



## **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, 22 June 2023)*

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

I am pleased to address you for the first time since assuming my duties in Somalia on 5th June. I am delighted to do so alongside the President of the Federal Republic of Somalia, His Excellency Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC), Ambassador Souef Mohammed El-Amine and the Executive Director of the World Food Programme, Ambassador Cindy McCain.

I am honoured to have the opportunity to serve in Somalia and assure you of my commitment to implement the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission. I am grateful for the warm welcome extended to me by the Federal Government of Somalia, Federal Member States, and the Somali people. The United Nations stands by the Government and people of Somalia. The recent visit of the Secretary General to Somalia is testimony to that strong commitment.

I am grateful, in particular, for the close partnership with the African Union Commission. I pay tribute to the dedicated service and sacrifice of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) forces. I take this opportunity to convey my condolences to the Government and people of Uganda for the soldiers who lost their lives and were injured in the attack on the ATMIS Forward Operating Base in Buulo Mareer, Lower Shabelle. While I condemn this heinous attack in the strongest terms, it is a stark reminder of the real and persistent threat Al Shabaab continues to pose.

Mr. President,

My briefing today will cover eight areas:

1. My first two weeks in Somalia
2. Political update
3. Security update
4. Humanitarian update
5. Update on Women, Peace and Security
6. Observations on stabilisation

7. Transition in the international missions
8. Priorities for UNSOM over the next six months

Mr. President,

My first update briefly summarises my first two weeks on the ground.

Since my arrival in Somalia – a country I first served in as a young UN staff member in the mid-90s – I have had the opportunity to meet with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, the Prime Minister, other Ministers, and senior government officials and to visit four of the five Federal Member States. I have met members of Civil Society Organizations and engaged with international partners, including Ambassadors from ATMIS Troop Contributing Countries. I have also spoken by phone to President Muse Bihi Abdi of “Somaliland”. On my way to New York, I stopped in Addis Ababa, where I met with the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, H.E. Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, and the State Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, H.E. Ambassador Mesganu Arega. My travels around the country have highlighted for me the tremendous progress that Somalia has made in state and peace building. His Excellency the President has rightly set out an ambitious vision for his country, and whilst many challenges and risks lie ahead, there are also many opportunities, and I urge all international partners to lean in and provide additional support to the people of Somalia.

Mr. President,

My second update covers the political situation.

Somalia has made significant progress in advancing key national priorities. These include (i) the appointment of the Independent Constitutional Review and Implementation Commission, (ii) the passage of 11 pieces of legislation, of which six have already been signed into law; and (iii) the successful one-person-one-vote district council elections in Puntland state.

The March and May meetings of the National Consultative Council resulted in three governance proposals: (i) the revision of the National Security Architecture; (ii) a model for fiscal federalism; and (iii) an electoral model. The proposed electoral model provides for one-person, one-vote elections at the different layers of government. This aspect has generally been well received. Other elements of the NCC electoral proposal – including a shift to a Presidential system, a move to two political parties, and the alignment of electoral terms have received more mixed reactions. I welcome clarification from His Excellency the President that proposals from the NCC are a starting point for further consultation.

With that in mind, I urge the Federal Government to set out its plans for a rigorous and inclusive consultation process – including precise options for consultation and how agreement will be reached before decisions are codified into law or fed into the constitution-making process. Puntland remains outside the NCC process but has indicated it will engage directly with the Federal Government. I encourage this dialogue to start urgently to ensure the process is fully inclusive.

Finally, under my political update, I would like to express my grave concern regarding the ongoing conflict in Laascaanood. The violence has resulted to-date in 308 civilian casualties, with 36 people killed and 272 individuals injured. I commend the efforts by all parties and, indeed, this Council to bring about a ceasefire. Following the Press Statement of 7 June,

UNSOM good offices are at the disposal of all parties to help agree on a peaceful way forward. To this end, I have engaged key stakeholders and held my first phone call with President Bihi to convey messages on the importance of dialogue, cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access.

My third update covers the security situation.

The Federal Government-led Counter-Al Shabaab operations have largely been focused on the Middle Shabelle region, Eastern Hiran and Galmudug. During these operations, Al Shabaab has been degraded militarily and dislodged from a number of areas. This is a notable achievement. But Al Shabaab remains a significant threat. The remaining operations under the current Phase 1 offensive are expected to be completed in the coming weeks.

Preparations for Phase 2 have begun and operations are expected to be launched in the coming weeks. Additionally, Operation Black Lion, a Somali-led initiative with the “Front Line States”, is due to start in the coming weeks. This is intended to place additional pressure on Al Shabaab.

Three other security challenges regarding the next phase of operation merit attention:

Firstly, operations will take place against a recent resurgence in the scale, tempo and geographic distribution of attacks from Al Shabaab. Al Shabaab’s continuing capability and intent were demonstrated by its attack on the Pearl Beach Hotel in Mogadishu on 9 June, which killed nine people, including one member of the UN family.

