



Serving the people of Somalia

HIGHLIGHTS

- International partners call for ongoing dialogue among Somali leaders
- Somalia Partnership Forum takes stock of country's progress, identifies priorities
- UN Special Representative briefs Security Council on the situation in Somalia
- Somali government and international partners meet to improve security and rule of law
- International partner representatives visit Somalia's Federal Member States
- UN Peacebuilding Commission holds first meeting on Somalia since 2015
- As poll preparations begin, Somali journalists undertake training on elections reporting
- Somalia among Horn of Africa countries threatened by desert locust upsurge



INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS CALL FOR ONGOING DIALOGUE AMONG SOMALI LEADERS

In December, Somalia's international partners* issued a joint statement in which they highlighted how the recently-concluded Somalia Partnership Forum had enabled all involved to openly exchange views on current developments in the country.

They added that the Forum allowed all involved to agree on the 2021 Mutual Accountability Framework, which sets out key priorities on inclusive politics, security and justice, and social and economic development.

However, the partners also stated that they remain deeply concerned about the ongoing disagreements over the implementation of the 2020/21 electoral process, and that further discussion and agreement is also needed on how the 30 per cent women's quota in committees, amongst delegates, and for seats will be assured.

The partners said these disagreements need to be resolved in a manner that respects the 17 September political agreement and

the implementation protocols signed by the Federal and Federal Member State (FMS) leaders on 1 October. Initiating a parallel process or imposing disputed electoral management committees that do not meet the agreed criteria undermines the legitimacy of the electoral process and creates instability, they added.

The statement continued as follows:

"We therefore reiterate our call on the Federal and FMS leaders to reconvene urgently and to reach out to other stakeholders to resolve concerns about the management of the electoral process through consensus-building so that timely, transparent, and credible elections embraced by the Somali people and all key stakeholders can take place. To that end, we welcome Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Roble's commitment to convene the leaders in Mogadishu following his current visits to the Federal Member States.

"We stand ready to provide support to the Federal and State electoral committees once the dialogue to resolve the dispute over their composition is successfully concluded. Transparency and good faith in implementing the electoral process according to the agreed rules will also be important.

"We also stress that regular meetings of the Federal and FMS leaders throughout the electoral process and continuation of the Dhusamareb spirit of compromise will help keep the electoral process on track. "The institutionalization of such

meetings of the leaders will help prevent the recurrence of a protracted political impasse. To that end we would urge parties to recall commitments made at the Somalia Partnership Forum under the 2021 Mutual Accountability Framework to a secure electoral process based on ongoing dialogue, and to the establishment of a mechanism for dialogue on this process to meet not less than monthly.

"In the coming weeks, we look forward to working with the Federal Government and FMSs to advance other key decisions from the Somalia Partnership Forum that require immediate follow-up. These include safeguarding the gains from the review of the Constitution prior to elections, consultations on developing the 2024/25 elections roadmap, signing the audit bill, finalizing the Somali Transition Plan, and preparing for the force generation conference planned for January 2021.

"In the meantime, we call on all stakeholders to refrain from any statements or actions that could create tensions or incite violence."

*African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Belgium, Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, European Union, Finland, Germany, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Qatar, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, and the United Nations.



SOMALIA PARTNERSHIP FORUM

TAKES STOCK OF COUNTRY'S PROGRESS, IDENTIFIES PRIORITIES

The Federal Government of Somalia and its international partners gathered in early December in the capital for a one-day, high-level meeting – the Somalia Partnership Forum (SPF) – dedicated to taking stock of the progress made by the country in various areas, as well as agree on priorities ahead of it.

Like last year, this year's SPF was held in Mogadishu, and the topics covered included the country's elections, the fight against Al-Shabaab and security transition planned for 2021, economic development and more.

Somalia's elections figured prominently in the remarks of Somalia's Prime Minister Mohamed H. Roble, who also chaired the SPF, which drew representatives from the country's Federal Member States as well as international partners.

