



UNSOM

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 29 | QUARTERLY
DECEMBER 2023

/UNSOMALIA
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HIGHLIGHTS

- Top UN officials reaffirm commitment to Somalia's state- and peacebuilding efforts
- UN Security Council extends UNSOM's mandate
- Political and security developments in Puntland
- Cross-cutting nature of human rights in Somalia
- 16 Days of Activism: UN calls for more progress to end gender-based violence
- Somalia's milestones for rights of persons with disabilities
- Human Rights Day and 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Feature: Radio Mogadishu – Saving historic audio recordings

TOP UN OFFICIALS REAFFIRM COMMITMENT TO SOMALIA'S STATE- AND PEACEBUILDING EFFORTS

Marking United Nations Day in October, the world body's top officials in Somalia reaffirmed their support for the Somali government and people as the country continues with its state- and peace-building efforts.

Speaking at a news conference in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing, said, "As you will all be aware, there are many challenges in the world at the moment... [including] numerous challenges on the continent of Africa and some of the challenges we face in Somalia – but the United Nations stands there ready to support in all these challenges."

"We have been here in Somalia pre-

independence. We have been here through some of the very tough times that Somalia has faced," added Ms. Laing, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

She was accompanied by the Secretary-General's Deputy Special Representatives for Somalia, Anita Kiki Gbeho and George Conway, with the latter also serving as the UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, and the Head of the UN Support Office for Somalia (UNSOS), Aisa Kacyira.

In her remarks to the media in Mogadishu, Ms. Laing highlighted various developments that are currently among the top areas of focus for the United Nations in Somalia.

Political

On the political front, the UN Special Representative flagged issues surrounding the National Consultative Council (NCC), which brings together the leaders of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and its Federal Member States (FMSs).

In May this year, the NCC had set out four specific proposals for a future electoral system with moves to: a presidential

system, a two-party system, a 'one person, one vote' electoral model throughout the country, and dates for local council elections and alignment of FMS terms of office. The proposals continued to dominate political debate.

"We are at quite a crucial moment where we need to agree collectively, under the leadership of the Government, [on] the way forward on elections, the kind of models that Somalia will pursue, the timeline, the sequencing of elections, and of course, very importantly, to try and bring Puntland back





into this process because it will be very hard to complete not just elections, but the whole legislative framework and the process around developing a constitution for Somalia,” Ms. Laing said.

She stressed the importance of Somalia’s Constitutional Review Process continuing.

“Without a constitution, a country will find it very hard to move forward. A constitution [is] essentially the ‘rules of the game’ which govern how a country is legislated, is governed. And Somalia really needs that constitution to be nailed down; as you know, it is still working on a draft constitution,” the UN Special Representative said.

The conflict in Laascaanood also figured in the top UN official’s remarks. She noted that the situation remains difficult and tense, despite the situation on the ground being relatively calm and displaced people starting to return home.

“The underlying drivers of this conflict, which resulted in a number of people killed and a number of prisoners taken, need still to be resolved,” Ms. Laing said, while flagging that the United Nations has been engaging with all parties involved in the conflict.

“The three messages are, number one, please make progress on the detainee exchange as a confidence-building measure. Secondly, it’s important for everyone to commit to no more violence, and thirdly, of course, to find a peaceful solution to the disputed territory,” she added.



Security

Addressing developments on Somalia’s security front, the UN Special Representative noted that the FGS recently requested a three-month technical pause to the latest stage of the drawdown of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), while it engages in a major military effort against the Al-Shabaab terrorist group.

“This is in recognition that the Government was facing challenges conducting the counter-offensive while also generating enough troops to take over the Forward Operating Bases that are held by ATMIS. This time is being used wisely to do some reconfiguration, some resetting, and to replan the military strategies,” Ms. Laing said.

