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USA

Trump’s recent racist rant against Somalia, Somalis and Somali Americans

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During a White House Easter lunch, US President Donald Trump made racist comments on people of Somali origin, calling them “low-IQ” and “bad people”.

On Wednesday, 1 April, US President Donald Trump attended an Easter lunch in the East Room of the White House. During the event, Trump called Somalia “just terrible” and “probably the worst, most dangerous country” with “no government” and “no police”. In his view, Somalis “have no money, no nothing” and “just shoot each other all day long”. Trump also called Somalis who had come to the United States, specifically to Minnesota, “low-IQ” and “bad people”, who “don’t want to work”, and accused them of having “stole[n] 19 billion dollars”. Furthermore, he insulted the Somali-born US Representative Ilhan Omar as “a stone-cold crook”, who had “married her brother”.

In his neocolonial, racist view of Somalia and its people, Trump ignores the fact that the policy of continued imperialist intervention by the United States, which supported Siad Barre’s authoritarian regime in Somalia during the Cold War to secure its geopolitical interests and counter Soviet influence, led to long-term instability, corruption and human rights violations in the country. The 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, in which US troops were involved, ended in disaster and contributed to the further destabilisation of Somalia.

Today, life expectancy among the Somali population is only 54 years for men and 59 years for women (by comparison, in the United States it is 79 years for men and 83 years for women). In the 2024 Global Hunger Index, Somalia ranks last out of 127 countries for which sufficient usable data is available. According to the index, 51.3% of the Somali population is undernourished, and 25.6% of children under the age of 5 suffer from stunted growth. Despite this situation, described as “alarming”, the Trump administration drastically cut financial support for humanitarian development programmes in Somalia in March 2025.

That Somalia’s current economic misery is not rooted in the supposed nature of Somalis, as racistly postulated by Trump, becomes clear by looking at the rich history of present-day Somalia prior to European colonisation.

A rich history

As early as 600 AD, the coastal inhabitants of East Africa were trading across the Indian Ocean for the first time. This trade between Africa’s east coast, Arabia and Asia began to flourish in the 8th century, and between the 11th and 15th centuries, the port settlements along Africa’s east coast developed into established trading cities. Muslim travellers had settled along the coast amongst the Bantu-speaking population, who were descended from immigrants from West Africa, and thus the unique hybrid Swahili culture emerged. Some 400 Swahili city-states were scattered along a 3,219 km coastline from present-day Somalia to present-day Mozambique, including Mogadishu, the current capital of Somalia.

Through trade with the African kingdoms in the interior, the Swahili obtained raw materials such as gold, copper, ivory, salt and iron from the Great Lakes region in the East African Great Rift Valley, which they transported to the coast and sold there to foreign traders from the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the Comoros, India and Madagascar. These traders arrived in dhows, Arab sailing ships, laden with cloves, pepper, ginger, jewels, pearls and more, and subsequently exported the East African goods to Oman, India, China and Cambodia.

From 1285 to 1415, the powerful Sultanate of Ifat flourished in parts of what is now Somalia, Ethiopia and Djibouti.

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Important trade routes ran from its centre, the port city of Zeila.

In 1418, Chinese sailors led by Zheng He reached East Africa and landed in Mogadishu and Brava in present-day Somalia. They began trading on equal terms with the East African population, exchanging valuable Chinese goods, including silk and porcelain, for local goods such as animal skins, tortoiseshell and rhinoceros horns. This trade in luxury goods and artefacts between China and East Africa boosted the incomes of East African artisans and merchants, thereby increasing the prosperity of East African societies.

That Trump is seemingly unaware of and uninterested in learning about the rich history of present-day Somalia, which contradicts his racist worldview, is a testimony of his neo-colonial, imperialist ignorance.

5 April 2026

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