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From Reactive Policing to Shared Prevention

Priorities for Somaliland's National Crime Prevention Strategy

Executive summary

Somaliland is at an important stage in the development of its National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS). Rather than approaching crime prevention primarily as a law-enforcement responsibility, the process, initiated by the Ministry of Justice, has sought to involve government institutions, police, criminal justice actors, civil society organisations, religious and traditional leaders, and local communities.

Four consultative workshops held in Hargeisa, Boorama, Berbera and Burao introduced participants to crime-prevention principles and encouraged collaboration around the development of the NCPS. More than 100 participants took part, including 24 women, while a preliminary perception survey involving 67 respondents provided additional insight into perceived security threats, institutional capabilities and community–police relations.

Results emerging from this process point towards a central policy conclusion: effective crime prevention in Somaliland will require a **transition from predominantly reactive policing towards a proactive, whole-of-society model based on prevention, partnership, information, and problem-solving.**

Somaliland already has important foundations on which to build. Survey respondents expressed relatively high levels of trust in the police, while the consultative process demonstrated a willingness among government, law enforcement and community stakeholders to cooperate. At the same time, important institutional weaknesses remain. These include limited police accessibility, insufficient resources and training, weak community-policing structures, inadequate crime information systems, gaps in inter-ministerial coordination and weaknesses across the wider criminal justice chain. The NCPS therefore provides an opportunity not simply to produce another security policy, but to establish an integrated system through which national institutions and communities identify risks early, analyse the causes of crime, coordinate interventions and measure whether those interventions work.

Why Somaliland Matters: Strategic and Regional Context

Somaliland's political status adds another dimension to its strategic significance. For decades, Somaliland has maintained its own governing institutions while seeking wider international recognition. That diplomatic environment changed significantly in December 2025 when Israel announced formal recognition of Somaliland as an independent and sovereign state.

This development has elevated Somaliland's international profile while simultaneously increasing the diplomatic sensitivity surrounding its status. It reinforces the importance of presenting questions of crime prevention and institutional development within their broader regional context. Effective governance, rule-of-law institutions, accountable policing and social stability are relevant not only to domestic security but also to Somaliland's relationships with neighbouring governments, regional organisations, international partners and potential investors.

Somaliland's importance extends considerably beyond its domestic security environment. Its geographic position on the Gulf of Aden, close to the Bab el-Mandeb and Red Sea maritime corridor, places it at the intersection of some of the most important security, commercial and geopolitical dynamics affecting the Horn of Africa. Developments within Somaliland can consequently have positive implications for neighbouring Ethiopia, Djibouti and Somalia, as well as for maritime security, regional trade and international engagement across the Red Sea.

This strategic significance has become increasingly pronounced as instability in and around the Red Sea has affected international shipping. The Red Sea connects the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden with the Suez Canal and onward routes to Europe and is regarded by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as one of the world's most critical maritime trade corridors. Renewed attacks against commercial shipping, piracy and other maritime security threats have reinforced the importance of stability along both sides of the Gulf of Aden. In July 2026, the IMO again described the Red Sea as a critical international trade corridor and warned that continuing attacks threaten shipping security and global supply chains.[1]

Relative stability in a volatile neighbourhood

Somaliland's strategic importance is reinforced by its comparative internal stability within a highly volatile regional environment. The underlying assessment notes that Somaliland has remained considerably more stable than many surrounding areas, while developing its own institutions and conducting regular electoral processes. Its 2024 political transition further demonstrated the importance attached domestically to electoral governance and institutional continuity. However, this relative stability does not grant immunity from regional insecurity.

[1] International Maritime Organization (IMO), Statement on recent attacks on ships in the Red Sea, 23 July 2026, https://www.imo.org/en/mediacentre/pressbriefings/pages/statement-on-recent-attacks-in-the-red-sea.aspx?utm.com

Al-Shabaab remains a major destabilising actor within Somalia, while Islamic State Somalia has also established a presence in the wider region. Although the assessment found that Somaliland was considerably less exposed to direct jihadist attacks than neighbouring areas, it noted the presence of Al-Shabaab and Islamic State Somalia -linked individuals and recruitment concerns, the use of territory for transit foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), violence involving clan militias and armed groups, and the effects of conflict in disputed areas.