According to Somalia’s security plans, ATMIS will be drawing down its troops over the next 14 months before completely departing at the end of 2024, with the Somali Security Forces (SSF) assuming prime responsibility in this area. A high-level conference on Somalia’s post-2024 security architecture and its needs took place at UN Headquarters in December this year.

While on security matters, the UN Special Representative spoke about the importance of what happens in areas where the SSF drives Al-Shabaab terrorists out.

“It’s important to note that reclaiming areas from Al-Shabaab is, of course, only step one, although a very important step. Those areas need to be stabilised, and people need to see the benefits of the Government returning to provide services for the people to enable their livelihoods to progress, to ensure justice is delivered – and that work is called stabilisation. The United Nations is providing the coordinating forum around stabilisation. It is very important to consolidate those security gains,” she said.

In her remarks to the media, Assistant Secretary-General Kacyira said UNSOS expected to continue its wide-ranging, steadfast support to ATMIS and the SSF throughout the remainder of ATMIS’ time in Somalia, and with a focus on leaving the SSF well-prepared for its responsibilities.

“It is of key importance that they are trained and equipped accordingly – through the UNSOS-administered Trust Fund in support of the SSF, we do our very best in implementing priorities set by the Somali Government in this regard. We are, for example, training Somali Security Forces in the spheres of aviation operations, aviation security and medical, evacuations and management of other logistics-related fields,” she said.

UNSOS’s logistics support throughout the security transition includes the handover of ATMIS’ Forward Operating Bases to the SSF, along with equipment at these



locations. The latter includes water points, generators and water treatment plants.

“All this is done in the spirit of building capacity and sustaining operations and supporting security,” the Assistant Secretary-General added. “As we go through this transition, I would like to take this opportunity to say that UNSOS remains committed to carrying out its role as a strategic enabler for its clients, for the ultimate benefit of Somalia.”

Women

When speaking about the UN’s support for increasing Somali women’s participation in society, including in peacebuilding and decision-making processes, the UN Special Representative emphasised that women play a very important role in security, and there can be no lasting peace unless women are involved in resolving underlying tensions and drivers of conflict.

“I’ve heard directly myself from many of the female leaders here in Somalia – brave women who stand up for women’s rights, who are doing pioneering work – and they urged me strongly and my team to continue to advocate with the Government, with Parliament and so on, on the importance of women having their rightful place at all the top tables, including crucially in politics, because women need to see other women in strong political leadership roles,” Ms. Laing said. “Let’s all commit to work together to continue on ensuring that women have their rightful seat at the table.”

The top UN official also drove home the





importance of achieving the target of a quota of at least 30 per cent for women's representation in parliament "to break this cycle, to get enough women at the table, for women to represent the views and rights of other women."

At Somalia's last federal electoral process in 2022, the target of the 30 per cent quota was not achieved. The final percentage of parliamentary seats held by women was just 21 per cent, down from 24 per cent in the previous electoral cycle in 2016.

Human rights

On the issue of human rights in Somalia, the UN Special Representative welcomed recent legislative achievements, such as the Federal Government's approval of a Disability Rights Bill, a Child Rights Bill and a Juvenile Justice Bill.

"A very important issue in Somalia is the age of a child. We now have for the first time an age verification policy, which is the first formal procedure for age assessment in the country to confirm that a child is actually under 18. The UN has provided technical support to all these bills," Ms. Laing said.

"But there is more to be done," she continued. "So, on the age of a child, for example, the next step is to harmonise all the legislation and policy around embedding formally that a child is under 18, and that affects things like child marriage, the age at which a child can legitimately join the military, and so on. So that is a really important next step."

In her remarks to the media, in relation to the Disability Rights Bill, Deputy Special Representative Gbeho highlighted the UN's support for the National Disability Agency over the last two years – including support for its first-ever disability needs and perceptions survey.

"We supported them to undertake a perception survey, so they can understand the issues that people with disabilities face in Somalia," she said. "When I was in school, I had a professor and he used to tell

us: 'If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it.' If we do not understand the challenges that people with disabilities face, there will be no way we can support the Government to resolve these issues."

