



# UNSOM

ISSUE 31 | QUARTERLY  
JUNE 2024

## NEWSLETTER

/UNSOMALIA

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### Serving the people of Somalia

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- New Acting UN Special Representative for Somalia arrives in Mogadishu
- United Nations congratulates Somalia on Security Council seat
- UN Acting Special Representative briefs Security Council
- UN Special Representative hails Galmudug's Anti-FGM law
- Maryan Zeylac: leading the way for female journalists
- Mohamed Okash: tackling climate change in Somalia



### NEW ACTING UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR SOMALIA ARRIVES IN MOGADISHU

The Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the UN Assistance Mission for Somalia (UNSOM), James Swan, arrived in Mogadishu in May.

Mr. Swan's focus will be to support the Federal Government of Somalia and the Somali people to advance their peace, security, development and state-building priorities.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres announced his designation of Mr. Swan on 14 May. Mr. Swan then held extensive meetings with UN Headquarters leadership prior to his arrival in Mogadishu.

Mr. Swan previously served as the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia and Head of UNSOM from 2019 to 2022, after a long career in the United States diplomatic service.

### UNITED NATIONS CONGRATULATES SOMALIA ON SECURITY COUNCIL SEAT



In early June, the United Nations in Somalia congratulated the Somali government and people on their country's election today to a seat on the UN Security Council for 2025-2026.

"Somalia has come a long way over the past three decades on its path to peace, prosperity, and security. Election to a seat on the Security Council is recognition of that commendable progress," said the UN Secretary-General's Acting Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, in a press statement.

"Somalia's experiences place it in a unique position to contribute to Council deliberations on international peace and security," he added.

Somalia last served on the UN Security Council in 1970-1972.



## UN ACTING SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL

### In June, the Acting UN Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, briefed the Security Council on the situation in Somalia.

(Statement as delivered, New York, 24 June 2024)

Mr. President, distinguished members of the Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the situation in Somalia.

I am pleased to do so together with the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, Ambassador Souef Mohamed El-Amine. I commend the bravery, determination, and sacrifices of the Somali and African Union forces in contributing to peace and security in the country.

I congratulate Somalia on its election as a member of the Security Council for 2025-2026. This achievement demonstrates the progress Somalia has made over the past three decades in its journey from conflict to recovery.

Mr. President,

The Federal Government of Somalia continues to pursue its key national priorities, including the constitutional review process, the electoral framework, and the fight against Al-Shabaab. Between February and May, Somalia's Federal Parliament adopted constitutional amendments to the first four chapters of the 2012 Provisional Constitution, which cover, among other issues, the governance system and electoral framework, reaffirming the Government's commitment to a one-person, one-vote electoral model.

During the last National Consultative Council meeting, convened by His Excellency President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud from 14 to 17 May, and which was attended by the Federal Member States leaders with the exception of Puntland, the leaders welcomed the amendments to the Provisional Constitution and encouraged the rapid adoption of related laws and regulations to facilitate the holding of one-person-one-vote elections. Some opposition figures and Puntland officials criticized the process and outcome, with Puntland's President announcing the State's withdrawal from the federal system pending negotiation of a comprehensive constitutional framework.

Parliament is scheduled to consider the important enabling legislation for universal suffrage elections as well as the next chapters of the Provisional Constitution during

its summer session. The next phase of the constitutional review will address complex issues, such as power- and resource-sharing under Somalia's federal model. Continued engagement of all stakeholders in an inclusive process will be critical to ensure broad-based consensus on these important state-building questions. I call on all Somali stakeholders to work together to resolve their differences and seek consensus.

At the regional level, I remain concerned about the Ethiopia and "Somaliland" Memorandum of Understanding announced on January 1, which has created tensions in the Horn of Africa at a time when the region faces other crises. I recall that the Security Council has repeatedly affirmed respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and unity of Somalia.

