated since the early 1990s.

But evidence of such practices literally appeared on the beaches of northern Somalia when the tsunami of 2004 hit the country. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) reported the tsunami had washed up rusting containers of toxic waste on the shores of Puntland.

Nick Nuttall, a UNEP spokesman, told Al Jazeera that when the barrels were smashed open by the force of the waves, the containers exposed a "frightening activity" that has been going on for more than decade.

"Somalia has been used as a dumping ground for hazardous waste starting in the early 1990s, and continuing through the civil war there," he said. "European companies found it to be very cheap to get rid of the waste, costing as little as $2.50 a tonne, where waste disposal costs in Europe are something like $1000 a tonne.

"And the waste is many different kinds. There is uranium radioactive waste. There is lead, and heavy metals like cadmium and mercury. There is also industrial waste, and there are hospital wastes, chemical wastes – you name it."

Nuttall also said that since the containers came ashore, hundreds of residents have fallen ill, suffering from mouth and abdominal bleeding, skin infections and other ailments.

"We [the UNEP] had planned to do a proper, in-depth scientific assessment on the magnitude of the problem. But because of the high levels of insecurity onshore and off the Somali coast, we are unable to carry out an accurate assessment of the extent of the problem," he said.

**Toxic waste**

Ould-Abdallah declined to name which companies are involved in waste dumping, citing legal reasons.

But he did say the practice helps fuel the 18-year-old civil war in Somalia as companies are paying Somali government ministers to dump their waste, or to secure licences and contracts.

"There is no government control ... and there are few people with high moral ground ... [and] yes, people in high positions are being paid off, but because of the fragility of the TFG [Transitional Federal Government], some of these companies now no longer ask the authorities – they simply dump their waste and leave."

Ould-Abdallah said there are ethical questions to be considered because the companies are
negotiating contracts with a government that is largely divided along tribal lines.

"How can you negotiate these dealings with a country at war and with a government struggling to remain relevant?"

In 1992, a contract to secure the dumping of toxic waste was made by Swiss and Italian shipping firms Achair Partners and Progresso, with Nur Elmi Osman, a former official appointed to the government of Ali Mahdi Mohamed, one of many militia leaders involved in the ousting of Mohamed Siad Barre, Somalia's former president.

At the request of the Swiss and Italian governments, UNEP investigated the matter. Both firms had denied entering into any agreement with militia leaders at the beginning of the Somali civil war. Osman also denied signing any contract.

**Mafia involvement**

However, Mustafa Tolba, the former UNEP executive director, told Al Jazeera that he discovered the firms were set up as fictitious companies by larger industrial firms to dispose of hazardous waste.

"At the time, it felt like we were dealing with the Mafia, or some sort of organised crime group, possibly working with these industrial firms," he said.

"It was very shady, and quite underground, and I would agree with Ould-Abdallah’s claims that it is still going on... Unfortunately the war has not allowed environmental groups to investigate this fully."

The Italian mafia controls an estimated 30 per cent of Italy's waste disposal companies, including those that deal with toxic waste.

In 1998, *Famiglia Cristiana*, an Italian weekly magazine, claimed that although most of the waste-dumping took place after the start of the civil war in 1991, the activity actually began as early as 1989 under the Barre government.

Beyond the ethical question of trying to secure a hazardous waste agreement in an unstable country like Somalia, the alleged attempt by Swiss and Italian firms to dump waste in Somalia would violate international treaties to which both countries are signatories.

**Legal ramifications**

Switzerland and Italy signed and ratified the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, which came into force in 1992.

EU member states, as well as 168 other countries have also signed the agreement. The convention prohibits waste trade between countries that have signed the convention, as well as countries that have not signed the accord unless a bilateral agreement had been negotiated.

It is also prohibits the shipping of hazardous waste to a war zone. Abdi Ismail Samatar, professor of Geography at the University of Minnesota, told Al Jazeera that because an
international coalition of warships has been deployed to the Gulf of Aden, the alleged
dumping of waste must have been observed.