In August 2019, following extensive consultations and advocacy, the FGS ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This momentum resulted in the fast-tracking of a national mechanism, with the inauguration of the National Disability Agency (NDA) in 2021. Subsequently, the NDA led and consulted on the drafting of the Disability Rights Bill which was promulgated in July 2023.

Despite its recent creation, the National Disability Agency is a fully functioning institution and UNSOM has been its main partner supporting its capacity building, facilitation of donor funding and technical assistance.

Within human rights, on the topic of freedom of expression, UN Special Representative Laing noted its importance to the world body.

"This is an area we keep a very close watch on. We've done three reports on ensuring that the Government adheres to its obligations to ensure that all of you as journalists can do your jobs freely and report so that people understand what is going on and without any intimidation," Ms. Laing said.

The right to freedom of expression is a fundamental human right, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it is widely considered to be essential to any functioning democracy.

Economic development

On economic development, the UN Special Representative welcomed Somalia's progress within the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.

"I am pleased to say that the final piece of the jigsaw was met recently, and Somalia should be moving to the completion point



in December. This will enable Somalia to access much larger soft loans and grants, and that will be important for Somalia's economic development," Ms. Laing said.

"So, investment, for example, in your coastline, your very important coastline, which will enable you to drive forward from an economic perspective," she added.

The IMF and World Bank launched HIPC Initiative in 1996 to ensure that no poor country faces an unmanageable debt burden.

In 2005, to accelerate progress toward the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, the HIPC Initiative was supplemented by the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative. This allows countries completing the HIPC Initiative process to receive 100 per cent relief on eligible debts by the IMF, the World Bank and the African Development Fund.

Rule of law

In her remarks to the media, Deputy Special Representative Gbeho also elaborated on the UN's support for Somalia's rule of law, justice and corrections, which includes supporting the strengthening of police and community policing throughout the country.

"We have also worked very closely with Government, with civil society, with our sister UN agencies on the Joint Justice and Corrections Programme. This has so far supported the provision of legal services to close to 18,000 beneficiaries in Somalia – the majority of these beneficiaries have been women," Ms. Gbeho said.





"We have also supported the establishment of 16 alternative dispute resolution centres throughout this country and 13,000 cases have been resolved as a result," she added.

Humanitarian concerns

Somalia's dire humanitarian situation figured prominently in the news conference.

The Horn of Africa country has been experiencing a long and severe drought – its worst in 40 years – which has also involved significant risks of famine. At the height of the humanitarian response over the past two years, more than 6.3 million Somalis were receiving some form of UN assistance. This support included assistance with food, hygiene, water, sanitation and more.

"It was an important part of preventing the country from falling over the brink from a protracted drought into famine conditions," said UN Deputy Special Representative Conway.

In 2022 and early 2023, the UN and its partners engaged in a robust humanitarian response, which helped. However, while recent rains have ameliorated the situation and food insecurity across the country has improved, challenges remain.

Currently, there are millions of people who are still food insecure and in need of assistance. The situation is projected to deteriorate further until December, mainly due to the enhanced Deyr rains exacerbated by the El Niño phenomenon.

El Niño is expected to cause flash and riverine floods in large parts of the country.

"We estimate right now about four million Somalis are living at different levels of food security crisis. And that is a lot. That is a very high number. And 3.8 million Somalis are internally displaced across the country. That number itself increased by a million people over the course of the protracted drought," said Deputy Special Representative Conway.

"So right now, today in addition to the baseline of humanitarian need in the country, we are very concerned about the impact of El Niño on the Deyr rainy season," he continued. "We have already in the past two weeks seen flash flooding happening in a number of cities throughout the country. We have seen river levels rising... The estimates that we have right now are that the rains are likely to be the worst that we've seen in at least 20 years, with the most recent worst rains in 1997."

