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UN IN SOMALIA STANDS IN SOLIDARITY WITH SOMALIS IN FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

The first quarter of 2020 saw the spectre of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic arise in Somalia. The challenge is a global one and a local one – and one which the UN is committed to supporting the people of Somalia in defeating.

The UN in Somalia, in particular through the World Health Organization (WHO), has been working with the Somali authorities across the country to prepare its health systems to contain and mitigate any outbreak of the pandemic in Somalia.

At the end of March, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, said the UN family in Somalia stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the country's people during this testing time.

"We will continue to support all efforts to address the immediate health and long-term socio-economic impact of COVID-19," said Mr. Swan. "We must all unite to prevent the spread of the virus. We need to pay particular attention to the most vulnerable in our communities, including

internally displaced people, the infirm and the elderly."

"We echo the call of the Secretary-General for an immediate global ceasefire to put aside violence, mistrust, hostilities and animosity, and to focus on battling the virus, not each other", he added. "This is essential in order for life saving assistance to reach communities across the country. Here in Somalia, the United Nations calls for a cessation of acts of violence and terrorism so that all resources and support can be channeled to fight the COVID-19 pandemic."

The WHO continues to support the Somali health sector by scaling up its operational readiness and response to COVID-19.

"The WHO is heavily engaged with the Somali health authorities for case findings, contact tracing, testing, isolation and containment activities with the intention of virus suppression and delaying patient surge," said Dr. Mamanur Rahman Malik, the WHO Country Representative in Somalia. "We will continue to work as One UN and keep the country safe showing

Serving the people of Somalia

HIGHLIGHTS

- COVID-19: UN stands with Somalia
- Supporting Somalia's elections
- Reaching out on a new constitution
- Security Council notes election preparation
- Continuing support for desert locust fight

our solidarity, unity and partnership with the government."

To reinforce the ongoing efforts to contain COVID-19 at the federal and state levels as well as limit the possibility of further spread of the virus, the United Nations has established system-wide operating, medical and support procedures. It is also assisting with the coordination of the support from international partners and helping the federal government to prioritise and allocate resources where they are needed. A task force has been established to ensure business continuity and agencies have developed a detailed preparedness and response plan in support of the Government's efforts.





SUPPORTING ELECTIONS IN SOMALIA

A brief Q&A with Deryck Fritz, Director of the UN Integrated Electoral Support Group (IESG)

Q. What are the major milestones achieved since the beginning of 2020, in preparation of upcoming universal elections in Somalia?

A. The significant achievement of 2020 has been the adoption of the Electoral Bill, which was signed into law on 20 February 2020 by President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo." The Law introduces a first-past-the-post electoral system with 275 constituencies in the House of the People and 54 seats for the Upper House. This is an important component of the legal framework for the upcoming elections – the first multiparty universal suffrage elections to be held in Somalia since 1969.

However, several key issues require clarification in order for the law to be implementable. These include the lack of a provision to guarantee women's 30 per cent quota to ensure women's representation in the Parliament. The Amendments to the Political Parties Law have also been submitted to Parliament for approval.

Q. What role does the UN play in support of the process to finalize the legal framework governing the first 'one person, one vote' elections?

A. The United Nations, through the Integrated Electoral Support Group (IESG) which brings together experts from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UNSOM, has provided support

and technical advice to the National Independent Electoral Commissions (NIEC) in reviewing the draft electoral bill as it progressed through Parliament.

The IESG and NIEC legal teams reviewed the draft Amendments to the Political Parties Law which is to be tabled in the next session of the Parliament, as well as the Political Parties Law that was passed in 2016. IESG also provided support to the NIEC in its preparations for the detailed discussions between the Joint Ad Hoc Committee and the NIEC which took place from 31 March to 2 April.

Since the Political Parties Law, as well as the National Electoral Law, contains a number of incompatibilities, it will be necessary to revise and harmonize the electoral legislation. Key legislative issues in the electoral law that remain to be clarified by the Joint Ad Hoc Committee include: (a) seats allocation for both Houses of Parliament (constituency); (b) women's quota; c) election of members of the two Houses hailing from the Northern Regions ("Somaliland"); and, (d) Representation rights of Banadir region.

IESG will continue to support the NIEC in its engage-

ment with the Joint Ad Hoc Parliamentary Committee to resolve these issues.