Referring to the decision not to proceed with 'one person, one vote' elections for the current electoral cycle, the Prime Minister said that particular model of voting was an aspiration of all Somalis and he pledged early preparations for them in the next cycle, involving dialogue with Federal Member States.

With international support, Somalia remains committed to implementing key financial and economic reforms.

"The Federal Government of Somalia has already embarked on a process to draft a roadmap for universal suffrage elections to take place in 2024/2025. The process will require engagement with a range of key stakeholders including our Federal Member States, civil society, political parties, to ensure inclusive and credible elections in the future," the Prime Minister said.

In his remarks to the SPF, delivered via video link, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, called for dialogue to solve Somalia's challenges with the current

elections, and highlighted the need for a practical roadmap with clear benchmarks that would lead to 'one person, one vote' elections in the next electoral cycle.

The UN envoy pointed to the consensus that was reached among the Federal Government and the Federal Member States, which led to the agreement on the current indirect elections, as evidence of what could be achieved through consensus-building and dialogue among leaders.

He also spoke of the need for progress with the country's constitutional review process during the current parliamentary sitting in order to avoid delays.

"We believe it is very important that the progress achieved on the non-contentious issues be secured prior to the end of this parliament, so that it is not necessary to





start over again. This too will require a dialogue between federal leadership and the Federal Member States. We hope that it can proceed quickly. It will also be important to include women, civil society organisations and other groups that have in the past been excluded. But constitutional reform remains a critical priority that we would like to see more progress,” the UN envoy said.

With international support, Somalia remains committed to implementing key financial and economic reforms.

Communiqué issued

At the end of the SPF, a communiqué was issued which stated that “continued inclusive dialogue to build on the consensus-based agreement is necessary to ensure the timely implementation of credible and acceptable elections in order to preserve the Somali tradition of a peaceful transfer of power.”

It also stated that Somalia committed to approve non-contentious changes to the Provision Constitution before the end of the current political cycle. In the communiqué, international partners agreed to support Somalia on this and other

commitments, such as the continuation of the national reconciliation process with the representation of all sections of Somali society, particularly women.

The international partners also agreed to continue supporting the transition involving Somalia taking over lead responsibility for the country’s security from peacekeeping forces of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), including the reconfiguration of AMISOM in order to better counter Al-Shabaab and accelerate the transition.

The communiqué noted that the country had made significant progress on economic development, notably the historic achievement of reaching ‘Decision Point’ under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in March this year. It pointed to more effort in this area.

“With international support, Somalia remains committed to implementing key financial and economic reforms, increasing transparency and accountability, including the transfer of funds from the Federal Government to the Member States, seeking membership of the World Trade Organisation, promoting equitable inclusive economic growth, and seeking enhanced regional economic integration as a means to greater prosperity,” it stated.

International partners agreed to support Somalia in the development of national approach on the impact of climate change on human security, public policy, prioritizing youth empowerment and employment generation, building resilience through

social protection, strengthening the government’s ability to deliver services to the population, addressing the harmful effects of COVID-19 and enhancing government legitimacy.

Furthermore, international partners also committed to support Somalia’s development priorities as outlined in its National Development Plan-9.





UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN SOMALIA

In November, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, virtually briefed the UN Security Council's meeting on Somalia.

Below are his remarks:

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

Thank you for the opportunity again to update you on the situation in Somalia.

I am especially pleased to speak to you today along with the Somali Prime Minister, His Excellency Mohamed Hussein Robleh; as well as the Founder and Chair of the Somali Gender Equity Movement, Ms. Zainab Hassan; and the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, my dear friend and colleague Ambassador Francisco Madeira.

We meet as Somalia faces critical decisions: an electoral process to choose the parliament and president in the coming few months; a security transition so that Somalis can assume lead security responsibility by the end of 2021; and urgent priorities for humanitarian response and economic reforms.