“Enabling legislation should include quotas to guarantee women's political participation and meaningful representation in decision-making”

“Climatic events, insecurity and disease outbreaks have continued to exacerbate humanitarian needs”



*I encourage Somalia and Ethiopia to resolve this matter peacefully in accordance with these principles as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and international law.*

Mr. President

*Security is a top priority for the Government of Somalia, which continues to undertake multi-faceted efforts to defeat Al-Shabaab. For its part, Al-Shabaab remains determined to continue terrorist attacks with little regard for the loss of civilian life. Protection of civilians must remain a key priority. I condemn these terrorist attacks and extend my condolences to the families of those killed.*

*While continuing efforts against Al-Shabaab, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) has also drawn down in accordance with the planned transition of responsibilities to Somali security forces. Since June 2023, five thousand ATMIS troops have left Somalia and further reductions are planned in the coming weeks. The United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) continues to provide logistical support to deployed ATMIS forces and to facilitate an orderly drawdown of departing forces.*

*On post-2024 security planning, the Federal Government of Somalia and the African Union continue their discussions on the follow-on security arrangements for 2025. SRCC Souef will provide further details in his briefing. Financing remains a critical challenge, and I appeal to all partners to ensure predictable and sustainable financing for the follow-on arrangements as well as the necessary resources for ATMIS, which continues to face critical funding shortfalls.*

Mr. President,

*On Women, Peace, and Security, I note the commitments made in its revisions of the Provisional Constitution that enabling legislation should include quotas to guarantee women's political participation and meaningful representation in decision-making. The United Nations will continue to provide technical assistance aimed at enabling a credible and transparent electoral process and to engage federal and member state governments on*

*the importance of increasing and codifying women's political participation.*

*I welcome the finalization by Parliament of the Bill of Rights, which has received Presidential endorsement as part of the ongoing constitutional review process. Important guarantees on child rights and protection against female genital mutilation are included. I further welcome Galmudug State's enactment of the first law prohibiting all forms of female genital mutilation as a vital step towards the elimination of violence against women.*

Mr. President,

*The humanitarian situation in Somalia remains dire. While the number of people in need of assistance has reduced from 8.3 million in 2023 to 6.9 million in 2024, climatic events, insecurity and disease outbreaks have continued to exacerbate humanitarian needs. More than 3.8 million people are displaced. The 2024 Somalia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan requires USD 1.6 billion, but as of June 23, it is only 24 per cent funded. I urge international partners to provide the necessary funding to ensure assistance for those most in need.*

*Somalia's humanitarian and development challenges are intensified by climate shocks. To address these challenges, investments to strengthen the longer-term resilience of communities, infrastructure, and economic recovery are essential. At the current rate,*

“The United Nations is in discussions with Somali authorities, to determine the modalities and timeline for the transition.”

*the impact of climate change is outpacing our ability to support adaptation and humanitarian response. Climate change also intensifies social tensions and conflicts, particularly in rural areas where livelihoods are highly dependent on natural resources.*

Mr. President,

*Regarding the Federal Government of Somalia's early May letters to the Security Council requesting the transition from UNSOM to the Country Team, the United Nations is in discussions with Somali authorities, to determine the modalities and timeline for the transition. Since, I assumed my duties on 23 May, I have met the senior Somali leadership, including President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister, among others, on this matter to hear how the United Nations can best support Somalia's priorities going forward. All have indicated that they seek a collaborative process to ensure an orderly transition. As requested by Somali authorities, a Joint Federal Government of Somalia and United Nations Technical Committee led by senior officials on both sides has been established to take forward the planning process. An initial meeting of the Joint Technical Committee was held on 22 June. While still in their early stages, discussions to date have been cordial and constructive. We are working to fulfil the Security Council's request that the Secretary-General engages with the Somali authorities to determine the modalities and timeline for the transition and provide an update by the end of August.*

Mr. President,

*I would like to conclude by reiterating the commitment of the United Nations to continue supporting Somalia in achieving its national priorities.*

Thank you.

[Read more clicking here](#)



## ON FAREWELL VISIT, UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE HAILS GALMUDUG'S ANTI-FGM LAW

**Continuing her farewell visits with Somali leaders, the top United Nations official for Somalia today visited Galmudug where she welcomed that Federal Member State's recent achievements in the fight against female genital mutilation (FGM).**

"Galmudug is the first Federal Member State to have passed legislation to outlaw all forms of female genital mutilation – FGM. And this is really an absolutely outstanding achievement, championed by the leadership of the President, but with amazing work done by the Minister of Women's Affairs and many, many women who have campaigned for this who I've been meeting over lunch today," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing.