**Environmental damage**

"If these acts are continuing, then surely they must have been seen by someone involved in
maritime operations," he said.

"Is the cargo aimed at a certain destination more important than monitoring illegal activities
in the region? Piracy is not the only problem for Somalia, and I think it's irresponsible on the
part of the authorities to overlook this issue."

Mohammed Gure, chairman of the Somalia Concern Group, said that the social and
environmental consequences will be felt for decades.

"The Somali coastline used to sustain hundreds of thousands of people, as a source of food
and livelihoods. Now much of it is almost destroyed, primarily at the hands of these so-called
ministers that have sold their nation to fill their own pockets."

Ould-Abdallah said piracy will not prevent waste dumping.

"The intentions of these pirates are not concerned with protecting their environment," he
said.

"What is ultimately needed is a functioning, effective government that will get its act
together and take control of its affairs."

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**UN envoy decry illegal fishing, waste dumping off Somalia**

http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5gVV_gQDsp1m8v7nPcumVc5McyV-Q

Ould Abdallah said the phenomenon helps fuel the endless civil war in Somalia as the illegal
fishermen are paying corrupt Somali ministers or warlords for protection or to secure fake
licenses.

East African waters, particularly off Somalia, have huge numbers of commercial fish species,
including the prized yellowfin tuna.

Foreign trawlers reportedly use prohibited fishing equipment, including nets with very small
mesh sizes and sophisticated underwater lighting systems, to lure fish to their traps.

"I am convinced there is dumping of solid waste, chemicals and probably nuclear (waste)....
There is no government (control) and there are few people with high moral ground," Ould
Abdallah added.

Allegations of waste dumping off Somalia by European companies have been heard for
years, according to Somalia watchers. The problem was highlighted in the wake of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami when broken hazardous waste containers washed up on Somali shores.

But world attention has recently focused on piracy off Somalia, which has taken epidemic proportions since the country sank into chaos after warlords ousted the late president Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991.

Some Somali pirates have reportedly claimed to be acting as "coastguards" protecting their waters from illegal fishing and dumping of toxic waste.

You are being lied to about pirates (February 4, 2009)

In 1991, the government of Somalia – in the Horn of Africa – collapsed. Its 9 million people have been teetering on starvation ever since – and many of the ugliest forces in the Western world have seen this as a great opportunity to steal the country’s food supply and dump our nuclear waste in their seas.

Yes: nuclear waste. As soon as the government was gone, mysterious European ships started appearing off the coast of Somalia, dumping vast barrels into the ocean. The coastal population began to sicken. At first they suffered strange rashes, nausea and malformed babies. Then, after the 2005 tsunami, hundreds of the dumped and leaking barrels washed up on shore. People began to suffer from radiation sickness, and more than 300 died.

Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the U.N. envoy to Somalia, tells me: “Somebody is dumping nuclear material here. There is also lead and heavy metals such as cadmium and mercury – you name it.” Much of it can be traced back to European hospitals and factories, who seem to be passing it on to the Italian mafia to “dispose” of cheaply. When I asked Ould-Abdallah what European governments were doing about it, he said with a sigh: “Nothing. There has been no cleanup, no compensation and no prevention.”

At the same time, other European ships have been looting Somalia’s seas of their greatest resource: seafood. We have destroyed our own fish stocks by over-exploitation – and now we have moved on to theirs. More than $300 million worth of tuna, shrimp, lobster and other sea life is being stolen every year by vast trawlers illegally sailing into Somalia’s unprotected seas.

The local fishermen have suddenly lost their livelihoods, and they are starving. Mohammed Hussein, a fisherman in the town of Marka 100km south of Mogadishu, told Reuters: “If nothing is done, there soon won’t be much fish left in our coastal waters.”

This is the context in which the men we are calling “pirates” have emerged. Everyone agrees they were ordinary Somalian fishermen who at first took speedboats to try to dissuade the dumpers and trawlers, or at least wage a “tax” on them. They call themselves the Volunteer Coast Guard of Somalia – and it’s not hard to see why.

