

## FOREWORD

This issue of *Bildhaan* is dedicated to some of the commissioned proceedings of an international conference, "Somalis in America: The Challenges of Adaptation," which was held at Macalester College, July 15–17, 2004.

It has been fourteen years since the collapse of the state in Somalia and, although a new government might be forming as this issue goes to press, peace and economic survival continue to be precarious. In the diaspora, an uneven and challenging process of integration and acculturation is in full swing. Many Somali refugees and immigrants are still struggling to establish their lives, but many are doing increasingly well, entering white-collar jobs, setting up businesses, and graduating from colleges.

Somalis are posing challenges to the host society in many arenas, but they also have much to offer to the communities of which they have become, or are becoming, a part. The conference, and this issue of *Bildhaan* to which it gave rise, focused on both sides of this equation.

For those who are curious about the full details, we have included the comprehensive programs at the end of the issue. The conference, the first of its kind in the United States, had three main objectives:

- To understand Somalis as a stateless people scattered all over the world, and the implications of this condition for Somali identity and for Somali efforts to reinvent themselves and create new lives in America and elsewhere;
- To identify how host communities can best assist in Somali resettlement;
- To disseminate this information as widely as possible by publishing the proceedings of the conference in *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, and broadcasting the video and audiotapes of the event on local Minnesota television access channels and radio stations.

Operationally, the program consisted of four elements:

- Four commissioned essays  
These essays cover such areas as citizenship; educating immigrant youth; life in small town Minnesota; mental health; entrepreneurial

activities; and remittances. We conclude with a brief but moving *buraanbur* by a Somali scientist.

- Five roundtable conversations

The roundtables covered topics that included comparative experiences from other parts of the United States, Europe, and Canada; health and disease; education; women; and the role of sponsoring institutions.

- Two evening dinners in which a rich and exquisite range of Somali cooking was served to over 250 guests

- Two commissioned full-house evening concerts performed by some of Somalia's greatest musical artists

The materials for the first concert night were drawn from the vast universe of Somali love songs; the second evening was heavy with songs that dealt with the sorrowful circumstances of civil strife, destruction of national institutions, and flight to other parts of the world.

All told, over 400 individuals (about 70 percent Somali and 30 percent non-Somali) attended the conference. We are grateful to have had the financial support of the following institutions: Macalester College; Global Partners; the St. Paul Foundation; St. Paul Travelers; the Minneapolis Foundation; Westminster Presbyterian Church; and the House of Hope Presbyterian Church.

In addition, we are fortunate to have had the organizing competence of Margaret Beegle, the assistant editor of *Bildhaan*, and four of our students, namely, Anna Kläppe, Jesse Ugglä, Emily Cintora, and Lauren Schrero. The latter give concrete meaning to the reputation of Macalester College as a leader among this nation's internationalist colleges.

Finally, we must register our deep appreciation of the contributors who traveled from long distances, including outside of North America: the contingent of Somali artists, led by Ahmed Ismail Hussein—"Hodeide" and Faduma Qasim Hiloule; the families of Qamar Ibrahim, Fadumo Aye, and Sirad Awl; David Reynolds of our media services; Kim David of our publications office; Peggy Lemmon, the manager of our Alumni House; and, not the least, the discussion leaders and the authors of these pieces. The success of the conference is testimony to what can be achieved by a communal effort.