"These are brave women who stood up and said 'this has to end.' And they had a receptive voice, I'm glad to say, in the President," she added.

The UN Special Representative was addressing the media in the capital, Dhushamareb, following meetings with Galmudug's President Ahmed Abdi Karie 'Qoorqoor'

and members of his cabinet, as well as local civil society representatives.

Prior to the press conference, they all took part in a celebration of Galmudug's passing of a law banning FGM there in March this year.

"This has been a subject that I wanted to put right in the forefront of my work here and I am very proud, very honoured to be a part of this, to play a small part and congratulate you, your excellency, the Minister of Women's Affairs, and all who have worked so hard to legislate to outlaw FGM – it is really, truly a remarkable achievement," Ms. Laing said at that celebratory event.

According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), FGM is a strong social and cultural norm in Somalia promoted by the societal/family expectations and fear of social sanction. The 2020 Somali Health and Demographic Survey found that around 99% of women and girls between the ages of 15-49 have undergone FGM.

However, progressively, there have been

“Let Somalia be the champion for the world on this – one of the many things that Somalia can demonstrate its leadership and its progress”

shifts in behavior and perceptions around FGM especially among young persons to indicate that extinction of the practice is possible – Galmudug's legislation gives hope to such efforts and emphasizes the need for government and relevant agencies to be in the vanguard of promoting the rights of women and girls.

In another positive development, Somalia's Federal Parliament recently adopted constitutional amendments which maintain the total ban on all forms of FGM, and provide an overall framework for the protection of women and girls. Anti-FGM laws like that of Galmudug spell out in more detail how the ban will be implemented, including providing support to survivors of FGM.

### Three joint aims

In her remarks, the UN Special Representative said the United Nations and the Galmudug administration will set up a joint team to carry out three aims: implementing the legislation; encouraging other Federal Member States to follow Galmudug's lead; and having Galmudug's example spread even further afar.

"Here in Galmudug, legislation is step one. But implementation, of course, is challenging because legislation in itself doesn't change cultural behaviours – deep cultural practices where families feel they are doing their daughter a service by cutting her, and, of course, it is quite the reverse. It is dangerous, harmful, and traumatic. So changing people's mindsets will take time. But we want to work with you on that through education in particular," Ms. Laing said.



She went on to say that Somalia's other Federal member States could follow the example of Galmudug, and suggested an upcoming National Consultative Council (NCC), which brings Somali leaders together to discuss national matters, could serve as a venue for discussing FGM.

"I'd like to see the President as he discusses issues at the NCC [National Consultative Council] – and this is an appeal to you, Mr. President – the next NCC should have FGM on the agenda," Ms. Laing said.

"And thirdly, let's not just leave it at Somalia," she continued. "Let Somalia be the champion for the world on this – one of the many things that Somalia can demonstrate its leadership and its progress. So, we have a lot of work to do ahead."

#### **New UN office**

While in Dhusamareb, the UN Special Representative and the President visited

the Hero Drogo camp site, the location at which a United Nations office is being built.

"We had the opportunity to visit the progress this morning and to see how well that is coming along. So that will be an [UN SOM] office... but will also be for the UN Country Team – UNICEF [UN Children's Fund], World Food Programme (WFP) and others – who want to deepen their partnership here in Galmudug.

The new UN premises are expected to be completed by the end of 2024. Currently, the UN has similar offices in the country's four other Federal Member States: Jubaland, South West State, Hirshabelle and Puntland.

The UN Special Representative completes her assignment later in May and has been having farewell meetings with the leaders of Somalia's Federal Member States, as well as with the top officials of the Federal Government of Somalia.

## **PHOTO HIGHLIGHT**

A lack of environmental awareness and inaction can pose a threat to human health, and improper disposal of waste exacerbates the problem. Shown here, Somali volunteers participate in a clean-up exercise at Lido Beach in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu.