Madam President,

When I last addressed this Council in August, the Somali leadership was meeting to agree a plan for the 2020/21 elections. In September, they reached consensus on an indirect

electoral model, ending a two-year political stalemate between the Federal Government and Federal Member States.

The agreed model of voting regrettably fell short of the constitutional requirement for direct universal suffrage election of parliament. Yet, the agreement reflected wide Somali political consensus and ownership. In addition

to the support of the President and Federal Member State leaders, the indirect model was also endorsed by other key Somali stakeholders, including political parties and civil society, and was ratified by the Federal Parliament.

Going forward, this broad political consensus must now be preserved and indeed deepened as the agreement is implemented. The agreed process must be conducted in a fair, transparent, broadly accepted and peaceful manner. And it must be more participatory and inclusive than it was four years ago. We welcome the political leaders' agreement to ensure the 30 per cent women's quota for seats in Parliament and we urge full respect for this commitment.

The electoral schedule foresees selection of members of the two houses of the Federal Parliament by the end of December, and election of the Federal President by the new Parliament in February 2021. Nominations to the electoral management bodies were several weeks behind schedule, and they remain the subject of some contention. Also pending is finalization of the electoral security plan, to ensure that the elections are as safe

and secure as possible and minimise the risk that Al Shabaab may disrupt or influence the process.

In support of these Somali-led efforts, UNSOM plans to contribute to implementation of the electoral agreement, within the scope of its mandate and in collaboration with UNDP, UNSOS and international partners. We will also continue efforts toward universal suffrage elections in the future. To this end, we urge Somali leaders to prepare consensually a roadmap with clear timelines and benchmarks to ensure one-person-one-vote elections take place in 2024/25.

Madam President,

In September, President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo appointed Prime Minister Mohamed Hussein Robleh, who subsequently named his Cabinet. The new government has a challenging task before it -- not only to steer the country through the electoral process, but also to pursue the reform agenda across the political, security and economic spectrum. The UN in Somalia stands ready to support the Government in advancing these national priorities.

I commend Somali leaders for their spirit of compromise in reaching agreement between the Federal Government and Federal Member States. This spirit must now be sustained. Beyond elections, we also urge further progress through consensus on other democratic reforms, including the constitutional review process, and establishment of the Judicial Services Commission, the Human Rights Commission, and Constitutional Court, as examples.

Political dialogue is also key to addressing



UN, and bilateral security partners. I welcome the Prime Minister's announced plan to convene in early December the Executive Committee of the Comprehensive Approach to Security, also known as the Security and Justice Committee.

I pay tribute to the Somali security forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia for their steadfast and courageous pursuit of peace and stability in Somalia. We also welcome

other pressing priorities, including operations against Al Shabaab, economic and security reforms, and collaboration to tackle the multiple humanitarian challenges facing the country. We encourage political actors to institutionalize this dialogue among leaders, such as through the newly formed National Consultative Forum.

To promote such dialogue, I have recently begun a series of visits to Federal Member State capitals, joined by SRCC Madeira and representatives of the European Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development.

Political dialogue is also key to addressing other pressing priorities.

I understand that Prime Minister Roble has also started a tour of the regions to engage with State leaders to continue dialogue, and I welcome this initiative.

Madam President,

The security situation in Somalia remains of concern, with persistent attacks by Al Shabab, which remains the primary threat to Somalia's security. Continued efforts at protecting the Somali people and degrading Al Shabab's capabilities must be the main objective of the national security forces, as well as AMISOM, and other security partners - in particular, as we enter the sensitive electoral period.

Next year will be a transition year in which Somalia takes lead responsibility on security matters. This requires agreement on a strategic vision for Somalia's security involving all security stakeholders. The Federal Government has already started this work as it is drafting an updated Somalia Transition Plan. It is crucial that this plan address many long-standing challenges -- including the need for realistic operational objectives, credible plans for force generation, and clear coordination structures. The updated Transition Plan will serve as a baseline for further discussions in the coming months to guide the role of Somali security forces as well as external actors, including AMISOM, the

the continuing support and commitment from many Member States to the development of Somalia's rule of law and security sector. It is through collective gains in the security realm that space is created for the political process, governance, and institution-building.

