

# TedxMogadishu and its spiritual predecessor, Elman the Electrician

By [Greg Marinovich](#)

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Many of the tweets joked about camel milk and the possibility of, perhaps next year, camel cheese, Insha'Allah. Others spoke of the "rebirth of hope", while one participant tweeted "TedxMogadishu event was not a success by itself. Poorly organised, no sound system, didn't follow the ted rules..." Wait a bit, did that tweet say TedxMogadishu? As in Somalia, Mogadishu? On the same day that news reports told of five Somalis killed in bomb attacks in the capital, tweets and video emanated from a secret location in Mogadishu, known only to the participants?



TEDx is an offshoot of the Technology, Entertainment and Design Talks concept, albeit one that the participants themselves have to organise. There have been TEDx events in Hanoi, Baghdad, and now Somalia. No wonder the TED folk want to maintain a little distance - TED usually boasts speakers like Richard Dawkins and Al Gore on "ideas worth spreading".

No such high-profile luminary was going to venture into the world's most dangerous city, in the world's most dangerous country, no matter how badly that country needs ideas worth spreading.

Instead, a few intrepid Somalis trying to rebuild their once-lovely city on the shores of the Indian Ocean got together to do a little morale boosting of their own. Video streaming showed the hundred-odd participants chanting "I love Mogadishu, I LOVE Mogadishu!"

The secret location turned out to be the premises of Somalia's first commercial bank to operate after 21 years of war, famine, farce and complete misery for the majority of Somalis. The founder of the bank, Liban Egal, had returned from America to take advantage of relative peace in the wake of the expulsion of Islamic fundamentalist group Al-Shabaab by forces loyal to the Somali government. (Actually, they were expelled by African Union muscle in the form of Ethiopian, Ugandan, Kenyan and Burundian troops.)

Other entrepreneurs, like property developers and camel traders, were also part of this rather extraordinary meeting, where ideas about innovation, freedom to reach your potential, tapping into technology to improve lives, are discussed. Yet Somalia is more about survival, in its most basic sense, where the ability to feed one's family is a success story.

The conference was meant to give a boost to the recent stability by encouraging investment in the city, and eventually the rest of the country. This is not as far-fetched as the more cynical might think - Turkish Airlines now flies regularly to Mogadishu, and Somalis from the diaspora are keen to investigate business opportunities back home.

Continue reading the [full story](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za) on [www.dailymaverick.co.za](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Marinovich is an award-winning South African photojournalist, film maker and photo editor. He co-authored the book *The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War*, which details South Africa's transition to democracy. In the 1990s, Greg worked as the chief photographer in Israel and for the Associated Press. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Spot News Photography in 1991 for his coverage of African National Congress supporters brutally murdering a man they believed to be an Inkatha spy. He has also received a Leica Award and a Visa d'Or.

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