



UNITED NATIONS

-TRANSCRIPT-

VIRTUAL PRESS CONFERENCE

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Mogadishu

Saturday, 24 October 2020

(edited for clarity)

My name is James Swan, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia. Thank you very much for joining us for this opportunity to speak to press organizations today.

October 24th, which is UN Day, and also the 75th anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Charter in 1945. So, I want to make just a few initial remarks and then I'm happy to take any questions that you might have. You could let us know what is on your minds.

So, as noted, today represents the 75th anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Charter, and current events in the world, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore now more than ever, the importance of global cooperation and collaboration to address common challenges. And really that is the essence of the United Nations formed in, literally, the months of the end of the Second World War. It was a commitment by the nations of the world, on behalf of the people of the world, that we must do better and that we must avoid a return to conflict on the planet, but more than that, we must build together a better planet for all of its people.

The United Nations really represents a number of facets.

First, it's a set of principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter on how the countries of the world should interact and what our collective aspirations are for our planet. Those aspirations are also reflected in many other conventions and agreements, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which, again, represent a commitment for how we want to treat the people of the world. These principles are at the core of the United Nations, and while they are sometimes, I think, neglected as we talk about institutions, offices and positions, really, the principles are fundamental to what we are seeking to achieve as the United Nations and as the peoples of the world.

Secondly, the United Nations, of course, represents many specialized institutions with expertise and capability on topics that are important to progress in the world. This includes multiple agencies, funds and programmes, from the World Health Organization (WHO) taking the lead on COVID response to the World Food Programme (WFP), which was just honoured with the Nobel Prize for Peace for its efforts to combat global hunger, to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which emphasizes efforts to build sustainable institutions

and policies and systems that support international development, to UN Women, which is focused on empowering women and ensuring their full inclusion and recognition in the societies and the decisions of the world, and many, many more – they are specialized agencies that represent efforts to provide direct assistance and support to governments, other institutions, civil society and the peoples of the world.

And then, thirdly, the United Nations is, of course, a collection of its Member States. It is, in the end, an agreement among the states of the world and they too come together to make decisions collectively, whether through the General Assembly or the UN Economic and Social Council or through the UN Security Council. This too is the United Nations – so it's a set of principles, it's specialized agencies and it's the collective work of Member States.

Somalia has been a proud and full member of the United Nations since its independence 60 years ago. Both the UN and Somalia have worked together throughout that time, and even before as the United Nations supported progress towards independence in 1960.

Today the UN is represented in Somalia through two Security Council-mandated missions and more than 20 agencies, funds and programmes. Those two Security Council-mandated missions are the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which is a special political mission focused on providing technical support to Somali institutions, including the national government, Federal Member States and local entities. It is also a source of coordination for international partners that seek to support Somalia in a number of areas, whether justice programming, corrections programming, police programming; and obviously security assistance and the like. We play a coordinating role.

And, finally, we have a 'good offices' role designed to encourage dialogue, cooperation and compromise among Somali leaders and actors as the country still advances from a period of conflict to more stable conditions. We play a supporting role, not a leading role, in that. But it is an effort, quietly, supportively, to encourage dialogue and collaboration among Somali leaders, political figures and communities.

The United Nations is also represented in Somalia by the United Nations Support Office for Somalia (UNSOS), also a Security Council-mandated mission. Its primary responsibility is to provide support to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), logistical support, food rations, casualty evacuation – effectively support, through UN-assessed peacekeeping contributions, the African Union Mission in Somalia. It also provides support through trust fund mechanisms, with the generous support of donors, for the Somali National Army and for other Somali security forces, based on the most recent resolutions of the Security Council.

In addition, there are more than 20 UN agencies, funds and programmes represented here, covering a wide array of areas of focus – food security, development, health, women's empowerment, crime and anti-corruption, supporting and assisting refugees and the displaced – really the gamut. I think it's fair to say that the UN family is supporting activities across the full range of interests and concerns of the Somali authorities and people.

I would note that the United Nations has been here in Somalia through good times and bad. Even in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when there were very few other external actors operating in Somalia, the United Nations was steadfast through its agencies, funds and programmes and through an ongoing small, political office to continue engagement and to try to support improvement during that period.

Last but not least, I want to stress, as I began, with that the United Nations, though we are focused on it today because it's UN Day, is here in a supporting role. It's here in a collaborative role, fundamentally to assist Somali institutions, the Somali national government, Federal Member States and other entities in addressing the

needs of the people. We are committed to strong cooperation and alignment, and support for national priorities and objectives.

On October 15th, I had the honour to sign, with the Deputy Prime Minister, the United Nations Sustainable Development Country Framework which makes clear that UN programming and support across all activities will be aligned with the government's National Development Plan 9. We have other means also of ensuring our collaboration, notably through the Somalia Partnership Forum. It met one year ago. It agreed, between the Somali government and international partners – some 40 were represented at that meeting – on seven objectives under the Mutual Accountability Framework in the areas of inclusive politics, security and justice, economic development and social development. This is an effort for us to work together, to be partners, and that is our intent today and going forward.