Human Rights and Justice remain at the centre of our work for Somalia's development. With elections approaching, I underscore my previous calls for the protection of political space, for tolerance of divergent opinions, for respect of free speech and association, and for media freedom.

I reiterate concerns over the recent increase in instances of sexual violence against women and girls, and over the regressive legislation relating to sexual rights and freedoms that have entered the parliamentary process in both Mogadishu and Hargeisa, and which contravene international standards.

Madam President,

Humanitarian needs remain acute in Somalia. The country has been hit by the triple-shock of COVID-19, flooding and locust infestation. The national trends in COVID-19 cases are broadly favourable, but we must remain vigilant. I again commend Somali authorities for their rapid response to COVID-19's outbreak and thank Somali health workers who are on the frontlines to defeat the pandemic.

I welcome the new five-year Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework

between the Somali Federal Government and the UN, which will guide UN support for Somali-owned and Somali-led development priorities. The Framework aligns with Somalia's ninth National Development Plan. We urge the Government to remain steadfast in its commitment to the reform agenda in order to make progress on the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative benchmarks to reach Completion Point. We look forward to the upcoming Somalia Partnership Forum announced by the Prime Minister for early December to take stock of progress since last year and agree on priorities for the future.

Madam President,

In closing, let me assure the Council of UNSOM's ongoing engagement with Somali stakeholders to promote political cooperation in the interest of the country. Our good offices are aimed at fostering the widest levels of inclusion and consensus possible.

Human Rights and Justice remain at the centre of our work for Somalia's development.

As the country focuses on the electoral process, the UN in Somalia will continue to press for participation by historically underrepresented groups, among them women, youth, and marginalised communities. They all have much to contribute to peace, stability, and development in their country.

The coming months will set the course of Somalia for the next several years. At this critical time, I am grateful for the Council's support as our United Nations team strives to help Somalia's leaders and people achieve their national priorities.

Thank you.





SOMALI GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS MEET TO IMPROVE SECURITY AND RULE OF LAW

The importance of improving security and the rule of law for the long-term future of Somalia was the focus of a high-level meeting in early December.

The event brought together top officials from the country's Federal Government and Federal Member States (FMSs), the United Nations, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other international partners.

"Effective governance of the security sector is not only crucial for stability, but also for the long-term consolidation of democratization and sustainable economic and social development. This is the goal of the Federal Government of Somalia. This is the aspiration of the Somali people," said Somalia's Prime Minister Mohamed H. Roble, at a meeting of the Security and Justice Committee, which he chaired, in the capital, Mogadishu.

Established in 2017, the Committee provides a platform for the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), FMSs and international partners to work together and further improve security and justice. It serves as a strategic decision-making body designed to coordinate progress on various strands of activity in security and justice as outlined in the Mutual Accountability Framework (MAF), which was agreed at the Somali Partnership Forum in October 2019.

The MAF details the joint commitments of Somalia and its international partners in the areas of political reforms, security reforms, economic development and recovery and humanitarian assistance, as the country rebuilds after decades of armed conflict and climate-related shocks.

A year of transition

It is anticipated that 2021 will be a year of change for Somalia's security, with a transition away from AMISOM to the Somali government and security authorities taking lead responsibility for the country's security.

In his remarks to the event, delivered via video-conference, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, highlighted the

need for strong coordination and support among all involved.

"It is important, if we are to achieve gains in security, that we take a comprehensive approach and collective action. Comprehensive in the sense that it is not just military, but it's police, it's rule law and justice, it's stabilization – both short-term and longer-term – and it is preventing and countering violent extremism and, overtime, it is about state-building as well," Mr. Swan said.

