



## **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 October 2023)*

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

I am pleased to address you on developments in Somalia since my last briefing in June. I am delighted to do so alongside the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) Souef Mohamed El-Amine. I want to pay tribute to the African Union's mission, ATMIS and the dedicated service of its personnel and troops. At the beginning of my intervention, I would also like to reiterate the commitment and dedication of the United Nations to support Somalia on its historic journey to create, as President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud says, 'Somalia, a country at peace with itself and the world.'

Mr. President, since my last briefing, I updated the Council on the situation in Laascaanood on 7 September. Also, I briefed the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict on 6 September.

My briefing today will provide brief updates on eight areas:

1. Political developments
2. Laascaanood
3. Security (including the ongoing offensive, stabilisation and the impact of ATMIS drawdown)
4. Women, Peace and Security
5. Humanitarian situation and links to climate change
6. Human rights
7. Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC)
8. Transition

#### **Political developments**

Mr. President, my first update is on political developments. The 27 May National Consultative Council (NCC) communique set out four specific proposals for a future electoral system with moves to: (i) a presidential system, (ii) a two-party system, (iii) one-person-one-vote throughout the country; and (iv) dates for local council elections and alignment of federal member states (FMS) terms of office.

These four proposals continue to dominate the political debate. In particular, the proposed change to a presidential system and the proposed synchronisation of FMS-election schedules with the implication for extension of incumbent mandates have proved contentious. There are particular tensions around term extensions in South West and Jubaland States. I continue to stress that all constitutional amendments, including a decision on term extensions, should be based on inclusive dialogue, consensus and legislative processes.

I remain concerned that Puntland has not participated in the NCC since January 2023 and I urge the Puntland state government and the Federal Government to seek spaces of compromise and pursue dialogue to enable the constitutional process to move ahead. The constitutional review serves as the cornerstone of Somalia's state-building agenda and is key to reach an agreement on federalism in the country.

## **Laascaanood**

Mr. President, my second update covers Laascaanood. As highlighted in my latest briefing to the Council, the conflict in Laascaanood escalated on 25 August when the Dhulbahante militia advanced toward the town of Oog. Currently, the situation is calm, and people are returning home. However, the potential for a relapse into violence cannot be ruled out.

The United Nations continues to convene partners to coordinate our joint efforts towards conflict resolution. Following the 25 August events, we issued a joint statement on 27 August condemning the escalation of the conflict and calling for all involved to abide by human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. My team and I have had numerous engagements with all key stakeholders, including President Bihi, President Deni of Puntland, elders, the Dhulbahante leaders, and the newly formed Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC) Committee. Our key messages to all parties are (i) to push for an immediate exchange of detainees, (ii) a commitment to no further violence and (iii) to the start of dialogue. The UN is also supporting demining efforts and a humanitarian needs assessment to enable people to return home.

## **Security update**

Mr. President, my third update focuses on the security situation, where I will cover three issues: (1) the ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab; (2) stabilisation efforts in newly recovered areas; and (3) the ATMIS drawdown, and its impact on the population and the UN's ability to deliver on its mandate.

### **Offensive against Al-Shabaab**

The President was in Dhusamareb – the capital of Galmudug state – from 5 August until 8 October to direct the military campaign against Al-Shabaab. Despite initial success when the Somali National Army and allied clan militias took significant territory, there have been setbacks and operational challenges have been faced since. Government forces are focused on regrouping, reinforcing, and reorganising, as well as mobilising additional support from clans, before resuming large-scale operations. In parallel, smaller-scale operations in Galmudug and Hirshabelle by the Somali National Army with ATMIS support are making progress.

In response to its own setbacks, Al-Shabaab has increased the use of 107mm rockets, particularly in Mogadishu. It has also conducted targeted attacks on high-profile Somali politicians.

Conflicts in Somalia continue to take a heavy toll on civilians. Last year, we saw the largest increase in civilian casualties since 2017. Sadly, early data indicate a similar trend in 2023, with 1,289 civilian casualties recorded so far. This is partly attributable to Al-Shabaab attacks but also the conflict in Laascaanood.

### **Stabilisation**

Turning now to stabilisation. The main findings and recommendations of the recently completed independent assessment will inform UN future efforts and guide our work. Two issues in particular need attention: (i) generating sufficient police capacity to hold recovered areas; and (ii) mobilising additional resources from partners for stabilisation.

On policing, the forthcoming Somalia Security Conference in December will present a more detailed needs assessment. In the meantime, while the Government continues to rely on local militia to hold recovered areas, it is essential to ensure they operate within a clear legal framework.

On funding, the stabilisation programmes are drastically under-resourced, with only \$20 million/year being spent. I urge all our partners to scale up support for stabilisation to ensure hard-won security victories can translate into better lives for Somalis.