Somaliland is therefore positioned between several interconnected security theatres: insecurity within Somalia and Puntland; tensions surrounding disputed territories; transnational criminal routes through the Horn of Africa; instability across the Gulf of Aden in Yemen; and insecurity affecting commercial shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The recent resurgence of piracy further illustrates the fluid nature of this environment. For example, the IMO reported in July 2026 that 24 attempted or actual piracy and armed-robbery incidents had been recorded in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden during the preceding three months.[2]

Transnational crime and regional connectivity

The same geographical characteristics that create economic opportunity also create vulnerabilities. Ports, transport corridors, long land borders, and access to major maritime routes can facilitate legitimate trade while simultaneously creating opportunities for the movement of illicit goods and people.

This helps explain why participants in the Somaliland assessment identified **trafficking in people, drug trafficking, organised crime, trafficking in explosives, corruption and piracy** among the most important crime-prevention priorities.

The challenge is therefore not simply one of conventional policing. Organised criminal markets are frequently transnational, exploiting differences between jurisdictions, informal border crossings, legitimate transport infrastructure and weaknesses in institutional coordination.

For Somaliland, strengthening domestic crime prevention therefore contributes to a wider regional security architecture. Better crime information, stronger investigation capacity, effective border and port cooperation, community-based early warning and improved coordination between criminal justice institutions can make it more difficult for transnational criminal and extremist networks to exploit Somaliland's territory and infrastructure.

Methodology and Evidence Base

The development of Somaliland's National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) has been informed by a participatory and consultative methodology designed to combine institutional perspectives with the experiences and perceptions of communities. Rather than relying exclusively on official crime statistics or law-enforcement assessments, the process brought together representatives from across the criminal justice system, government, civil society and local communities to identify security concerns, institutional constraints and priorities for crime prevention.

[2] Ibid

Consultative workshops

A central component of the methodology was a series of four three-day workshops organised by the Somaliland Ministry of Justice's Department of Crime Prevention. The workshops were conducted in Hargeisa, Boorama, Berbera and Burao and were intended both to support capacity development and to generate evidence for the formulation of the NCPS.

The workshops introduced participants to fundamental principles of crime prevention and to the Swedish five-step crime-prevention model, structured around:

1. initiating collaboration;

2. undertaking internal preparations;

3. conducting joint preparations;

4. implementation; and

5. follow-up.

The methodology therefore did not treat consultation simply as a mechanism for gathering opinions. Participants were also introduced to structured approaches for identifying crime problems, establishing institutional partnerships and translating identified priorities into practical interventions. Human rights and community policing were incorporated as central principles throughout the process.

More than 100 participants took part in the consultation process, including 24 women. Participants represented the Ministry of Justice and its Crime Prevention Department, the Attorney General's Office, local government, the police, correctional institutions, religious leaders, traditional leaders and civil society organisations. This diversity was intended to ensure that the development of the strategy reflected perspectives extending beyond the security services alone.

The workshops were also designed to identify practical barriers to the implementation of crime prevention. Discussions therefore focused on three interconnected areas: strengthening police–community relations; identifying structural and procedural limitations affecting the development and implementation of the NCPS; and exploring approaches that place human rights and community policing at the centre of preventive security policy.

Perception survey

The qualitative consultation process was complemented by a preliminary perception survey aimed at developing a clearer understanding of perceived security threats, institutional capacity and the level of trust between communities, government and the criminal justice system.

A total of 67 respondents participated in the survey, comprising 30 men and 37 women. The respondent pool included representatives of government, police, military, prosecution, civil society and local communities. Government officials constituted approximately 38% of respondents, police 21%, community members approximately 23% and civil society approximately 11%, with smaller proportions representing the military and prosecution services.

The questionnaire examined three broad dimensions:

- perceptions of the most significant crime and security threats confronting Somaliland;
- perceptions of the current capabilities of law-enforcement and criminal justice institutions; and
- perceptions of community–police relations, including trust, accessibility, cooperation and factors that may inhibit effective partnership.

The assessment consequently provides insight not only into what respondents considered the most important security threats, but also into how different stakeholder groups assessed existing institutional responses and where they believed additional capacity or reform was required.

Combining quantitative and qualitative evidence

The methodology adopted a mixed evidence approach, combining numerical perception data with qualitative findings generated through facilitated discussion. This is particularly important because perceptions differed considerably between stakeholder groups. For example, police respondents generally assessed threats and police capabilities differently from community, civil society and government respondents. Rather than treating these differences as inconsistencies, they should be understood as important analytical findings. Differences in perception can themselves reveal gaps in communication, institutional awareness and the way security is experienced by different sections of society.

The workshops also provided an opportunity to test and interpret issues emerging from the questionnaire. Participants identified a range of institutional priorities, including stronger cooperation with communities and civil society, formal community partnerships, improved communication channels, a national crime database, stronger inter-ministerial cooperation, a centralised crime statistics capability and dedicated support for women and children.