"Achievement requires collective action," he added. "Collective action means agreeing, together, on the objectives. Collective action means planning together how we are going to achieve those objectives. And collective action means working together to implement what we have identified as objectives and plan to accomplish. So it really does require that we continue to operate alongside one another."

The UN envoy also called for observance of accountability in the delivery of support by all the parties involved in Somalia's security and justice sectors, in line with commitments made under the MAF.



Recognition and welcoming

A communique issued by the Security and Justice Committee after the gathering covered a range of topics, including participants' recognition of the efforts and sacrifices made by Somalia's security forces and AMISOM peacekeepers in their fight against Al-Shabaab, and their welcoming of progress made in securing locations in the Lower Shabelle region.

In addition, the participants also called for greater joint, inclusive, and integrated planning for subsequent operations between rule of law, stabilisation and security stakeholders.

On the security transition in 2021, the Committee welcomed progress made to date on Somalia's ongoing revision of the Somali Transition Plan (STP), a guiding strategic document for transferring security responsibilities from AMISOM to the Somali security forces.

"International partners noted the importance of political commitment and coordination by FGS and FMS leaders, as called for in Somalia's National Security Architecture, to ensure political will and

buy-in to deliver the STP across the security, rule of law, development and governance sectors," the communique continued.

The Committee said that stakeholders stressed the need for FGS and FMS coordination, and emphasis on force generation and organization, particularly for military, federal police and state police services.

The Committee also welcomed greater FGS and FMS cooperation and international partner coordination to effectively train, organize, and equip the Somali security forces, and noted the urgent need to agree a politically-inclusive model for the generation of hold forces required to allow transition.

In this regard, it was agreed that a Force Generation Conference would be held by the end of January 2021 to consider military, federal police and state police services and resources required, including agreed approaches to developing counter-improvised explosive devices and logistics capabilities.

The Committee plans to meet on a quarterly basis, with the next meeting in March 2021.



INTERNATIONAL PARTNER REPRESENTATIVES VISIT SOMALIA'S FEDERAL MEMBER STATES

The last few months of 2020 saw representatives from some of Somalia's main partners continue visiting Federal Member States (FMSs) for meetings with their leaders.

The visiting delegations were made up of top officials from the African Union, the European Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the United Nations.

They visited South West State, Galmudug and Puntland in person for meetings with Presidents Abdiiaziz Hassan Mohamed 'Laftagreen,' Ahmed Abdi Kariye and Said Abdullahi Deni, respectively, and held an e-meeting with the leader of Jubaland, President Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe.'

In addition to addressing topics specific to each FMS in its remarks to the media after the in-person meetings, the delegation also emphasized the need for Somali leaders to remain in dialogue with one another, as well as continue in the spirit of consensus which has recently seen progress on preparation for national elections.

The delegation noted that the international partners had been encouraged by the revitalization of dialogue between the Federal Government and the FMSs in recent months.

Somalia's federal and FMS leaders began a series of meetings in Dhusamareb, Galmudug's capital, in July and August, which led to consultative meetings in Mogadishu in September and October and at which agreements on the national electoral model were reached.



UN PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION HOLDS FIRST MEETING ON SOMALIA SINCE 2015

For the first time since 2015, the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission met in early December to discuss Somalia and explore how the international community can support its peacebuilding priorities and jointly find solutions to some of the challenges to peace it faces.

This meeting is part of Somalia coming back to the international arena and fostering relationships with the international community – Somalia has achieved a lot in the past 10 years and made a lot of recovery and reform,” the virtual meeting’s opening speaker, Somalia’s Prime Minister Mohamed H. Roble, told the Commission.

“Peacebuilding cannot be imported, but can be brought about through the sustenance and reform of indigenous wisdoms while learning and adopting good practices from other experiences.