Tababar 3 maali... aabsan horumarinta muuqaalka  
Iyo kobcinta aw... mka warbaahinta.

3 DAYS TRAINING... OTING MEDIA WOMEN'S  
VISIBILITY TH... Y BUILDING.

VENUE: RP FU

DATE: 14-16/jan/2023

## MARYAN ZEYLAC

### LEADING THE WAY FOR FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN SOMALIA'S SOUTH WEST STATE

**For a long time, the voice of Maryan Zeylac was one of the few women's voices heard by the listeners of the main, privately-owned radio station in Somalia's South West State.**

"I was the sole female journalist at Radio Baidoa, leading several radio shows within a predominantly male environment," says Maryan Zeylac, whose programmes used to cover a range of topics, including political developments, women's affairs and social uses.

Working in a male-dominated industry is not new Ms. Zeylac – she spent almost 20 years working in the media in South West State and became accustomed to it.

But she did not simply accept the status quo either.

#### Learning on the job

Born in 1987 in Baidoa – the biggest city in South West State – Ms. Zeylac had a childhood dream of a career in the news media.

She completed her primary and secondary education in Mogadishu, and then returned to Baidoa in 2005. She soon landed a cadetship at Baidoa Radio's newsroom.

Her training and natural aptitude saw her grow her skills, and she eventually undertook various roles, including reporter and producer, for various Somali outlets with a presence in South West State, such as SBC TV, Universal TV and Radio Shabelle, among others. In 2007, she completed a diploma in journalism from the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication.

Women seeking careers in the news media can face many obstacles, ranging from discrimination to lower salaries.

Looking back, Ms. Zeylac recalls how rare it was for a Somali woman to work as a journalist.

"When I started in 2005, children in villages would cheer my name – they looked at me as if I was some sort of renowned BBC Somali journalist from Europe!" she says. "I was the sole female reporter, covering the latest social and political news on the streets. I recall that all radio stations were manned by males except mine."

#### Starting SOMWA

Her awareness of the lack of women's voices in the local media also prompted her to do something to bridge this gap.

With others, she established a platform in 2006 to unite the few female journalists in Baidoa and to, hopefully, attract more women to the field: the Somali Media Women Association (SOMWA).

"I, along with three colleagues from Radio Warsan and Radio Shabelle, founded SOMWA to advocate for a higher number

of female journalists in my hometown. Back then, we were just four, but now there are nearly a hundred female media workers in Baidoa alone, and throughout the South West State," says Ms. Zeylac, who also serves as SOMWA's Executive Director.

With offices in Baidoa and Mogadishu, the Somali capital, the non-governmental organization (NGO) is one of the country's leading representative associations for women working in the news media in Somalia.

It has 20 paid staff and 253 voluntary members, and is a vocal advocate for their rights, needs and place in Somali society.

SOMWA works to promote the rights to and use of information to create a society that has equitable access to opportunities. It monitors the violations of the labour rights and safety of female of journalists





and provides impartial information concerning attacks on female journalists such as harassment, intimidation, inappropriate sexual attentions and online violence. It has also highlighted the issue of women's involvement in the country's political processes, especially decision-making processes.

"We are glad that our efforts have borne fruit – negative perceptions against female journalism are dying down, the number of female journalists has increased significantly and, after engaging traditional leaders intensively, women's political participation is higher in SWS comparing to other Federal Member States. I believed we did our best," she says.

#### Reporter targeted

Ms. Zeylac knows what it is like to be targeted as a female journalist – it is what led to her now living far from her homeland.

In 2008, SOMWA partnered with international entities such as Care International and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which the Al-Shabaab terrorist group was opposed to on ideological grounds.

In 2008, when the Al-Shabaab terrorist group took control of Baidoa from Somalia's Transitional Federal Government, the young journalist relocated to Mogadishu.

"I started to receive death threats from Al-Shabaab, which was so severe and constant to the extent that I could not even step out of my house," she says.