Secondly, the next phase of operations, which moves further South, presents more challenging politics and clan dynamics. It will be essential to plan this next phase carefully – to ensure the full integration of military and civilian efforts, including planned stabilization.

Thirdly, operations will occur concurrently with the ATMIS drawdown, putting pressure on planning and logistics.

Mr. President,

My fourth update covers the humanitarian situation and the links to conflict and climate change.

The current operation against Al Shabaab has created opportunities for humanitarian access to people in need. However, insecurity has also contributed to an extremely challenging operating environment for humanitarian agencies. From January to March, around 430,000 people across Somalia were displaced by conflict and insecurity. Approximately 580,000 people live within territories controlled by non-state armed actors. Most of those displaced are women and children.

Somalia’s overall humanitarian situation remains precarious, with 8.25 million people, almost half the population requiring humanitarian assistance. While famine has been averted due to a scale-up of humanitarian assistance and better-than-forecast rain patterns, the rains have also resulted in flooding, affecting at least 468,000 people and displacing 247,000 others. To address critical humanitarian needs, the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan needs more than 2.6 billion dollars. Halfway through the year, the plan is only 29.8 per cent funded. I call on all of Somalia’s friends to increase the much-needed funding urgently.

Droughts and flooding are becoming more frequent in Somalia due to recurrent climate shocks. Traditional pastoral livelihoods are under severe pressure, and we are seeing significant urbanization – including an estimated 800,000 more people in Mogadishu. This calls for durable solutions through urban planning and investments in different forms of livelihoods. Somalia needs to access large-scale climate finance for resilience and adaptation, and this will be a priority for me going forward.

Mr. President,

My fifth update is on WPS. The inspirational women leaders of Somalia continue to advocate for their rightful inclusion in political processes and decision-making. The commitment made by Somalia's political leaders to a 30 per cent quota of women representation in the previous federal elections remains unrealized. In the recent district elections held in Puntland, only 17 per cent of those elected were women – down from 27 per cent in the first phase. Women's participation and representation needs to be codified in relevant legal frameworks, including the constitution. As the first female SRSG in Somalia, I will be putting this issue at the forefront of my work.

Mr. President,

For the sixth part of this briefing, I would like to make observations on stabilisation.

Stabilisation activities continue to be implemented in areas recovered from Al Shabaab. The challenge remains the sustainability of these gains. This will require ongoing security, basic services, reconciliation, and long-term political and state-building processes. UNSOM has responded to the request by the Federal Government of Somalia to step up our response on stabilisation. A stabilisation cell has been created, which will report directly to me.

Our shared ambition must be matched with the resources to deliver the necessary stabilisation response, and future military operations must be planned alongside stabilisation interventions.

For the seventh section of this briefing, I would like to discuss our transition plans.

Mr. President, you will recall that UNSOM's strategic review (S/2022/716) recommends that the mission plan for a triple transition. The first is the security transition. The second is the possible drawdown of UNSOS and the handover of the mission support functions to UNSOM. The third transition is the eventual handover from UNSOM to the United Nations Country Team. The three transitions are interdependent, and we cannot make decisions on one without carefully considering the consequences for the others. But the overriding driver is the security transition.

As we will hear from His Excellency, the President and the SRCC the planned June drawdown of ATMIS and handover to the Somali security forces is proceeding. My provisional assessment of transition going forward is that the complexity, the constraints, and pace of the transition process present risks. This will be challenging. I have started by forming a transition cell to ensure coherent mission-wide planning. This team is now working intensively on transition in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. I would like to reassure members that we are identifying the questions that need to be addressed – but some of the solutions will demand a collective endeavour.

Mr. President,

For the eighth and final section of this briefing, I will conclude by highlighting my top five priorities for the UNSOM mission over the next six months.

My first priority will be preparing the United Nations for the three transitions ahead, taking account of the challenges I have outlined above.

Second, I will be focusing on positioning UNSOM to play a lead role in bringing together the international community efforts on stabilization.

Third, I will be prioritising supporting the various elements of the state building process – in particular those related to the elections process – ensuring inclusive consultations, including with Puntland.

Fourthly, I will support ongoing efforts to bring the conflict in Laascaanood to a peaceful conclusion.

Fifthly, I will support the Federal Government of Somalia to achieve HIPC completion and an associated shift from humanitarian into resilience-based development programming, including on climate.

Across all priorities, I will encourage the rightful participation and representation of women. Somalia needs to draw on the full talent of all its population if it is to tackle the numerous challenges ahead.

In conclusion Mr. President, the United Nations stands ready to support His Excellency President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in achieving his vision of “Somalia as a country at peace with itself and the world”. I thank you and the Security Council for your continued support.