We have learned the hard way of being engulfed in conflict and trying quick-fix solutions to restoring peace. We will strive to safeguard inclusive solutions that are Somali-owned and grounded on local context and environment,” he added.

“Nevertheless,” the Prime Minister continued, “we need to benefit and learn from successful processes of other countries that have effectively restored law and order and trust between their communities as well as rebuilt their citizens’ confidence in state institutions.”

The UN Peacebuilding Commission is an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in conflict-affected countries. It is composed of 31 members, elected from the UN General Assembly, UN Security Council and the UN Economic and Social Council, as well as the UN system’s top financial-contributing countries and the top troop-contributing countries.

The discussion was led by the Commission’s Chairperson, Ambassador Bob Rae, who also serves as Canada’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York.

In his remarks, Prime Minister Roble said Somalia’s peacebuilding priorities could be placed in three categories: state-building, reconciliation, and economic reconstruction and recovery; and he reiterated Somali’s commitment to collaborating with multilateral bodies

such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission.

In addition to Somalia’s Prime Minister, other keynote speakers included the country’s Minister of Women and Human Rights Development, Hanifa Mohamed Ibrahim, and, from Somali civil society, the founder of Maandeeq Mental Health, Rowda A. Olad. From the world body’s side, the keynote speakers included the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, and the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

In his remarks at the opening of the e-meeting, the top UN official for Somalia emphasized the importance of engagement.

“I encourage sustained flexible engagement between Somalia and the Peacebuilding Commission, I also encourage the Commission to reconvene regularly – if its members so choose – perhaps next year, to take stock of the situation following the electoral process, assess progress that’s been made and look at what remains to be done,” Mr. Swan said.

“The Peacebuilding Commission can help keep us all focused on key cross-cutting themes in Somalia, it can help us mobilize resources for peacebuilding and it can support partnerships between Somalia and other countries that have experiences to share – building and sustaining peace is a collective effort,” the UN envoy added.



Three aims

The e-meeting had three aims. The first was centred on building understanding on the country's peacebuilding priorities, including those related to peacebuilding and sustainable development agenda as laid out in its Ninth National Development Plan in 2019 and its eligibility request for the UN Peacebuilding Fund.

The Fund is the world body's financial instrument of first resort to sustain peace in countries at risk or affected by conflict. In Somalia, it first began supporting the consolidation of peacebuilding gains in 2009. Since then, it has invested \$56 million in Somalia and has contributed in areas such as helping extend state authority and promoting of the rule of law. In July this year, the UN Secretary-General approved a new five-year eligibility period for the Fund in Somalia.

The NRF provides a blueprint for a new participatory and inclusive approach to reconciliation.

The second aim was to explore opportunities to support the implementation of Somalia's National Reconciliation Framework (NRF) – which the Prime Minister described as “context and gender sensitive” – and the vital role of women in peacebuilding in Somalia, within the framework of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

The NRF provides a blueprint for a new participatory and inclusive approach to reconciliation in Somalia, involving women in leadership and decision-making roles in peacebuilding and political processes, as well as having Somali youth play an active

role in defining a peaceful future society.

The WPS agenda stems from the Security Council's historic adoption of resolution 1325, which was the first Council resolution to link women to the peace and security agenda, looking at the impact of war on women and their contribution to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. It challenges the focus on interstate conflict at the expense of measures to protect women with decades of research and practice demonstrating the close links between gender equality, conflict prevention, and peace.

The third aim was to share Somalia's experience achieving the so-called ‘decision point’ for debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries' Initiative (HIPC) and explore ideas for collaboration with international financial institutions on peacebuilding.

Achieving ‘decision point’ in March this year was an historic milestone on Somalia's path to peace and prosperity. It confirmed the country's eligibility for debt relief and also fully normalized its relations with international financial institutions. It also meant Somalia qualified for certain types of grant financing to meet its public finance and development needs and to access private-sector financing instruments.