#### ATMIS drawdown and impact on citizens and UN operations

A particular challenge over August and September was that the military offensive was taking place alongside preparations for the second phase of the drawdown. The subsequent request by the Federal Government of Somalia for a 90-day technical delay, while maintaining overall security transition timelines, was endorsed by the African Union Peace and Security Council on 30 September. Work is now underway to mobilise the funding to support this. I urge all partners to consider providing support to fill the funding gap for ATMIS to ensure the mission can deliver its mandate, and troops do not go unpaid.

Mr. President, the UN is now assessing the drawdown and its implications. Our foremost concern is the impact of the drawdown on the civilian population. As such, I welcome the recent Joint Technical Assessment, which reviewed lessons from the Phase I drawdown on civilian populations. The safety and security of Somali people must be at the centre of our minds as we move forward with the transition. For the UN, we are assessing the potential impact of the drawdown on our operations and our ability to deliver our mandate.

#### Women, Peace and Security

Mr. President, my fourth update is on Women, Peace and Security, which remains at the forefront of UNSOM's work. The UN is working with the Government through the joint programme on Women, Peace and Protection, focusing on engaging and empowering women in peace-building processes. As the UN scales up its work on stabilisation in newly recovered areas, we are paying particular attention to the role of women as peacemakers. The UN also continues to undertake advocacy to strengthen the legislative framework for addressing impunity regarding sexual violence.

On the political side, UNSOM continues to work with female members of the federal Parliament, including as part of the ongoing efforts to implement the 30 per cent quota for women. To this end, capacity development training for parliamentarians continues to be provided by the United Nations. I also recently met with courageous Somali women leaders and heard of their pioneering work to ensure Somali women play a significant role in critical areas, from politics to climate change. These women stressed the need to agree on a clear plan to achieve the 30 per cent women's quota. In our engagements with Somali officials, the United Nations continues to raise the importance of women's rights and to ensure women are consulted and their views are reflected in legislative frameworks.

#### Humanitarian situation and links to climate change

Mr. President, the fifth part of my briefing focuses on the humanitarian situation and links to climate change. The humanitarian crisis in Somalia remains deeply concerning, with close to four million people continuing to be food insecure and in need of assistance. The situation is projected to deteriorate further from mid-October to December, mainly due to the enhanced Deyr rains exacerbated by the El Niño phenomenon expected to cause flash and riverine floods in large parts of the country. The number of food-insecure people is predicted to rise to around 4.3 million, with 1.2 million displaced. It is essential that we scale up programmes that tackle the underlying

drivers of the humanitarian crisis and integrate humanitarian response with longer-term climate adaptation.

Critical is also the funding of the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, which seeks more than 2.6 billion dollars to meet the priority needs of 7.6 million people. Currently, the plan is only 39.4 per cent funded, and partners are having to prioritise the most vulnerable in areas with the greatest severity of needs. I call on all of Somalia's friends to increase the much-needed funding and to do so without delay.

## **Human Rights**

Mr. President, my sixth update will be on human rights. Legislative developments in the reporting period are encouraging. I commend the Federal Government for approving the Disability Rights Bill as well as the Child Rights Bill and the Juvenile Justice Bill. The Age Verification Policy, the first formal procedure for age assessment in the country was also adopted. The UN provided technical support and advice in drafting these bills and policy, and I use this opportunity to call for their timely enactment and implementation.

Despite this progress, more needs to be done. I reiterate my call for the Somali authorities to urgently adopt legislation to address sexual violence crimes in compliance with the international human rights obligations to which Somalia has already committed. I also urge the Government to harmonise all legislative and policy reforms to define the child as a person under the age of 18 years. As highlighted in my briefing to the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Government must take all necessary precautions to protect children during military operations.

## **Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC)**

Mr. President my seventh update is on the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). I am encouraged by the commitment and progress made by the Government of Somalia towards reaching the HIPC completion point by December. I welcome in particular the passage of the Audit Bill as one of the final milestones. Looking ahead, it is essential that agreement is reached with Puntland to ensure the state can benefit from post HIPC large scale concessional finance and to enable the finalisation of the fiscal federal model for Somalia as a whole.

## **Transition**

Finally, Mr. President I would like to update on the UN's preparation for the three transitions outlined in the 2022 UNSOM strategic review. The Transition Cell is now fully established with three different work streams for each of the three transitions. You will hear from the SRCC more detail on the security transition. Looking ahead, I commend the Government for the work underway to prepare for a post-2024 security architecture. It is essential to prepare early for a smooth security transition and for this to be based on a clear assessment of capabilities needed and funding requirements. I look forward to the December security conference, which will be a critical opportunity to agree on the detail of the post-2024 security architecture.

In conclusion, Mr. President and Distinguished members of the Council, Somalia is at a critical juncture. While there is every expectation that Somalia will prevail, this is more likely if there is honest reflection of areas where things are off track as well as celebrating many successes. I urge all international partners to continue to support Somalia to ensure we lock in the gains achieved so far. The UN remains firmly committed to supporting Somalia to achieve and consolidate peace and prosperity.

Thank you.