In a surreal telephone interview, one of the pirate leaders, Sugule Ali, said their motive was “to stop illegal fishing and dumping in our waters … We don’t consider ourselves sea
bandits. We consider sea bandits [to be] those who illegally fish and dump in our seas and
dump waste in our seas and carry weapons in our seas.” William Scott would understand
those words.

We didn’t act on those crimes – but when some of the fishermen responded by disrupting
the transit corridor for 20 percent of the world’s oil supply, we begin to shriek about
“evil.” If we really want to deal with piracy, we need to stop its root cause – our crimes –
before we send in the gunboats to root out Somalia’s criminals.

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Somali Piracy Connected to Toxic Dumping, Illegal Fishing (Nov 23, 2008)
http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=84b309cb375a71013072e8158b583353

While I know the subject of this interview is waste dumping in Somalia, I must say that toxic dumping
is an issue all over West and East Africa,” said Nii Akuetteh, executive director of Africa Action, a
member of the Scholars’ Council at Trans Africa Forum and founder of the Democracy and Conflict
Research Institute in Accra, Ghana.

“The Somali toxic waste dumping issue is of great concern to me because it spills over to other
African nations,” Mr. Akuetteh said. “Did you know that when the Islamic Courts Union was in
charge of Somalia, piracy had come to a virtual halt? But thanks to the Bush administration and
Ethiopia after the ouster of the ICU in 2006, the phenomenon returned,” said Mr. Akuetteh.

In early October, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1838 (2008) which
determined “that the incidents of piracy and armed robbery against vessels in the territorial waters of
Somalia and the high seas off the coast of Somalia exacerbate the situation in Somalia which continues
to constitute a threat against international peace and security.”

“The UN must monitor more closely the toxic waste issue; and there doesn’t seem to be any mention
of that in Resolution 1838,” observed Professor Abdi Ismail Samatar, of the geography and global
studies department at the University of Minnesota, in a Final Call interview.

While the media is covering piracy, there needs to be coverage of the plundering of Somali resources
by rich companies and rich governments, said Prof. Samatar. “They are destroying the coral reefs—
breeding grounds for the fisheries—destroying the livelihoods of Somalis, taking the food out of the
mouths of the poor.”

According to Ms. Aden there are 3.5 million Somalis facing starvation. East African waters,
particularly off Somalia, have huge numbers of commercial fish, including the prized yellow-fin tuna.
Observers say the Somali coastline once sustained hundreds of thousands of people as a source of food
and livelihoods.

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Seeking Environmental Justice: Toxic Waste Dumping in Africa
http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/node/4719

An environmental advocate, Zainab Hasan, came back an investigative trip to Africa and
Europe and presented to the community findings of her research as she seeks environmental
Justice and to halt the dangerous business of toxic dumping in Africa by cruel criminals.

In Somalia, without exposing the true nature of her visit, she met both the victims and the
non-profit organizations busy the clean up activities the toxic waste exposed by the Tsunami,
collected more data, interviewed doctors, and environmental and human rights groups in
Somalia such as DBG or Daryeel Bulsho Guud which is working the cleaning up area.

In about 10 years ago, in 1997/98 The European Green Party presented to the European Parliament and the media copies of contracts signed by two European companies and representatives of the then “President” — Ali Mahdi Mohamed — to dump in Southern Somalia 10 million tonnes of toxic waste in exchange for $80 million. The Italian newspaper, Famiglia Cristiana, first broke the stories and wrote a series of articles exposing in detail the extent of illegal dumping by a Swiss firm, Achair Partners, and an Italian waste broker, Progresso. The deal in which Mr. Mahdi was receiving reportedly worked out somewhat like less then $10 per tonne, while in Europe the cost for disposal and treatment of toxic waste material could go up to $1,000 per tonne” in those days.