Role of women

In his remarks to the meeting, the UN envoy for Somalia highlighted the need for dialogue and compromise as the country prepares for national elections. He also noted that despite impressive progress in addressing security threats, establishing the foundations for democracy and rebuilding national institutions, many significant challenges remain and need to be faced head on.

Mr. Swan flagged the important role the UN Peacebuilding Fund had played in various areas of Somalia's development, as well in relation to it committing at least 50 per cent of its resources in Somalia over the next five years to the implementation of the WPS agenda.

“Without women's political participation there can be no sustained peace and development,” he said, quoting the Somali Women's Charter.

The issue of the WPS agenda in Somalia was featured in the remarks of Minister Ibrahim, who told the Commission meeting that, ahead of Somalia's elections, she had been

visiting several of the country's Federal Member States to advocate and campaign for the 30 per cent quote for women as had been agreed upon in an electoral agreement by the country's leaders.

“Women in Somalia have the right to be part of the political process. With women taking part in the Somali leadership, we can rebuild peace and security in Somalia,” she said.

“As Somalia continues to make progress towards peacebuilding, with national reconciliation as one the top priorities of the Government, we are fully aware that the Women, Peace and Security agenda needs to remain a priority,” the Minister added. “The path to peace and stability in Somalia has been difficult. However, Somali women have are important in peacebuilding and in conflict prevention in Somalia. Somali Women are active peacemakers, mediators and negotiators.”

Human Rights and Justice remain at the centre of our work for Somalia's development.

The Somali official also noted that the newly-developed NRF provided an opportunity to address the drivers of inequality and promote peace through strengthening the role of women.

“Through this NRF, the advancement of human rights and the Women, Peace and Security agenda, I am confident that positive change for lasting peace is possible,” she said.

Addressing the meeting, Ms. Olad pointed out that structural violence that Somali women regularly deal with, including both discursive and physical, with the former including patterns as behavior accepted as normal but nonetheless harmful in terms of the way women are talked about and referred to in Somali society and their political participation.

“Somali women are the breadwinners of most families. Somali women are natural-born mediators transcending the divisions in Somali society,” Ms. Olad said. “Our potential is limitless and our intentions are peaceful. And we demand our space and we deserve more support.”

The full video recording of the UN Peacebuilding Commission meeting on Somalia can be found here: <http://bit.ly/3g2HfbU>



AS POLL PREPARATIONS BEGIN, SOMALI JOURNALISTS UNDERTAKE TRAINING ON ELECTIONS REPORTING

Ahead of Somalia's elections, the importance of the media's role in the upcoming electoral process was centre-stage as a group of journalists gathered in early November for an intensive, United Nations-backed training on strengthening their reporting on elections and voter education.

"Election periods are serious and historic moments and it is important for journalists to learn how to report on them. I think two scenarios can be the most interesting and sensitive to learn about – the first one is when reporting amid conflict, especially in areas affected by conflict; and the second is at the polling stations, which are also sensitive locations when it comes to reporting on how things are going," said the Office of the President of Somalia's Director of Communications, Abdirashid Mohamed Hashi, at the start of the capacity development sessions held at a venue in the capital, Mogadishu.

"Thank you for bringing here veteran journalists who have been in the media for 40 or 50 years and more, and new journalists, to exchange their views openly. The Ministry of Information would like

to thank you and encourage you for the opportunity you give Somali journalists. The country is at a critical juncture. There are many journalists who have lost their lives carrying out their work, and I am one of those who believe that Somalia would not have had a government after the civil war without a free media," Somalia's Deputy Minister of Information, Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adala, said in his remarks at the opening.

Supported by the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), and organized by the Federation of Somalia Journalists (FESoj), the three-day training brought together more than two dozen journalists from various Somali media outlets with a presence in the capital and working across various platforms, including television, radio and online channels.