The methodology therefore serves two complementary purposes. First, it provides an initial diagnostic of the crime-prevention environment. Second, it creates a participatory foundation for the development of interventions by involving many of the institutions and communities that will ultimately be required to implement the NCPS.

Methodological limitations

Considering the small sample, these findings should nevertheless be interpreted as indicative rather than nationally representative.

The relatively small survey sample limits the extent to which percentages can be extrapolated to the Somaliland population as a whole. Geographic representation is also uneven. Of the 67 respondents, 59 were from Maroodi-Jeeh, while five represented Awdal and only one respondent each represented Sahil and Toghdeer.

A further limitation inherent in perception-based research is that respondents assess security threats and institutional capabilities according to their own experiences, professional roles and access to information. Police officers, government officials, community members and civil society representatives may consequently interpret the same threat differently. This should not necessarily be regarded as a weakness of the assessment. Identifying such differences is important for designing a national strategy because successful crime prevention depends partly on developing a shared understanding of problems between institutions and communities.

Why the National Crime Prevention Strategy matters beyond crime

Against this background, the development of Somaliland's National Crime Prevention Strategy should be understood as part of a broader state- and institution-building process.

The strategy provides an opportunity to strengthen the capacity of public institutions to anticipate and manage security risks rather than simply respond to individual crimes after they occur. The consultative process already reflects this approach, bringing together government departments, police and criminal justice institutions with civil society, religious leaders, traditional leaders and communities. More than 100 participants were involved in the four regional workshops that informed the process.

A credible NCPS can therefore contribute simultaneously to several strategic objectives:

- strengthening community safety and public confidence in state institutions;
- improving the ability of authorities to identify emerging threats before they escalate;
- strengthening coordination between police, prosecution, corrections, local government and other agencies;
- increasing resilience against organised crime, trafficking and violent extremism;
- protecting strategically important trade, transport and economic infrastructure;
- supporting greater cooperation with neighbouring states and international partners; and
- reinforcing the rule of law and institutional legitimacy.

For Somaliland, crime prevention is therefore not a narrow policing issue. It closely connects to governance, economic development, social cohesion, and regional stability. A Somaliland that is capable of preventing crime, resolving local tensions, protecting strategic infrastructure and maintaining constructive relations between communities and state institutions contributes not only to the safety of its own population, but also to the resilience of the wider Horn of Africa and the security of one of the world's most strategically important maritime regions.

Why crime prevention matters

Somaliland faces a security environment extending well beyond conventional street crime. The preliminary assessment identified **trafficking in people, drug trafficking, organised crime, trafficking in explosives, corruption, piracy, terrorism financing, violent extremism, firearms trafficking and conflict associated with resource pressures** among the issues requiring attention.

Respondents ranked trafficking in people as the highest priority crime, followed by drug trafficking and historic grievances based on tribe or ethnicity. Organised crime, trafficking in explosives, corruption and piracy also featured prominently. The assessment consequently highlights the importance of addressing transnational organised crime alongside locally rooted sources of insecurity.

Perceptions differ significantly between institutions and communities. Community respondents expressed particularly high concern regarding trafficking in explosives, people and firearms, while government respondents highlighted historic grievances and drug trafficking. Police respondents generally assessed the threats as considerably lower than community and government respondents.

These differences matter. A national crime prevention strategy cannot rely exclusively on institutional assessments of insecurity. Effective prevention requires mechanisms through which information held by government, police and communities can be brought together to develop a shared understanding of the threats facing particular locations and populations.

The challenge is therefore not simply to strengthen enforcement. Somaliland needs an approach capable of identifying why crime occurs, where vulnerabilities exist, which institutions are best positioned to respond and how communities can contribute without assuming law-enforcement functions themselves.

A foundation of public trust but important gaps remain

The consultation process identified several positive foundations for crime prevention. Respondents assessed police capabilities at approximately 68%, and they rated community policing at approximately 66%. Police respondents assessed their own capabilities more positively than government respondents, however, with police respondents giving an overall assessment of 77% compared with 57% among government representatives. Forensic capabilities and hostage negotiation were among the areas identified as requiring greater attention.

Trust also provides an important foundation. The survey estimated trust in the police at 75.6%, although the police ranked below several other institutions. Trust in the military was assessed at 80.42%.

These figures should not, however, obscure structural weaknesses.

Government respondents assessed the availability of police officers at only 39%, highlighting the importance of both the physical presence and accessibility of police services. Workshop participants similarly identified shortages in funding, personnel and equipment as obstacles to effective crime prevention.