Q. The Parliamentary Joint Ad Hoc Committee was established to address provisions of the Electoral Law that are technically implementable by the NIEC. Can you give us an example of this type of challenge?

A. The time period for political parties to submit their list of candidates is currently 75 working days. This duration is insufficient for the NIEC and political parties to conduct all the necessary preparatory activities for the candidate nomination and the election, including campaign preparations, NIEC vetting and



finalizing lists of candidates, and addressing candidate nomination complaints.

A major concern related to the organization of universal elections is ensuring security during voter registration, and beyond. What is being done in this area?

IESG will continue to support the NIEC in its engagement with the Joint Ad Hoc Parliamentary Committee to resolve these issues.

Security operations to protect the citizens participating in the electoral process will be a major challenge in Somalia and everyone agrees that security is going to be a defining factor on the conduct of the 2020/21 electoral process. A National Electoral Security Task Force (NESTF) was established in 2019 comprising federal and national security actors, with support from the UN and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

The Task Force is mandated to coordinate the efforts to provide security to the Voter Registration and Polling Centres. In a recent meeting of the NESTF – held on 15-18 March and chaired by the SPF Police Commissioner, with participation by the Police Commissioners from South West State, HirShabelle, Galmudug and Banadir, and representatives from Government, NIEC, AMISOM and the UN – it was agreed to conduct detailed assessments of the 284 provisional Voter Registration sites with all security stakeholders in three Federal Member States and Banadir, and to establish the respective State Security Task Forces immediately. The UN Peace Building Fund Project is providing support to the NESTF Secretariat, and to equip and train joint operations centres at national, state capital, and regional levels. AMISOM will provide training support for the security actors.

Q. The ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis imposed a number of restrictions and delays to a wide range of activities. How are the electoral preparations affected, and how is IESG supporting some of the alternate work modalities for the electoral stakeholders?

A. Obviously, all institutions in Somalia are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

and the NIEC is one of them. Most of the NIEC staff are currently working from home and report to work on a rotational basis as required. IESG has been supporting NIEC to ensure its business continuity through electronic means. As an example, the recent Electoral Information Sharing meeting held on 7 April, co-chaired by the NIEC and the UN, was conducted virtually with donors, assistance partners and staff connected from several countries. In particular, IESG has provided Zoom licenses to the NIEC to facilitate its electronic communications with its staff.

NIEC vetting and finalizing lists of candidates, and addressing candidate nomination complaints.

The NIEC are currently exploring options, with IESG support, regarding the conduct of elections with additional measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on electoral preparations. But planning cannot be finalized without political agreement on the decisions on the electoral framework.

NATIONWIDE OUTREACH TO GARNER SOMALIS' VIEWS ON NEW CONSTITUTION

Since February, the federal Ministry of Constitutional Affairs (MoCA), with the support of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSMOM), has been conducting a nationwide outreach campaign, which will cover all of Somalia's Federal Member States with the aim of enabling citizens to contribute to the Constitution-making process.

"The Constitution is not an issue for the politicians and the technical committees working on it, it also not supposed to be a project. It is supposed to be taken to the public, who are very much interested in it. The people living with disabilities want to see their rights represented in the Constitution, the youth want to be sure their rights are enshrined in the Constitution, and it's same case with women and various groups in society," the Minister of Constitutional Affairs, Salah Jama, said at the opening of the first consultation event, held in Mogadishu.

The regional gatherings held so far brought together hundreds of people from all walks of life, speaking on their own behalf and for others. They included community leaders, civil society groups, academics, clan elders, youth, women, farmers, persons with disabilities, and religious leaders. Topics discussed have included power-sharing, federalism, the financial system, the justice system, national security, and the status of the capital city, Mogadishu.

Somalia's constitutional review process was launched in 2018 and aims to replace the current provisional Constitution, adopted in 2012, ahead of the country's upcoming 'one person, one vote' elections – the first in 50 years. The ongoing public outreach campaign will advance the country's constitutional

review process by integrating citizens suggestions and opinions.

To date, consultation events have been held in Benadir Regional Administration, South West State, Hirshabelle and Galmudug, and similar consultations are to be held in Jubaland and Puntland.