In the capital, she continued her media and advocacy work, but the Al-Shabaab threats did not let up. Her work there, as well as her work in Baidoa made her a target. In late 2009, she fled to Kenya from where she proceeded to the United Kingdom.

"I did not choose to move to the UK – I left my country for safety reasons. Al-Shabaab constantly demanded that I close SOMWA's office. They accused me

of 'collaborating' with Care International and USAID, calling me an 'apostate' in the media," she says.

Recently, in the United Kingdom, Ms. Zeylac completed a bachelor's degree in health and social care from the University of Bedfordshire – but she continues in her leadership role at SOMWA through virtual means and through regular, low-key visits to Somalia.

"The situation is difficult for me in some ways, but SOMWA has a strong membership and, ultimately, it doesn't matter where I am physically as long as we can achieve our goals for Somali women in SWS and Mogadishu," she says.

Over the past 20 years, SOMWA has worked with various national and international organization, including the United Nations, to hold a series of training workshops for female media workers in South West Somalia.

"The proportion of female journalists in the press is less than 30 per cent, underscoring the need to increase their representation. Offering capacity-building training, internships, employment opportunities, and holding media leaders accountable for violations against women in the media are crucial strategic areas that can promote female journalists," says Ms. Zeylac.

"In general, I can say that women are half of our society and should be represented accordingly. Women are often interested in hearing other women's voices and opinions, and men can learn from hearing female's perspectives of the world." says the Head of Office of the UN's operations in South West State, Magnus Bjarnason.

But, even with this support, Ms. Bjarnason is under no illusion as to the road ahead for young Somali women considering a career in the news industry.

"My advice to young girls entering the media is that the media needs you. Equip yourself with knowledge, proactiveness, and perseverance. There are no red carpets on your path to success, but it is slightly better than before," she says. "Let's make sacrifices for the next generation."

My advice to young girls entering the media is that the media needs you. Equip yourself with knowledge, proactiveness, and perseverance





## MOHAMED OKASH: TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOMALIA

### Among the many challenges that Somalia is grappling with on its path to peace and stability is climate change.

Climate shocks have greatly impacted Somalia as it deals with other challenges on the security and humanitarian fronts. They often add another layer of complication to already-difficult issues.

However, there is growing recognition among Somalis that they themselves need to do more and soon.

One of those Somalis is Mohamed Okash.

The Mogadishu native is an educator, researcher and innovator. He is also the founding director of the Institute of Climate and Environment (ICE) – a think tank at SIMAD University set up to tackle climate, environment and development challenges in Somalia.

"I firmly believe that sustainable development is not just a lofty goal but a necessity for our survival," he says. "Through collaborative efforts and innovative solutions, we can ensure that no one is left behind in Somalia's journey towards a sustainable future."

In some ways, Mr. Okash's path to ICE comes as no surprise, and is a testament to his drive and the power of education to change lives and communities.

#### Beginnings

Mr. Okash was born in Mogadishu in 1992 and completed his primary and secondary schooling there, amidst the civil war. From a young age, he was aware that education was an avenue to a better future and he threw himself into his studies.

He went on to study at Mogadishu University, from where he received a Diploma in Education in 2012, and he embarked on a teaching career at local high schools.

"I started teaching at schools out of passion, as I used to teach my siblings at home. Being the eldest of seven siblings, assuming early leadership responsibility within the family, teaching them how to write, read, and think critically brought me joy and imbued meaning into investing in human capital cultivation and development," Mr. Okash says. "This led me to pursue a Diploma in Education, specializing in teaching."

From there, he went on to undertake a bachelor's degree in public administration at SIMAD University in 2015.

He took his education, and that of his fellow students, seriously. In addition to his studies, he also became a student leader,

advocating for changes to improve the learning experience for his fellow students.

"Throughout my undergraduate studies at SIMAD University, I frequently served as a class coordinator and on the inaugural faculty election board, which introduced the university's first student election and student government bodies aimed at representing and serving students," Mr. Okash says.

"I did this because I believe in empowering fellow students, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their needs are met," he adds. "And it helped me develop my leadership skills!"

He followed this with a master's in development studies from Kampala International University in 2018.

