



United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM)

Statement by Special Representative of the Secretary-General Catriona Laing to the Security Council on the situation in Somalia

(As delivered, New York, 19 February 2024)

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

I welcome this opportunity to address you on developments in Somalia since my last briefing in October. I am pleased to do so alongside the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC), Souef Mohamed El-Amine. I pay tribute to the African Union's mission, ATMIS, and the dedicated service of its personnel and troops.

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has made solid progress in recent months in the implementation of its priorities, including the completion of a critical security roadmap presented at the Somalia Security Conference on 12 December last year. Since my last briefing, Somalia has also gained admission to the East African Community, reached the completion point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, secured the lifting of the arms embargo and most recently secured the endorsement of the African Union (AU) Executive Council for a seat on the Security Council in 2025-26. These are very significant achievements.

The UN family in Mogadishu has faced a challenging start to the year, particularly the incident that took place in Galmudug on 10 January involving one of our helicopters. We are working closely with the Federal Government and all partners to secure the safe return of passengers and crew. I would also like to recognise the tragic death of a member of the United Nations Guard Force Unit (UNGU) who was killed in an Al-Shabaab indirect fire attack on our UN compound on 11 January. Despite these tragic events, our focus remains on supporting Somalia with its rightly ambitious agenda over the year ahead.

My briefing today will provide brief updates on eight areas:

1. Political developments
2. Regional developments
3. Security update
4. Women, peace and security
5. Human rights
6. Humanitarian situation and links to climate change
7. Economic development
8. Transition

Political developments

Madam President, I will begin with an update on political developments.

The National Consultative Council (NCC) proposals of 27 May on the proposed new electoral model continue to be debated intensely. On the positive side, there is broad public support for the transition to One-Person, One-Vote (OPOV) elections, but there is also a realisation that the timelines proposed by the NCC are too ambitious. The UN is working with the Ministry of Interior Federal Affairs and Reconciliation to develop a realistic plan which will ensure the momentum towards OPOV is maintained.

We welcome the recent approval by Parliament of the procedural rules for constitutional changes. This sets a clear pathway on process. It is now urgent to reach an inclusive consensus on the electoral framework. On the constitution, we encourage all parties to engage in the spirit of compromise to finalise the process. Without an agreed constitution, Somalia remains vulnerable to perennial crises with no agreed rules of the game to enable resolution.

I commend the people of the Federal Member State of Puntland on the peaceful conclusion of the electoral process on 8 January 2024. President Said Abdullahi Deni – the sixth President of Puntland – was re-elected by the Puntland State Assembly to a second term in office. The presence of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and three Federal Member State Presidents at the inauguration on 25 January was a positive signal. We hope this has created the foundation for a reset of dialogue with full re-engagement of President Deni in the NCC process. The planned Garowe conference on the future of Somalia could be an important part of this reset, with the opportunity for wider consultation with key stakeholders, including women and youth.

In Laascaanood and the Sool region, the situation has remained calm since the violence of November 2023. There is, however, no formal ceasefire. We continue to urge all parties to work towards an immediate exchange of detainees, a commitment to no further violence and to start dialogue to address the underlying drivers of the conflict. We continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected and to support the de-mining and early recovery.

Regional developments

Madam President, my second update concerns regional developments.

On 1 January, Ethiopia and “Somaliland” announced a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which reportedly grants Ethiopia a 50-year lease of 20 kilometres of coastline in exchange for certain political and economic benefits to “Somaliland.” The full details of the MOU are not available, but public pronouncements have generated strong hostile public reactions in Somalia. It is also worrying to see Al-Shabaab exploiting this situation as a tool for recruitment. We recognise that the strong feelings in Somalia are putting pressure on the Government to respond, and we encourage the President to remain measured in his response.

I echo the words of the Secretary-General who has recalled that the Security Council has repeatedly affirmed its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Somalia, and

called for all parties to engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue and to refrain from inflammatory words or actions that could further escalate tensions.

This situation must be resolved through constructive dialogue. In that regard, it is disappointing that no significant progress was made at the recent Africa Union summit.

Security update

Madam President, my third update focuses on the security situation.

Countering Al-Shabaab remains one of the Government's top priorities. Heavy rains and flooding hampered operations towards the end of 2023. However, since the rains eased in December, government forces have had some success in the south and east of Galmudug state. The Government is now preparing for the resumption of large-scale operations.

The UN is pleased to report some positive developments on stabilisation in newly recovered areas. Specifically, there has been progress in the delivery of rule of law, governance, reconciliation, and the provision of basic services. UN joint programmatic efforts are being deployed in recovered areas; nevertheless, funding for those initiatives remains limited. I urge international partners to provide the resources needed to meet vital stabilisation needs in newly recovered areas.

The handover of security responsibilities of the State House and Villa Somalia to the National Security Forces on 14 December 2023 was an important symbolic milestone for Somalia. There were some delays on completion of Phase 2 drawdown, but it was completed successfully in full by the end of January.

As planning is now underway for a new AU-led mission from January 2024, plans for drawdown may need to be revised to allow for a smooth transition to any new force and to prevent a security vacuum from emerging during the transition phase. It is essential that any further drawdown of ATMIS forces is undertaken in a manner which ensures protection for local communities and enables the ongoing presence of the international community in Somalia.