Ms. Hasan said “ Apart from the on going wars in Somalia, the public faces now unfamiliar diseases in an alarming numbers which the local medical professionals don’t know how to handle it or don’t have the proper material to work with”. “ There are increase numbers of cancer patients, deformed births and some other illnesses no one knows what to call it” she added. While in Europe, Ms. Hasan met in Rome the news editors who broke some of the horrific stories about the hazardous and nuclear waste dumping in Somalia. She also met with the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in Nairobi, Kenya, and others who have done field work and published reports about the environmental degradation in Somalia. “Foreign companies involved in this type of crimes have collaborators in Somalia including a businessman Munye Omar” said Hasan. Munye runs a seafood company in Somalia called the Somali High Sea Fishing Company. The company was reportedly owned by the previous Somali government before it collapsed in early 1990’s but Munye who was the manager of the company took over them. Mr. Munye, who is a member of parliament in the current Somalia’s Transitional Government resides in Yemen while his ships and boats carried their activities in Somalia waters.

The environmental activist’s work proved difficult when it came clear these companies dumping the waste and their criminal partners in Somalia are also serious to take out anyone who challenges them. Early 1990’s when the story broke an Italian television journalist named Ilaria Alpi soon took up the investigation. But in 1994, Ms. Alpi and her cameraman were “assassinated” while traveling in Somalia. Some argue her death was set as an example by the mafia controlling this lucrative immoral and illegal activities. The journalist, Ms. Alpi, had been investigating allegations that Mafia-run companies in Italy were regularly transporting industrial waste to Somalia for dumping. The organized crime group is estimated to control about 30 percent of Italy’s waste disposal companies, including those that deal with toxic waste.

The Tsunami that hit the coast of Somalia in 2004 destroyed coastal towns and villages but uncovered a secret that some must have hoped would remain forever buried at sea, toxic dumping. Besides the waste, Somalia’s coast has also been receiving shiploads of industrial, hospital, chemical, leather treatment and other toxic waste. “Most of the waste was simply dumped on the beaches in containers and disposable leaking barrels without regard to the health of the local population and any environmentally devastating impacts,” a UN report suggests. However, United Nations Environment mergergy Programe (UNEP) falls short of naming the corporate culprits responsible for the dumping of the radioactive waste. It simply says, “European firms are known to be engaged in the business of dumping hazardous waste in Africa.”
The Tsunami exposure, the dumpers are eyeing on other parts of Africa. They are reportedly conducting their illegal business with war torn and corrupted governments in the continent. Countries like Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Mozambique and many others. Although, there is not conclusive eyewitness report yet but there are rumors of Asian companies are also in the wings carrying on similar activities under the name of fishing agreements.

Recent event, earlier this year, West African country of Ivory Coast, another victim of political instability, became latest victim when at the port of Abidjan under cover of darkness. The shipment of highly toxic waste, floated through international waters by the Dutch multinational Trafigura aboard a Panamanian-flagged ship, was the residual product from an offshore cleaning of fuel oil tainted with too much sulphur.

Fifteen people have died, more than 100 made seriously ill and several thousand more suffer lingering effects on their health, their livelihoods and their personal environments. Trafigura has just settled a $200 million lawsuit with the government of Ivory Coast, while a class-action suit is making steady and slow progress through the British legal system. When asked Sainab in if any legal action considered in the case of Somalia, she said “Somalia have no central goverment, so no one speak to speak, that what we hear quite often.”

She said the Somali non-profit organization, Daryeel Bulsho Guud, has been doing all it can to stop leaking and properly restoring the containers brought by the Tsunami to save from the public. The containers are 15 of them, huge and filled with dangerous substances. “The organization is currently assisted by voluteer donors and groups based in Germany but I saw a great need of help” Ms. Hassan said.

Congressman Keith Ellison who briefly joined the meeting encouraged the community to join with Sainab and bring the issue to the attention of law makers. But, he said “the key of all these problems, is the lack of a strong central goverment and it is important to find the solution once and for all.

“I am proud of you” said Somali Action Committee Director, Abdi Hashi, who offered his cooperation and appealed to everyone to join.

The event organized by Environmental Justice Advocates of Minnesota, in which she was (EJAM) intern in 2006, as an Upper Midwest Human Rights Fellow. She has been involved with the local Arsenic Triangle campaign in S. Minneap-olis, & has completed research about toxic waste dumping in Somalia.