Looking back, the 30-year-old says there was always a unifying thread to his educational goals: "All my qualifications and educational pursuits were and are aimed at understanding public affairs to enhance the quality of life for communities."

#### Social enterprise

Mr. Okash's leadership endeavours did not remain in the classroom.

In September 2018, he co-founded a community-based, youth-led non-governmental organization called SDGs252 – later rebranded as Rays Initiative – which aims to empower Somali communities on sustainable development through



capacity development, policy advocacy, and development monitoring.

“Rays Initiative is now a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network and implements developmental programmes, including the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Somali language, and the Rays Leadership Programme, which is a career and leadership fellowship for teenagers and youngsters to navigate career paths while in tertiary education,” he says.

The SDGs are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone everywhere. They were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda, which sets out a 15-year plan to achieve the SDGs.

### International representation

The young activist’s path started to take on an international hue, with his potential and efforts being recognized abroad.

In 2019, he was selected to take part in the Léo Africa Institute’s Young and Emerging Leaders Project (YELP).

According to its website, the Uganda-based institution seeks to empower “young and emerging leaders in Africa to success, live high-impact and fulfilled lives,” and the YELP project “picks individuals who are clearly on the path to success and empowers them with knowledge and skills to navigate through the pitfalls of success and dangers of leading change.”

In 2020, after a highly-competitive application process, he was selected as a participant in the Generation Change Fellows Program (GCFP), established by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the University of Southern California’s Center for Religion and Civic Culture.

The GCFP focuses on young leaders from conflict-affected and fragile countries and aims to foster collaboration, build resilience and strengthen capacity as they transform local communities.

“Even the most dedicated young leaders face challenges and burnout as they work to create change. They often work in isolation, or lack the knowledge, skills, and resources to maximize their efforts and increase their personal resilience,” USIP notes on its website.

“USIP developed the Generation Change Fellows Program,” it continues, “to counter this isolation through a family-like community of practice, to augment the existing knowledge and skills of participants through mentorship and training, and to partner with them in community-led peacebuilding initiatives.”

“Being chosen for the Fellows Programme meant a lot to me – it has opened doors to incredible opportunities, networks and leadership development,” says Mr. Okash.

As could be expected given his drive and trajectory, Mr. Okash – at a young age – has become something of an old hand at representing his country in international fora, and especially its youth.

He is very aware of the responsibility he bears in this respect.

“Somali youth, the primary stakeholders in the nation, are facing escalating threats to their current and future prospects due to climate change, endangering all facets of their lives,” he says. “It is imperative to empower them, facilitating their participation in co-creating their future by utilising their creativity, innovation, energy, and aspirations for a sustainable Somalia and beyond.”

According to the World Population Prospects, produced by the UN Department



of Economic and Social Affairs, Somalia’s current population is close to 18 million, with some 70 per cent being of them under the age of 30.

Mr. Okash’s representational duties saw him attend the World Economic Forum’s Annual Meeting in Davos in 2022 and, in 2023, the UN Conference of Least Developed Countries in Doha and the climate summit known as the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which took place in Dubai and was known as COP28.

“At these global gatherings, I have witnessed firsthand the power of collaboration and the urgent need for collective action – Somalia may face unique challenges, but our aspirations for a better future are universal,” Mr. Okash says.

### Teaching

In 2020, Mr. Okash joined SIMAD University, where he served as a senior lecturer and as Head of Innovation at its innovation project, known as SIMAD iLab.

“Part of my role included disrupting and designing social innovation programmes to innovate solutions among emerging social entrepreneurs that align with the Global Goals, mentoring and coaching micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises and startups, and building an ecosystem that challenges traditional job creation by fostering an entrepreneurial, design, and tech community that innovates for SDGs and Somalia’s National Development Plan,” he says.

“To boil this down to its essence, in the Somalia context, this was about promoting lasting development by empowering local communities and encouraging innovation and collaboration,” he adds.

In his role lecturing at SIMAD University’s Faculties of Social Sciences and Management Sciences, he taught classes, supervised students’ research and



mentored them as they pursued their professional careers.