Below is a snapshot of some of the views expressed by representatives at the consultations:

"The Constitution needs to be based on women's interests. Although there is a narrative that women should have a thirty per cent quota, that is not enough. We have to get fifty per cent. Our representation should not be confined to government and parliament but we have to be represented everywhere, including the ministries and other government institutions."

Salima Sheikh Shueb, representative of women's groups, South West State

"It is impressive to see the people of Galmudug discussing their future. I want to thank those who organized this event and the federal Government. I am very happy today that Somalia is discussing about its future."

Abdi Iyow, elder, Galmudug State

"Two things need to be included in the Constitution, for the benefit and the future of persons with disabilities. We need a special commission that champions for our welfare. We also need a specific quota allocated to persons with disabilities, just like the women's quota."

Abdullahi Hassan, representative of persons with disabilities, Mogadishu

"I would like to see changes that address our interests."

Nurta Mohamed, resident of a camp for internally displaced persons, South West State

"The youth were actively involved in the discussions. We reviewed the articles of the Constitution, and gave our opinion on issues we thought were not right and suggested what we thought was good."

Mohamed Muhumed Abdi, university student, Hirshabelle State ▀



FOLLOWING BRIEFING, SECURITY COUNCIL NOTES PROGRESS ON SOMALI ELECTION PREPARATION

In late February, the UN envoy to Somalia, James Swan, briefed the Security Council at UN Headquarters in New York on the latest developments in Somalia.

He described 2020 as having "the potential to be a transformative year" for the country, with a number of key national priorities with impact on Somalia's trajectory for years to come due to conclude.

"These include achieving debt relief, holding 'one person, one vote' elections, finalising the federal constitution, advancing the fight against al-Shabaab, and consolidating the federal state," Mr. Swan told the Council.

"There is much to do in the year ahead. Only by working together, as Somalis, as partners, and in a spirit of unity and compromise, will progress be made. Further impetus and consensus-building are needed to ensure that key 2020 benchmarks for elections, security, and relations between the Federal Government and Federal Member States do not fall further behind schedule," he added. "I look forward to Somalia's leaders taking the bold steps necessary to enable such progress in this critical year."

A few days later, the Council issued a press statement in which it noted the progress made in the preparations for the elections, and welcomed the role of the Federal Government of

Somalia, the Somali Federal Parliament and the National Independent Election Commission in this regard.

The Council reiterated its expectation that 'one person, one vote' elections which are peaceful, transparent, timely, credible and inclusive, allowing as many citizens to vote as possible, will be held by late 2020 or early 2021, in accordance with the Provisional Federal Constitution of Somalia.

In other points, the Council emphasised the importance of full cooperation between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Federal Member States. It reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive approach to security in compliance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law and better coordination between international partners.

The Council also stressed the importance of the meaningful participation of women in all efforts towards the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and expressed concern about the continued vulnerability of millions of people, notably children and the internally displaced, to extreme weather events, the ongoing risk of famine in Somalia and the need for generous support to the country's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP).

Currently, the \$1 billion HRP for Somalia is just 12.2 per cent funded, with a funding gap of \$918 million.





AMID COVID-19 RESPONSE, UN CONTINUES SUPPORT FOR DESERT LOCUST FIGHT

While Somalia and its partners, including the United Nations, focus on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, other parts of the world body remain concentrated on supporting the Somali authorities in a range of areas – including the current desert locust infestation.

The pests continue laying eggs and hatching in their breeding grounds in Somalia, and a new generation threatens rural food security and livelihoods.

In this Q&A, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's Representative in Somalia, Etienne Peterschmitt, provides an update on its support in the country's fight against desert locust.

Q. Why should the fight to curb the spread of desert locusts remain a top priority in the midst of COVID-19 response?

A. It's very simple: desert locusts pose a serious threat to Somalia's food security. We cannot stop the fight or the situation will get even worse. Let us remember that this is the worst outbreak in 25 years in the country, and it is of an unprecedented scale, also throughout East Africa. It is not by any chance that the Federal Government of Somalia declared the desert locust upsurge a national emergency on 2 February. According to our latest food security outlook, the impact of this desert locust outbreak in Somalia could increase, by September 2020, by half a million the number of Somalis facing food insecurity or severe hunger.

