

NISA, from suspicious agency to an entity gaining public confidence

NISA



Mogadishu 24)- Somalia's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) have made tangible and progressive transformation in terms of legality of its operations and gaining of public confidence. NISA was founded fifty three years ago, and since then had been the agency that governs all security aspects of the country including the most predominant one of handling terrorism in the country. However the agency had been facing huge criticism in their operation, where majority claim the agency had been doing illegal meddling and handling of security operations, mainly by the agency leaders and officials for personal motives rather than of the public.

"There was a paramount shadow of fear but seemed to possess no power to wreak havoc," confided a current NISA official who was among the officials assigned to transform the beleaguered institution. In an exclusive conversation with Mogadishu 24, The official revealed a startling truth that had sent shockwaves through the corridors of power just a year ago.

"When President Hassan announced a 'total war' on Al-Shabaab, we convened a meeting with the organization's intelligence officers who were tasked with procuring the record files on Al-Shabaab, but we found out that there were no files, and it was all elusive. Instead, there were secret files with confidential information on politicians that had been obtained through lawful and unlawful means. From this damning revelation, the President issued a stern command that within six months, the organization must be transformed," he added.

The Intelligence agency took several approaches to restore public trust in a year's time under the new leadership of Mahad Salad who was appointed to lead NISA on May 26th, 2022



Legalizing the institution

Somalia's Parliament passed a proposed draft bill from the cabinet in February 2023; the bill was based on legalizing and the establishment of the agency after 53 years of the agency's foundation, a move welcomed by many people including politicians. The process of legalizing the Agency faced numerous challenges, as highlighted in the annual report data observed by Mogadishu 24. One of the key concerns raised during the initial meeting was the absence of retroactive rules governing the agency's operations.

This included issues related to its relationship with its International Partners, the investigation process, the rights of officers and employees, access to information, storage and sharing protocols, and the overall governance system.

"When the new Director assumed office, there were no retroactive rules that separate the activities of the agency, how it relates to its counterparts, the investigation process, the rights of officers and employees, access to information and storage and sharing process and everything about the government system," member of NISA reform team said.

To address these issues, the NISA establishment act was drafted as a solution by internal security minister with the Somali finest security experts, although it required a considerable amount of time and approval from various government agencies. The President, Prime minister, and the Speaker of the parliament collaborated closely, recognizing the significance of this law in combating the security crisis particularly in the fight against Al-Shabaab Militia.



The significance of this campaign was evident during the meeting attended by the cabinets of Ministers on January 5th, 2023, where the bill was raised. Subsequently, a series of discussions transpired within the legislative councils, garnering considerable support until the President finally signed it, effectively putting an end to the lawlessness plaguing the institution.

"My close friends and colleagues have often criticized me for confining my efforts to this particular issue, saying this reform would limit the endless power that I could obtain as the director of the institution, In response, I have consistently assured them that we shall construct formidable mechanisms, fortified by the strength of the law, which will serve as a shield to safeguard the welfare of our children and the society at large and that NISA will be serving the Somali people integrally and transparently" the NISA Director told Mogadishu 24.



Inauguration of the public complaints office

On June 12th, 2023 the office of public complaints was officially inaugurated by prime minister Hamza Abdi Barre together with the minister of security and the police commissioner. The public complaints office comes under the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) and is aimed to bridge the communication gap between the society and the agency. Through the inauguration event the office launched a hotline number that is accessible through the short number 199, intending to make it possible for citizens to reach out and share security concerns. The office emphasized that anonymity was assured for whistleblowers and complainants, ensuring the confidentiality of their personal information and safety.

"Somali Prime Minister @HamzaAbdirBarre has officially inaugurated the Public Complaints Office today, implemented by @HSNQ_NISA. Citizens can now reach out through hotline numbers to share their concerns and complaints," NISA said in a tweet.



This innovative approach has received positive feedback, with comparisons made to independent complaint offices in other countries. The initiative is seen as a crucial step in enhancing community intelligence and encouraging public trust in the intelligence agency.

'Many countries have independent offices and institutions to address violations and abuses by security agencies, which operate separately from these agencies. If the organization's leadership introduces such an innovation without coercion, it is a significant step forward. It will effectively contribute to the fight against terrorist groups, as countering terrorism serves as the foundation of community intelligence.

This is crucial for establishing public trust in intelligence agencies and promoting the sharing of terrorism-related information,' said Abdirahman Abdishakur, member of the Parliament and President's special envoy for humanitarian issues.

The Prime Minister emphasized on the importance of fostering trust between the government and the public. "Within short-term of our government, we have created close cooperation with the community which have yielded tangible results in addressing security concerns. We are fully aware of the challenges and are taking proactive measures to ensure the safety and security of our nation," Prime Minister Hamza said.

International Cooperation

The legalization and improvement of the institution as well as the resolution of political issues are believed to have opened a new chapter focused on the exchange of information between NISA and its counterparts in major governments.

Mogadishu 24 learned that most of the information regarding Al-Shabaab's financial activities has been shared by Western governments, which led to the identification of previously unknown sources of income and investors, thus depriving NISA of significant resources.

"The new data sharing protocol has instilled confidence in us regarding the reliability of our data. Initially, there were strong doubts about whether our data could be compromised and shared with the enemy; however, we established protocols with clear rules" NISA Security officer said.

The agency had active collaboration with partners engaged in counter terrorism as the country launched a total offensive against Al-Shabaab. The Security Agency's intelligence role, Somali National Army, local forces known as 'Macawisley' and International Partners resulted in the destruction of Al-Shabaab network and killing over 3,000 fighters and senior commanders in the past eight months.

"Somalia needs a friend, especially from the neighboring countries. Eastern African nations need to collaborate on many fronts, including security, economics, social integration etc.", Security expert, Abdisalan Guled said.

Community Intelligence

"The National Intelligence and Security Agency @HSQ_NISA has awarded Galbed Hussein Adan up to \$20,000 for his invaluable assistance in providing information about a planned terrorist attack on Mogadishu's peace garden," it tweeted.

For the first time, NISA announced an award presented to a member of the public for sharing information with it. This move by NISA is seen as a significant step towards bridging the gap between the community and the institution in elevating the efforts of improving the nation's security



The NISA reforms have been nothing short of a sensation among the public, who have lauded the agency's collaborative approach in bolstering its governance and protocols. Many believe that these improvements will go a long way in aiding the government's ongoing battle against the notorious Al-Shabaab group. Though the future looks brighter for a safer Somalia, the country is still in dire need of support from its global partners and regional neighbors in the form of resource and information sharing, as well as active participation in the fight against terrorism.



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