Community respondents also placed considerable emphasis on establishing formal community-policing structures and improving police training on engagement with communities. Respectful, professional, transparent and fair treatment during everyday interactions emerged as an essential foundation for effective community policing.

The implications are significant. Trust should be regarded as an operational asset. Communities that regard the police as legitimate and accessible are more likely to report crime, provide information and participate in prevention initiatives. Conversely, poor accessibility, inappropriate behaviour, corruption or unresolved complaints against individual officers can rapidly undermine that relationship.

Community policing should become a method of policing

Community policing is not merely public relations or periodic consultations. It requires influencing the identification of security problems and the determination of policing priorities.

The consultations point towards three mutually reinforcing principles: organisational transformation, community partnership and shared problem-solving. This requires police officers to engage communities before crises occur, participate in community meetings, interact with schools, women’s organisations, faith-based organisations and other local institutions, and jointly identify recurring problems and their underlying causes.

The Scanning, Analysis, Response, and Assessment — SARA — model discussed in the underlying paper offers one practical mechanism. Instead of repeatedly responding to individual incidents, police and communities identify recurring problems, analyse their causes, develop appropriate responses, and assess whether interventions have been effective.

This represents a fundamental change in orientation: from measuring policing primarily through arrests and responses towards measuring whether insecurity and opportunities for crime are being reduced.

Formal community structures can support this approach, provided their roles are clearly defined. Community participation should complement rather than replace professional policing. Neighbourhood watch arrangements, for example, need clear boundaries distinguishing legitimate observation and reporting from vigilantism or informal punishment.

Crime prevention requires more than the police

The development of the NCPS creates an opportunity to institutionalise crime prevention as a whole-of-government and whole-of-society responsibility.

The police are a critical component of this system, but they are only one part of the criminal justice chain. Investigation must connect effectively with prosecution, courts and correctional institutions. Weaknesses in

crime-scene management, evidence collection, staffing or prosecution capacity can undermine an otherwise successful police intervention. The underlying assessment therefore calls for a broader examination of the criminal justice system rather than treating police performance in isolation.

The same principle applies beyond the justice sector. Municipalities, schools, social services, businesses, civil society, religious leaders and traditional authorities all influence the conditions within which crime either develops or is prevented.

The National Crime Prevention Unit under the Ministry of Justice can consequently play an important coordinating role, provided that it has sufficient authority, institutional support and access to information. The original consultation process specifically envisaged cooperation between the police and the NCPU, including sharing crime statistics and participation in the Steering Committee responsible for implementing the strategy.

From consultation to implementation: policy priorities

Research finding identified the following priorities that should form the operational backbone of the National Crime Prevention Strategy:

1. **Establish a clear national governance architecture for crime prevention.** Strengthen the National Crime Prevention Unit as the coordinating mechanism for implementation of the NCPS and establish clearly defined responsibilities for the police, Ministry of Justice, prosecution, corrections, local government and other participating institutions. A multi-agency steering mechanism should oversee implementation, resolve institutional obstacles and maintain accountability for results.
2. **Institutionalise proactive and problem-oriented policing.** Shift operational emphasis from responding primarily after offences occur towards identifying recurring problems and preventing crime before it occurs. Incorporate problem-solving methodologies such as SARA into police training, station-level planning and local crime-prevention initiatives.
3. **Create locally appropriate community–police partnership structures.** Establish or strengthen regular community-police forums involving municipalities, civil society organisations, clan and traditional leaders, religious leaders, women, youth, schools and businesses. Structures should be adapted to local conditions rather than imposed through a single national template. Their mandate should focus on consultation, problem identification, information exchange and collaborative prevention not informal law enforcement.
4. **Improve police accessibility and responsiveness.** Conduct assessments of police to population ratios, station locations, staffing and response capacity. Explore practical mechanisms for bringing police services closer to underserved communities, including appropriately resourced local service points and mobility solutions. Resource allocation should be informed by crime patterns, population needs and geographical accessibility.
5. **Make trust, professionalism and accountability measurable policing priorities.** Integrate communication, human rights, procedural fairness, professional conduct and community engagement into police training and performance management. Establish credible channels through which members of the public and police personnel can report misconduct, abuse or corruption, including mechanisms capable of receiving and independently assessing confidential complaints. The assessment specifically identifies the need for mechanisms through which allegations against individual officers can be independently and anonymously investigated.
6. **Build an integrated national crime-information system.** Develop a secure national database capable of consolidating information from police, prosecution, corrections and other relevant agencies. Establish common data standards and procedures for information sharing. Complement the database with a central capacity responsible for collecting, analysing and disseminating crime statistics. Workshop participants identified both a national database and a centralised statistics centre as priority requirements.
7. **Strengthen the criminal justice chain and targeted technical capacity.** Undertake a broader capacity assessment covering investigation, crime-scene management, evidence handling, forensic capabilities and prosecution. Training should be linked to identified operational weaknesses rather than delivered as

isolated activities. Strengthening cooperation between investigators and prosecutors should form part of this process.