So thanks for joining me for this brief presentation on UN Day. I'm happy to take any questions you have on these issues or any other current issues that we're addressing here in Somalia.

QUESTIONS

Q.) What is your view on the role of the united Nations in ensuring that Somalis eventually get the possibility of voting for their leaders through political parties that up to now is completely denied?

A. As I hope everyone following this knows, the United Nations and a wide array of other international partners very actively advocated over the last year and more, for a 'one person, one vote' model here in Somalia. I should stress that this was not merely at our own initiative but, of course, 'one person, one vote' is enshrined in the Somali Constitution, and Somalia's leaders over many years have repeatedly supported their desire to move to a 'one person, one vote' model. So we echoed that. It was also a position endorsed by the UN Security Council and we carried that forward. And we continue to believe that Somalis deserve the opportunity to vote for their leaders. We, of course, very actively, also supported efforts to achieve communication and consensus-building between the Federal Government and Federal Member States in order to come up with a model that all could support. And, in the end, through the Dhusamareeb process and the process in Mogadishu, an indirect model was agreed and has been supported by a very broad array of Somali political actors. Obviously, the federal president, all of the Federal Member State presidents, the Upper House, the Lower House, most of the main political parties, and it appears to enjoy substantial consensus.

So our view is that while disappointed that it does not represent 'one person, one vote,' we nonetheless want this agreed model to succeed. No one has any interest in a failed political process in Somalia. We would like to see the adjustments from the 2016 model fully respected. Those who signed the agreement stated that it would be an improvement over 2016 – I think it's important to ensure that that is the case. What does that mean? It means making sure that this very laudable commitment to 30 per cent women's representation in parliament is indeed implemented and made to occur. It also means making sure that the selection process – which is no longer merely the purview of the elders, but is to include other civil society and community leaders, and a role for the Federal Member States – is conducted in a way that adds to the diversity of the selection process. We also, of course, want to make sure that the process proceeds with maximum transparency and accountability.

Beyond the elections that will take place in this cycle for parliament and then for president, we think it's important to remember that democracy is more than just elections. It's about building a set of institutions in the country that can support giving people a voice and role in selecting their leaders. So we would also like to see efforts to secure elements of the revised Constitution that could be agreed so that all the work that's gone

into that over the last eight years is not lost. There are a number of technical provisions that we believe would garner broad support and we hope could be confirmed.

There are other institutions of government that would help ensure a more participatory process – including the human rights commission and the judicial services commission. Finding ways for these entities to be established would also help build democracy. Ideally, they would be put in place through a consensual process that ensures broad support.

Finally, and to respond very specifically to your question, we also agree that it's time already to start thinking ahead to the next electoral cycle. We don't want to lose time as a new government or a re-elected government takes office, but it would be important to begin already looking at what are the measures that need to be put in place in order to prepare for 'one person, one vote' in 2024 or 2025. Those measures need to be identified now and put on the calendar and, ideally, agreed on by key political stakeholders right away.

So our ambition remains what we think is the ambition of Somalis: to get to 'one person, one vote.' There's work to be done right now to make this process as good as possible, but then we need to urgently look ahead to the next cycle and help Somalis put in place systems that ensure we do get to 'one person, one vote' in another four years.

Q.) Can you talk about what are the UN's concerns on the COVID-19 situation in Somalia? From what I understand there is no widespread testing happening right now.

A. Yes, we receive regular updates from our colleagues in the World Health Organization (WHO) and I'm sure that if you have some more specific questions, we could provide quite detailed answers in regard to the data related to what we're finding in regard to COVID.

We also continue to have very close collaboration with the Ministry of Health at the national level and also in the Federal Member States in regard to the COVID response. From the beginning, WHO has provided extensive assistance on COVID response, including supporting the setting up of, I believe, more than ten testing laboratory facilities to support these efforts and training something in the order of 4,000 health workers and additional community engagement workers who could communicate information about COVID prevention and sound practices. I should note also that, beyond the response on the medical and health front, the UN family more broadly also assisted in a number of ways in terms of addressing the impact on livelihoods.

For example, the World Food Programme (WFP), at the beginning of the emergence of COVID in Somalia, moved very quickly to front-load and accelerate the distribution of some of its assistance packages to ensure that people who might be locked down because of COVID would still have that assistance available during this difficult period.

In terms of the most recent results, our understanding is that based on the available data, there appears to be progress in addressing the COVID situation in terms of the number of new cases reported and in terms of deaths being reported month over month. These are showing declines, and in areas of testing it has been under five per cent. In terms of addressing the issue of the ability to test everywhere obviously there continue to be some areas of the country that are inaccessible.

However, WHO in recent weeks has conducted sampling exercise in the districts that are accessible, which I believe are in excess of 40 here in Somalia, and was able to do sample testing in those locations to determine whether there was a positivity rate of concern or that suggested a situation different from what has been reported from the ongoing testing. So, I think at this point the sense is that the trend lines based on the data, which are, of course, still somewhat limited, those trend lines are positive, but it remains important to be highly

vigilant about COVID, to continue to take precautions. And certainly, our guidance is that those measures need to continue to be respected in terms of social distancing, hand washing and limited numbers of people in meetings and the like. But if you have more specific questions, I think we would be very happy to put you in touch with WHO, who could go over this in some further detail.