While he was content with his work, he started to become aware of the looming and ever-growing threat posed to Somalia by climate change.

Somalia is the most climate-vulnerable nation and the least prepared to tackle climate shocks. Over the years, the country had problems of severe droughts, famine and floodings.

According to a Climate Risk Profile by the consultancy Weathering Risk, temperatures in Somalia will rise between 1.4 – 1.9 °C by 2030 compared to pre-industrial levels. The annual number of very hot days – with daily maximum temperature above 35 °C – is also set to increase, with central Somalia being the worst affected. Added to this, overall water availability per capita could halve by 2080, underlining the acute need for long-term climate and conflict mitigation strategies.

#### On ICE

After careful consideration and much consultation, Mr. Okash decided to put a long-gestating plan into place in January 2023: the creation of ICE, which has quickly established itself as a leading environmental think-tank focused on tackling the climate crisis in Somalia.

“We need to rethink how we farm, transport, build infrastructure and manage our resources, as well as reorient the mindset of people towards the environment – we advocate for informed and evidence-based policy making through research to design bottom-up policies and programmes that build resilience and improve climate adaptation in Somalia,” he says.

ICE currently has four full-time staff members, two interns, two advisory board members, and five research fellows, in addition to a group of student volunteers known as GreenChampions.

Central to its mission is the exchange of ideas and knowledge through stakeholder engagement with academics, policymakers, and practitioners. These interactions aim to inform policy processes and inspire innovative solutions tailored to Somalia’s unique context.

“We offer capacity development for communities, we disseminate knowledge to raise people’s awareness of these issues as well inform policy-making processes to build climate resilience, reduce vulnerability and enhance the adaptive capacity of

Somalia so that it’s a place where people prosper, and our planet is protected,” Mr. Okash says.

Over the past 18 months of its existence, ICE has worked with various partners, including governments, the private sector, communities, civil societies and the United Nations.

In 2023, ICE signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Federal Ministry of Climate Change and Environment to partner on research, capacity-building and raising awareness on climate and environmental issues. Last year, it collaborated with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) to form a so-called ‘climate change cluster,’ a platform to bring all the stakeholders that have shared interests in climate and environmental issues.

“We believe in the power of knowledge and collaboration to drive meaningful change,” Mr. Okash says. “Through our partnerships with governments, the private sector, communities, and civil society, we work to build local capacities and foster resilience in the face of environmental challenges.”

#### UN and environment

On the issue of climate change, the United Nations in Somalia has been actively working with the Federal Government of Somalia to advocate for increases in funding for climate adaptation for communities affected by climate shocks.

“We are doing this through policy, technical advice and project and program support to both Federal and Member states. Together we are delivering large programs such as the ‘Jowhar Off Stream Development Programme’ to help drive climate security through water, food and human security and through working with communities

to support adaptation to the changing world,” says the UN Climate Security and Environmental Advisor to Somalia, Christophe Hodder.

UNSOM is one of the world body’s few special political missions to incorporate climate-related language into its mandate and has been leading the way since 2020, when it became the first mission to deploy an environmental and climate adviser – Mr. Hodder – dedicated to working on the impact of climate change on the country’s security.

The UN Mission also provided the training for the Institute’s ‘GreenChampions’ on the nexus between climate change and human rights. It aimed to deepen their understanding of the impact of climate risks on fundamental human rights and principles.

“It’s young Somalis like Mr. Okash who have inspired the United Nations in Somalia to better incorporate climate action and youth perspectives into its programming and advocacy, and also strengthen engagement with academic institutions such as SIMAD, a key way to reach youth but also future policy-makers,” says the Chief of UNSOM’s Human Rights and Protection Group, Kirsten Young.

Ultimately, the responsibility for the response to climate change in Somalia will fall on Somalis, and Mr. Okash is fully prepared and committed.

“As the founding director of the Institute of Climate and Environment, I have chosen to dedicate my life to pioneering initiatives that bridge the gap between climate change, sustainable development, and social innovation in Somalia,” he says. “In the journey towards sustainability, every step forward matters, and together, we can pave the way for a brighter, greener future for future generations.”

