

**Statement by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General,
James Swan, to the Security Council on the Situation in Somalia**

22 February 2021

Madame President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

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

I am pleased to appear jointly with my dear colleague, Ambassador Francisco Madeira, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission. Let me take this opportunity at the beginning of this session to pay tribute to the commitment and sacrifice of AMISOM forces in Somalia since 2007 alongside courageous Somali Forces.

Today's meeting of the Council is timely in view of the significant developments in Somalia in recent weeks, and even days. Growing political tensions threaten Somalia's state-building progress and even security unless they are resolved through dialogue and compromise in the interest of the country. Unfortunately, instead we are seeing increased brinkmanship, pressure tactics, and tests of strength that can only heighten risks.

The political standoff among key Somali leaders has blocked implementation of the electoral model agreed by the Federal Government of Somalia President and Federal Member State leaders on 17 September 2020. This model was formally endorsed by both houses of Parliament and supported by all other major political actors, but implementation is in dispute. I will return to this point.

Tensions over electoral implementation have now been compounded by questions raised by some political figures over the legitimacy of the president's mandate following expiry of his constitutional term on 8 February. The Government cites an October parliamentary resolution permitting the President to remain, but this is contested by others.

Meanwhile, on the morning of February 19, a day of protests announced by the opposition Council of Presidential Candidates, several violent incidents were reported. Although full details are unconfirmed, these incidents reportedly included armed exchanges between government security personnel and security teams employed by the opposition, as well as recourse to live fire by government forces to disperse protestors.

Public communication from key leaders has become increasingly polemical and confrontational, revealing the frustration, mistrust, and sense of grievance felt by many.

Hence, this is a tense moment in Somalia, as both rhetoric and actions are escalating.

Madam President,

In light of the above, let me briefly recap recent efforts to move forward with implementation of the 17 September electoral model.

At the invitation of the Federal Government, FGS and FMS leaders met in Dhusamareb from 2 to 6 February, and made progress but reached no final agreement on the contentious issues, namely: the composition of the electoral management bodies; the modalities for selecting representatives from “Somaliland” in federal institutions; and the management of elections in the Gedo region of Jubaland State.

Subsequently, the Federal Government convened a technical committee of senior ministers from the FGS and FMS, who met in Baidoa from 15 to 16 February. The Committee announced that it had arrived at technical solutions for the contentious issues, it reaffirmed commitment to the 30 per cent women’s quota in the electoral process, and it noted the need for a revised but short new electoral calendar.

On the basis of the Committee’s work, the Federal Government called for a FGS-FMS leaders’ summit to be held in Mogadishu from 18 to 19 February. Yet, events of recent days have disrupted these plans, and the leaders of Jubaland and Puntland have so far regrettably declined to join the FGS and other FMSes for a summit. Along with other partners, we continue efforts to understand and address the concerns of these two leaders so that they may join the process to advance the 17 September agreement.

In view of this worrying impasse, in recent days I have worked closely, alongside other regional and international partners, to engage FGS and FMS leaders, key political figures, and civil society representatives to urge a way forward based on dialogue and compromise in the national interest. The message from partners has been clear that there should be no partial elections, no parallel processes, and no unilateral actions by Somali leaders. Such approaches would only lead to greater division and risk of confrontation.

Madam President,

Let me be clear: I remain convinced that the consensus-based 17 September model offers the best available option to proceed quickly to an electoral process for selection of members of parliament, senators, and the president. This would minimize further delays in Somalia's four-year transition cycle, ensure that the chosen national leaders have a clear mandate and are widely accepted, and allow the country to turn its attention from the current political competition to other vital national priorities in the interest of the people.

To move forward on this path, it is imperative that Somali leaders use all available channels for dialogue and consultation, including contacts with a wide range of political stakeholders and influential civil society figures so that their important voices are heard. To build trust in the process, it will also be necessary to ensure that the management and oversight of the agreed electoral process are as impartial and independent as possible, and subject to regular monitoring. Core political freedoms including those of speech, assembly, organization, and access to media must be ensured. And communication among the main actors – and especially the FGS and FMS leaders – must continue on a regular and frequent basis to minimize future misunderstandings and resolve problems before they escalate.

The United Nations and other international partners stand ready to walk with Somalis on this path forward, through providing good offices or a forum for dialogue, offering technical assistance to the process, and monitoring implementation of commitments, should the Somali parties find these contributions useful.

The longer national political attention continues to be focussed on the current impasse over holding elections, the greater will be the negative impact on other priorities, such as advancing security and economic reforms, finalising the constitution, and pursuing the development agenda.

Madam President,

Al-Shabaab continues to pose the primary threat to the security of the country. Al-Shabaab has increased its operational tempo since August 2020, and the beginning of 2021 has seen a new peak in the number of attacks, including more Person-Borne and Vehicle-Borne IEDs, targeting government officials and key figures in Somali society.

Important military gains were made by Somali Security Forces backed by AMISOM in the Lower Shabelle region in early 2019 and again in early 2020, and these are now being consolidated to enable further progress against Al Shabaab in other areas. UNSOS has remained steadfast in delivery of support to AMISOM and eligible Somali forces throughout this period, despite the complications of the COVID pandemic.

Meanwhile, preparatory work has been completed to advance the security transition in Somalia in 2021, as requested by this Council. The Federal Government organised meetings of the Security and Justice Committee as well as the Somalia Partnership Forum in early December – thereby advancing the Comprehensive Approach to Security and the Mutual Accountability Framework. We encourage the Government to continue these efforts, and to hold the Force Generation Conference announced by the Prime Minister as soon as possible. The Council-mandated Independent Assessment of the security situation and the role of international partners was submitted to the Council on January 8, and the Somalia Transition Plan was updated and presented by the Somali Government to security partners and the African Union PSC in early February. These are all important elements to advance the security transition this year and lay the foundations for further progress in the future.

Madame President,

The humanitarian situation in Somalia remains dire. The number of people in need of assistance will increase from 5.2 million persons last year to an estimated 5.9 million persons in 2021. This is the result of increasing food insecurity, climatic disasters, the worst desert locust infestation in decades, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, in recent weeks we have seen a renewed spike in COVID cases in Somalia, which will only exacerbate the already difficult humanitarian situation. Somalia is eligible for the COVAX vaccine programme, and the United Nations, in close collaboration with the Somali authorities, will ensure that the first batch of

vaccines is effectively distributed to front line workers and vulnerable groups across the country. While we are deeply grateful for the generous donor contributions in 2020, the humanitarian needs will continue to be high and we again appeal for donor support to the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2021, for which \$1.09 billion is requested.

The UN family also continues to work with Somali authorities and partners on longer-term solutions to these recurrent humanitarian shocks. For example, our Mission's Environmental Advisor is engaging the Government to develop climate-related policies and strategies as well as practical responses to flood and drought cycles impacted by climatic conditions.

Madam President,

While these quarterly briefings typically focus on the latest political, security, and humanitarian developments, we must always remain mindful that enduring positive change for Somalis will require institution building; improvements in governance through many elements including constitutional reform; investment in health and education; greater participation by women, youth and marginalized groups; and other long-term reforms. The UN in Somalia continues its work with Somalis in all these areas, knowing this will take persistence and perseverance.

It is imperative that these larger future goals be borne in mind by Somalia's political leaders. The Somali people have waited a long time to see progress, and it remains fragile.

That is why I conclude by urging all of Somalia's political leaders to pull back from confrontation and avoid risky winner-take-all tactics. Instead, this is a time to pursue dialogue and compromise to reach an inclusive and credible political agreement to hold elections as soon as possible based on the 17 September model.

Thank you.