Thank you for joining us for today’s Spotlight program. I’m Liz Waid. And I’m Ruby Jones. Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand, no matter where in the world they live. Somalia is in East Africa. It is a country with a long history and beautiful culture. For generations, the Somali people have continued their culture through poetry. People have called it a country of poets. The Somali people do have a written language. It was developed in 1972. However, they communicate most through spoken word. It is an oral culture. For this reason, Somali poems are usually spoken, not read. Somalis gather in groups to perform and listen to poetry. Often, they perform the poetry to music. This kind of musical poem is called a ballad. Recently, Somalis have also started listening to poetry on cassettes and the radio. One well-known Somali ballad tells the story of a boy. The boy tells about his life. And he tells about his experience during the continuing Somali civil war. After thanking the listeners, he explains, “In the beginning, we were a family of six [6] children with a mother and a father. At the beginning of the Somali civil war, we lost our father. We could not find any trace of him - dead or alive.” He then continues to tell his horrible story. His brothers found a small bomb while they played. It exploded and killed them all. On the same day, his mother gave birth to another son. However, both his mother and new brother died when a bomb hit the hospital. He continues by telling of how he tried to find his uncle - his parent’s brother - in another town. On his way, people stole the car he was in and took everything. They left the boy on the road. He walked all day and night to his uncle’s town. He had no shoes. He had no food. And he was tired. He finally arrived in the town. However, it was there that he understood he was an orphan. He had no mother and no father. And he was unable to care for himself. The boy in the ballad represents all Somali children. Today, children in Somalia experience many terrible things. In two thousand and eight [2008], the United Nations said that Somalia is the most difficult place in the world for children to live. There are many reasons why Somalia is a difficult place for children. The Somali ballad continues by sharing some of these reasons. The boy explains, “We are lost,” One million [1,000,000] Somali people are refugees. They are “lost” because they cannot return home. Many of these refugees are children. And many live in temporary camps and poor conditions. Other Somali children are “lost” because they have no family. Over six hundred thousand [600,000] Somali children are orphans. Many of their parents died in the war. Other parents died from an extreme lack of water or in natural disasters like floods. Shelters were established to care for orphaned children. However, as conditions in Somalia have become worse, many shelters have closed. And these children have to live on the streets. Another growing problem is separated Somali children. These “lost” children are separated from their parents. They are illegally sent to other countries. Some parents choose to have their children sent away. They hope that their children will have better lives. However, some children are stolen. And some are even sold by their parents. These children face great risks all alone. The boy from the ballad shares another problem for Somali children. He says, “we cannot read or write,” In 2006, the United Nations reported that only twelve [12] percent of young children attend school in Somalia. This is one of the lowest attendance rates in the world. And girls attend school at an even lower rate than boys. The percent of Somalis that can read is also among the lowest in the world. Because Somalia has an oral culture, literacy rates have always been lower. Now, the country has experienced many years of war and poor conditions. And this has kept even more children from learning to read and write. The boy from the ballad continues sharing about a major issue for Somali children. He says, “the civil wars have damaged us,” There has been fighting between groups in Somalia for over twenty years. Over half of the people in Somalia are under the age of eighteen [18]. So, over half of Somalis have never experienced peace or a national government. Some groups in Somalia have used children as soldiers. Many child soldiers and innocent children have been killed or wounded. The children of Somalia are also emotionally wounded. They suffer from great fear, sadness and much anger. The boy tells of another major problem in Somalia. He says, “we have little to eat or drink,” In fact, seventeen [17] percent of children in Somalia suffer from malnutrition. They are in severe need of food and drink. This amount is above the World Health Organization’s emergency levels for malnutrition. This means that the children of Somalia are in a food crisis. And the rising price of food in the world makes the problem even worse. The boy declares, “we are surrounded by terrible events, and we are victims of unkind treatment.” Children who are lost, without education or food and living in war are at great risk. People can easily hurt these children and treat them badly. The children of Somalia suffer much - from sickness, attacks, poverty and much more. They are children at risk. In 2008, the leader of UN Children’s group in Somalia called Somalia “the forgotten crisis.” After so many years of war and bad conditions, the world has forgotten about Somalia. And it has forgotten about Somalia’s children. However, the world must learn about and remember Somalia. The children of Somalia are depending on us all. In the closing words of the Somali ballad, the boy speaks again for the children of Somalia. And he says, “We appeal to the International community, who look after and support human rights. Look and see the war, recognize all the disasters. If you do not help us, our future will be lost and our lives will be at an end.” So, how can you help the children of Somalia to be heard? What can the international community do to support the children? You can e-mail us your ideas about the children of Somalia to radio @ English . net. The writer and producer of this program was Robin Basselin. The voices you heard were from the United States and the United Kingdom. All quotes were adapted for this program. The music and words for the Somali ballad were from a special BBC series called “Children of Conflict.” Computer users can visit our website at http://www.Radio.English.net. This program is called “Somali Ballad.”