I welcome the commitment by the Federal Government on 11 February to relocate all high-explosive ammunition from the Halane armoury by 25 February. This is critical to minimise the danger posed to the international community and surrounding local residents.

Women, peace and security

Madam President, my fourth update is on Women, Peace and Security.

We have continued to work with the Government, women in the Federal Parliament and civil society to advance the implementation of the 30 per cent women's quota. Despite concerted efforts, women's political participation and representation remains a significant challenge. To illustrate this, only one of the new members of Parliament of Puntland is a woman, among sixty-six representatives. The electoral model, security issues, patriarchal structures, and the lack of financing for female political campaigns have all contributed to this under-representation.

I met again with senior women leaders in February. They had three key messages for me. Firstly, a minimum of 30 per cent representation at all levels must be enshrined in the constitution currently under review. Secondly, they reiterated their strong support for one-person, one-vote elections. And thirdly, they strongly oppose the Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and “Somaliland” given its potential to lead to conflict in the region, recognising the disproportionate effect conflict has on women and girls.

Human rights

Madam President, my fifth update concerns Human Rights.

On the legislative front, the Offences of Rape and Indecency Bill (ORIB) was approved by the Somali Cabinet. Defining a child as a person under the age of 18 years is a positive step. However, there are articles in the bill that are not aligned with international human rights standards. For example, the definition of rape must contain the element of consent as part of the crime, and the crimes of indecency must be clearly defined so that conduct that is prohibited and is punishable under the law is clear. The UN has offered technical assistance to promote compliance and is working with partners to advocate for the Bill to be amended to comply with international human rights standards.

I’m concerned about the high number of children casualties due to explosive remnants of war and crossfire incidents which have had a particular impact on children. I remain gravely preoccupied by the number of violations attributed to Al-Shabaab as well as the group’s continued abduction of children for the purposes of recruitment and use. I call on all parties to the conflict to immediately cease and prevent violations and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Humanitarian situation and links to climate change

Madam President, my sixth update is on the humanitarian situation and links to climate change.

Somalia’s humanitarian crisis remains dire. In 2023, Somalia experienced the worst drought in decades, followed by El Niño impacts leading to heavy rains and extensive flooding in October and November 2023. This affected more than 2.4 million people, inundated farmlands, and damaged critical infrastructure.

The 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan will require USD 1.6 billion to meet the needs of 5.2 million most vulnerable people in Somalia. This is, however, a 37 per cent reduction from 2023. This reduction is in line with a new approach to make the humanitarian response highly targeted and prioritised, given the dwindling funding outlook globally. This will require greater collaboration with development and peace actors to address underlying vulnerabilities.

Integrating climate resilience strategies into the humanitarian assistance is important for creating sustainable, long-term solutions to Somalia’s complex challenges, and this demands a holistic response that goes beyond the traditional aid models in order to build resilience through durable solutions. Following the recent Committee of Parties (COP28) and HIPC completion, there is significant momentum to advance access to climate financing to Somalia. Somalia also joined

the Task Force to Access Climate Finance, which should allow it to unlock funding pledged at COP28.

Economic development

Madame President, my seventh update is on economic development.

I would like to congratulate the Government and all partners that supported Somalia to successfully conclude the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief process in December. It is encouraging that Somalia will access grant financing from the World Bank for another year. The UN supports the Government's priorities on domestic revenue mobilisation, accountability and commitment to deliver social services for its citizens.

On financing for state-building, the UN is facing a huge shortfall for its strategically important joint programming. Without adequate funding, we will not be able to deliver on the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which is aligned with Somalia's National Development Plan. I urge international partners to make adequate resources available to the Somalia Joint Fund.

Transition planning

Last but not least, Madam President, I would like to update you on strategic aspects of transition planning.

At the Security Conference in December, the Federal Government of Somalia presented its plan for the transition of full security responsibility to national ownership. International partners signalled their collective intention to support the FGS in countering insurgency and building a stable and prosperous future. As the ATMIS drawdown proceeds, Somalia has requested a new, repurposed, and smaller AU mission, focused on protection. This security umbrella will also be essential to enable the implementation of the UN mandate and the efforts of the wider international community in Somalia.

The Federal Government of Somalia is requesting an evolved UN logistics support package to strengthen national systems and capacity. The United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) Independent Review, will explore how to achieve this in a way that strengthens the capacity of the Somali Government. Predictable, sustainable funding for the new AU mission is vital. We are working with the AU and FGS, to explore all potential funding modalities, including applying resolution 2719 on the financing of African Union-led Peace Support Operations. We are also working with AU and partners to ensure our collective support to the security sector is more coherent and establish more innovative, nimble, cost-effective ways of working. We recognise we must 'do business' differently to ensure a more sustainable approach.

Conclusion

Madam President, in conclusion, Somalia remains resilient and the Federal Government's commitment to its state-building agenda remains strong. The efforts of the campaign against insurgency are commendable, but much more is needed to ensure that its gains are sustained. I

would like to assure the people of Somalia of the UN's unwavering support towards the state-building agenda and to underscore that the support of this Council is central to Somalia's success. Through our collective support, Somalia is demonstrating that a country can emerge from prolonged conflict to one that delivers for its people and acts as a force for good in the region.

Thank you.