The journalists are receiving training in areas ranging from the need for neutrality to the uses of opinion polls. The aim is to enhance the journalists' skills, allowing them to better report on the country's impending elections and, consequently, improve the general public's understanding of the electoral process. In addition to practical skills, there will be a specific focus on the theoretical aspects and approaches to covering elections.

"After this training, reporters will apply the knowledge they have gained in their daily activities. This training is important for Somali journalists, as the country is once again going to indirect polls and people need to understand more about the elections," said FESoj's President Abaadir Abdulkadir Elmi.

Asides from the substantive elements of reporting on elections,

the training will also include covering elections in volatile security situations. Various international media associations have spoken out about the challenges members of the media face in going about their work in Somalia, including in their dealings with authorities and targeting by Al-Shabaab terrorists.

Important role to play

The United Nations in Somalia has previously highlighted the role the media play in Somali society, and how they need to be able to carry out their work free from violence, harassment, detention, persecution, intimidation and censorship, especially as the country prepares for elections.

In his remarks at the opening today, UNSOM's Chief of Strategic Communications, Ari Gaitanis, spoke about the Somali media's important role.

"Quite simply: a democratic society must allow different viewpoints on political issues, on elections, and on a range of issues, to be expressed freely and openly, and the media has a key role to play here in all of these areas, including coverage of elections," Mr. Gaitanis said.





"Democracy is more than the holding of elections; it also means ensuring a country's political space allows for everyone to take part and, as I stress, the media has a key role to play in this," he added. "Fact-based news and analysis depend on the work of journalists conducting independent reporting, rooted in the fundamental tenet: 'journalism without fear or favour.'"

At the event's opening, attendees voiced their eagerness to start with the training.

"I think good reporting is significant, simply because people need to hear different opinions, such as the opinions of leaders running for office and their platforms, as well as the outcome of the elections," said Hassan Ali Osman, a journalist with Kalfadhi, an independent news platform covering parliamentary and governance issues.

"It's my first time attending this kind of training, and I'm optimistic about gaining a lot from the facilitators providing the teaching. Media outlets provide information to the public and if the election isn't reported well, then the public will not understand what's happening. But if the election is covered fairly and professionally, the public will have a chance to know of the elections' integrity," said Fardowsa Mohamed Sahal, a journalist with Galmudug Television.



SOMALIA AMONG HORN OF AFRICA COUNTRIES THREATENED BY DESERT LOCUST UPSURGE

In mid-December, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization warned that a new generation of Desert Locust swarms is threatening agricultural and pastoral livelihoods and the food security of millions of people in the Horn of Africa despite intense efforts to control the pest throughout 2020.

With international support and an unprecedented large-scale response campaign coordinated by FAO, more than 1.3 million hectares of locust infestations have been treated in ten countries since January – including Somalia.

Control operations have prevented the loss of an estimated 2.7 million tonnes of cereal, worth nearly \$800 million, in countries already hard hit by acute food insecurity and poverty. That is enough to feed 18 million people a year.

However, favourable weather conditions and widespread seasonal rains have caused

extensive breeding in eastern Ethiopia and Somalia. This was worsened by Cyclone Gati which brought flooding to northern Somalia in November, allowing locust infestations to increase further in the coming months.

New swarms

New locust swarms are already forming and threatening to re-invade northern Kenya and breeding is also underway on both sides of the Red Sea.

FAO is assisting governments and other partners with surveillance and coordination, technical advice and the procurement of supplies and equipment but operations must be further scaled up to safeguard food production and prevent worsening food insecurity in the affected countries.

Donors and partners have so far provided nearly \$200 million to finance control efforts, allowing FAO and governments to rapidly scale up locust response capacity in a region that has not faced an upsurge of the pest on this scale in generations.

More than 1,500 ground survey and control personnel have been trained and 110 vehicle mounted ground sprayers and 20 aircraft are now in action.

FAO is now seeking a further \$40 million to increase surveillance and control activities in the most affected countries – which include Somalia – in 2021.