Q. What is the current situation of desert locust in Somalia and the East Africa region?

A. On the one hand, we have a second generation of mature adults laying a new batch of eggs, while egg hatching took place in the first half of April. This calls for immediate ground control operations to contain a new bigger generation. On the other hand, we have a new generation of immature adults that have begun to form swarms in Kenya and Ethiopia. These

swarms can travel up to 150 kilometres a day, depending on wind conditions, and may reach Somalia during the main Gu season, ravaging young crops and pasture. Good persistent rains across Somalia are ensuring the availability of suitable vegetation to sustain the development of the third generation of desert locust in Somalia.

Rural areas and populations will be unfortunately most affected by the infestation. Livelihoods are at immediate risk.

Q. What does that mean in terms of impact for the local population?

A. It means that rural areas and populations will be, unfortunately, the most affected by the infestation, including riverine farmers, agro-pastoralists, pastoralists and rural internally displaced people. Livelihoods are at immediate risk.

Q. How is the United Nations collaborating with the Federal Government of Somalia?

A. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is in the lead with this for the world body. We have been working together with the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation of the Federal Government of Somalia since the early stages of the outbreak. We have prepared together a comprehensive Action Plan, which is aligned with the regional efforts coordinated by FAO – we must not forget that this is a regional endeavour. And we have recently reinforced our partnership to scale up local capacities, surveillance and control operations to combat the desert locust upsurge. We have done so not only with the Federal Government, but also with different government institutions at the state level across the country. We are satisfied with the enhanced cooperation.





Q. In a nutshell, what does the Action Plan consists of?

A. The plan has two main components or goals. The first one is to control desert locust. That includes to scale up capacities, control operations in the ground, spraying, surveillance and so on. The second pillar is protecting lives and livelihoods. As I said before, and according to the projections, we are anticipating the shocks that this crisis can trigger at the humanitarian level. With funds received to-date, we will be able to reach 24,000 families with farming inputs, and a further 30,000 households with supplementary animal feed.

The impact of this desert locust outbreak in Somalia could increase by September 2020 in half a million the number of Somalis facing food insecurity or severe hunger.

Q. In practical terms, how is FAO supporting the government-led Action Plan to fight the upsurge of desert locusts?

A. FAO is providing technical expertise, mobilizing resources from the international community, procuring key items in the international market – like biopesticides,

vehicles and mounted-vehicle sprayers, as well as knapsacks – recruiting desert locust officers, or providing technology like the eLocust3 GPS tracking system, which is coordinated from our headquarters in Rome. And we are also coordinating the regional response in East Africa, which is fundamental in a crisis that doesn't understand borders.

Q. How does this translate into concrete actions on the ground?

A. Well, we can say that capacity for ground control has been strengthened with the purchase of 18 Land Cruiser vehicles. They complement another 15 vehicles currently on hire for survey and control in north and central Somalia. Twelve vehicle-mounted sprayers and ten backpack sprayers have also been delivered in Hargeisa and Mogadishu, in addition to ten vehicle-mounted sprayers triangulated from Morocco and Mali to support control efforts in Somalia.

Three helicopters are being mobilized to Somalia to carry out aerial control operations. A new consignment of 2,000 kilos of biopesticides has also been delivered. Two Somali desert locust officers have been recently hired by FAO in Somalia to support surveillance and control operations in the main breeding grounds; one is stationed in Garowe, Puntland, and one in Hargeisa, Somaliland. As a result of the concerted efforts between the Government and FAO, by mid-April, some 31,000 hectares had already been covered out of the 360,000 hectares estimated to be affected across the country.

Q. In terms of funding, FAO has recently updated its total requirement up to \$57 million. Why?

A. That's correct. Let me first say that we are very grateful to the international community, which has committed \$24.2 million so far to support FAO and the government-led Desert Locust 2020 Somalia Action Plan. Our initial appeal did not cover the whole year, and this is why we have now updated it including all needs through 2020 against a total requirement of \$57 million. Top contributors so far include the United States and Germany, followed by the United Kingdom, Sweden, the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, the European Union, the Gates Foundation, France and Mastercard, among others.

We have updated our funding appeal against a total requirement of \$57 million.

Q. How is COVID-19 hindering FAO and government efforts to tackle this crisis?

A. We are experiencing some delays with consignments, for example with biopesticides. International experts cannot travel to breeding grounds and quarantine upon arrival is also a constraint for aerial operations. All in all, it is not optimal, but we are doing our best and remain fully committed to carry it out.