Q.) On security, regarding statements that the President of the United States wants to pull US troops out of Somalia. How true is this? And secondly, there are quite a number of street kids on the streets of Somalia. What is the United Nations doing to absorb the children into programmes that cater for them?

A. First, with regards to these press reports of a change in US posture here in Somalia, I've seen those reports. We have not received any official notification in that regard, and I would encourage you to perhaps address that question to someone in the United States government. It's not a topic on which we have special information. I would encourage you to raise that with the with the US.

I would just take this opportunity, though, to note that as you say security issues are very important as always here in Somalia and 2021 is slated to be an important transition year. It has been identified in both in the Somalia Transition Plan developed by the government, but also in the UN Security Council resolutions as the year of transition to Somali-lead security. It doesn't necessarily mean independent Somali security responsibility, but Somali security lead in 2021. So, there are a number of efforts underway to continue to support Somali capabilities in the security arena.

As noted, the UN role is primarily a coordinating and technical advisory role. But there are many international partners that are actively supporting the Somali security forces. I think it will be important as we go forward to 2021 to make sure that all of the key security stakeholders are coming together around a common vision of what should happen in 2021 and beyond.

So, who are those stakeholders? Of course, it's the Somali government at the centre. But it includes others. It includes AMISOM and the African Union who, of course, have had a presence here since 2007 and have been courageous defenders of the Somali institutions. It includes other important neighbours who are troop-contributing countries, but also have other security interests here. It includes key funders such as the European Union, bilateral security partners and others. So, as we come to these important security questions it's important that they be addressed collectively in an effort to have a common vision for the way forward.

With regard to street children and others, Somalia has severe problem of internally displaced people (IDPs). I think the latest numbers suggest something in the order of 2.6 million internally displaced. This has been a chronic problem as a consequence of climate-impacted, economic dislocation. It has been a feature of political violence and other sources of pressure. And some of it is almost certainly driven by bigger picture, urbanizing trends.

We are indeed working with the Somali government on durable solutions with the view that you can't treat these IDPs as just a short-term problem. This is a longer-term problem that's going to require longer-term solutions. And we have been working closely with not only the national government, but with sub-national governmental organizations such as the Benadir Regional Administration in Mogadishu, which has been very focused on the IDP issue, the government in South West State where you have hundreds of thousands of IDPs who have arrived in recent years and placed a heavy burden on those communities. So, really there is a need to address this through multiple channels using multiple agencies and multiple approaches because it is a severe challenge for the Somali institutions to grapple with some 2.6 million internally displaced persons, among them many children.

Q.) The region is grappling with standards of education. What is the UN's plan for support in this area?

A. I would just stress that the plan is really coming from the Somali authorities; coming from the Ministry of Education. We are seeking to support those initiatives from the Ministry of Education. The UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is a key partner with the ministry. We also have worked through the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to support some of the more culturally-focused activities of the ministry.

So, there is indeed effort by the UN to support those activities. And there have been very robust discussions with the ministry about what is most useful in terms of curriculum development for the Somali education system, for the Somali school system and the like. So, that collaboration is tight, but it really is again a matter of our supporting Somali strategies and Somali objectives rather than coming in with our own plans.

Q.) What guarantees has the United Nations put in place to ensure that the upcoming electoral process is free and fair, given that there is no monitoring on the ground of the electoral process?

A. International partners have been very clear on their expectations for a credible and transparent process going forward. During the course of the summer, we coordinated with many international partners – in some cases more than 20 – on a series of statements that laid out broad expectations from the international community.

So I think it's clear to the government, it's clear to political actors, and it should be clear to the election management bodies – both at the federal government level and at the member state level – once they're formed, what these expectations are for a transparent and free process. We have already, as partners, engaged the new Prime Minister and his team for a focused discussion on the election plan. I've also met personally with the Police Commissioner who chairs the National Elections Security Task force, and his team then very graciously briefed other partners on their election security plan. And we look forward to the establishment of the election management committees so that we can begin to engage with them as well on the details of the process.

As part of that work, we fully expect there will be a discussion of monitoring and oversight measures, and we'll want to better understand what the plans are. I think, again, partners have been active on these issues. We want this process to succeed, but to succeed as a sound process, as a well-done process. And I think that on the issue of support, there will be support for the process. But it is likely to be greater and more generous from partners the higher the quality of the process, the more transparent the process, and the more that partners are satisfied that it will indeed represent a significant improvement over 2016.

I think that we're still at a somewhat early stage in this as the election management bodies haven't been set up yet. We don't have a fully developed elections security plan. There is a preliminary draft at this point. So, we will need to see a few more of those details. But our intent, absolutely, is to remain engaged, remain supportive, and try to make this as successful as possible.

One final point on this is, of course, the external actors are not the central players here. So, we hope that Somali civil society organizations, Somali media, Somali political leaders, Somali community leaders will also assert their demands, their insistence that this be a quality process, that it be a fair process. We as outsiders can help that. We can be supportive of that but the central actors here are Somalis, and will be Somalis through this process.