8. **Build inclusive and two-way public communication into the NCPS.** Develop sustained crime-prevention communication that explains how citizens can report crime, why sharing information matters and what happens after a report is made. Communication should combine traditional community structures with schools, civil society and digital and social-media channels. Police should not only request information from communities; they should also provide communities with information on relevant risks, trends and preventive measures.
9. **Strengthen protection and access to justice for women and children.** Increase the availability of appropriately trained female personnel and establish dedicated mechanisms, including child desks where appropriate, to improve the ability of women and children to access police assistance safely and effectively. This was identified directly by workshop participants as a priority institutional need.
10. **Create durable partnerships with civil society and the private sector.** Move beyond ad hoc consultation towards structured partnerships with CSOs, businesses and community institutions. Such partnerships can support prevention, communication, community mobilisation and selected resource requirements while preserving the independence and accountability of public law-enforcement institutions. Workshop participants specifically identified stronger community partnerships and public-private cooperation as key needs.

Implementation must be evidence led

The consultation process represents an important starting point, but the available perception survey should be interpreted cautiously. The consultation and perception survey should therefore be regarded as the first stage of an iterative evidence-gathering process rather than a final assessment.

As the NCPS moves towards implementation, the evidence base should progressively be strengthened through:

- broader regional consultations and more geographically representative community surveys;
- systematic collection and analysis of police, prosecution and correctional data;
- establishment of baseline indicators against which implementation can be measured;
- disaggregation of data by location, gender, age and relevant vulnerability factors;
- periodic assessments of public trust, police accessibility and perceptions of safety;
- analysis of emerging crime trends and recurring local security problems; and
- monitoring and evaluation of individual crime-prevention interventions.

Workshop participants themselves identified the establishment of a national database and a centralised statistics centre as important institutional requirements, highlighting the need for information from police, prosecution, corrections and other relevant agencies to be collected, analysed and shared systematically.

The methodological approach underpinning the NCPS is therefore best understood as consultative, evidence-informed and iterative. Its strength lies in combining institutional knowledge with community experience and using those perspectives to identify both security priorities and weaknesses in the systems intended to address them. As the strategy develops, strengthening the quality, geographic coverage and consistency of crime data will be essential for moving from perception-based diagnosis towards sustained evidence-based crime prevention.

The 67 respondents included government, police, military, prosecution, civil society and community representatives, with women comprising 55% of respondents. However, 59 of the 67 participants represented Maroodi-Jeeh, with substantially smaller representation from Awdal, Sahil and Toghdeer.

The findings should therefore be treated as an initial diagnostic rather than a nationally representative measure of crime or public opinion.

As implementation progresses, the NCPS should establish a stronger evidence base through broader regional consultations, reliable administrative crime data, community surveys and systematic monitoring of interventions. Baseline indicators should be established so that progress can be assessed against outcomes such as public trust, police accessibility, response times, reporting behaviour, recurring crime patterns and the functioning of community partnerships.

The objective should be to create a cycle in which **information informs priorities, priorities inform interventions, and evidence determines whether those interventions should be continued, modified or replaced.**

Conclusion

Somaliland has an opportunity to build a crime-prevention system around an important principle: **security is produced not by law-enforcement institutions alone, but through cooperation between legitimate institutions and the communities they serve.**

The consultative development of the National Crime Prevention Strategy already reflects this principle. Government institutions, police, criminal justice actors, civil society, traditional and religious leaders and community representatives have begun identifying shared challenges and discussing possible solutions.

The next challenge is institutionalisation.

Crime prevention will require more than a strategy document. It will require capable coordinating structures, local partnerships, reliable information, professional and accountable policing, an effective criminal justice chain and sustained investment in institutional and community capacity.

The fundamental transition is **from reacting to incidents towards preventing problems; from institutional silos towards coordination; from one-way intelligence collection towards two-way engagement; and from viewing communities as recipients of security towards recognising them as partners in creating safer communities.**

If these principles are translated into practical structures and measurable interventions, the National Crime Prevention Strategy can provide Somaliland with a framework not only for responding to present security challenges, but for strengthening institutional legitimacy, resilience and public safety over the longer term.

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