According to estimates from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), around 1.2 million Somalis could be impacted by flooding over the course of the next three months, with 1.6 million hectares of land also inundated as a result. Somalis in camps for internally displaced people, and the host communities for those camps, are expected to be disproportionately affected.

Mr. Conway noted that UN humanitarian agencies have been working with the FGS, in particular its Somalia Disaster Management Agency, and also with FMS-level humanitarian affairs ministries on preparedness measures to try to reduce the impact on Somalis.

Development

Away from humanitarian issues, the Deputy Special Representative also addressed Somalia's broader development, including the need to find long-term solutions to recurrent crises caused by climate shocks, such as flooding and drought.

"These are cyclical in Somalia, and the

cycles are getting shorter and shorter and the impact is getting higher and higher. And what that necessitates from the Somali authorities, supported by the international community, including the United Nations, is to invest in solutions to reduce the risks for the future, to reduce humanitarian needs for the future through targeting the types of development deficits that have been a structural challenge for the country over recent decades," Mr. Conway said.

"There's been far more money spent on humanitarian response than on investment in development in the past two decades," he added, while also welcoming progress on the HIPC Initiative.

Mr. Conway noted that completing the HIPC Initiative process will enable an expansion of the development agenda in Somalia – one that addresses the underlying drivers of cyclical crises and risks and builds greater resilience of Somali citizens and Somali institutions to be able to better manage these crises in the future.

"We are seeking to rebalance our engagements from principally humanitarian to much more developmental engagements to reduce, again, risk for the future. We do have a development cooperation framework that we're supporting the Government across multiple areas. Much of the work that we do is directly joined with the Mission structures in support of the state-building agenda, justice, the rule of law and others," the Deputy Special Representative said.

"We're making increased investments into climate adaptation, into environmental management, into certainly the stabilisation agenda and expanding basic service delivery systems into newly-accessible areas where people have not had access to recurrent service delivery, some for a very long time – over a decade," he added. "And we have opened a new funding window called the Somalia Joint Fund, which has now become operational."





UN SECURITY COUNCIL EXTENDS UNSOM'S MANDATE, HOLDS SESSION ON SOMALIA

In October, the United Nations Security Council voted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Somalia (UNSOM) until 31 October 2024 and received a briefing on the situation in Somalia by the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing.

Unanimously adopting resolution 2705 (2023), the Council requested UNSOM to maintain and strengthen its presence across Somalia in consultation with the Federal Government and Somalia's Federal Member States, and continue to strengthen its cooperation with the country and the African Union.

By the terms of the resolution, UNSOM is encouraged to coordinate United Nations efforts and support the Federal Government and Federal Member States in the acceleration of the implementation of the National Stabilization Strategy and State-Level Stabilization Plans and support peacebuilding.

In her briefing to the Council, which took place before its meeting on UNSOM's

mandate extension, UN Special Representative Catriona Laing focused on eight areas: political developments; situation in Laascaanood; security; women, peace and security; humanitarian situation and links to climate change; human rights; Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC); and transition.

Below are excerpts from the transcript of her remarks.

Political developments

Mr. President, my first update is on political developments. The 27 May National Consultative Council (NCC) communique set out four specific proposals for a future electoral system with moves to: (i) a presidential system, (ii) a two-party system, (iii) one-person-one-vote throughout the country; and (iv) dates for local council elections and alignment of federal member states (FMS) terms of office.

These four proposals continue to dominate the political debate. ...I remain concerned that Puntland has not participated in the NCC since January 2023 and I urge the Puntland state government and the Federal Government to seek spaces of compromise and pursue dialogue to enable the constitutional process to move ahead. The constitutional review serves as the cornerstone of Somalia's state-building agenda and is key to reach an agreement on federalism in the country.

Laascaanood

Mr. President, my second update covers Laascaanood. As highlighted in my latest briefing to the Council, the conflict in Laascaanood escalated on 25 August when the Dhulbahante militia advanced toward the

town of Oog. Currently, the situation is calm, and people are returning home. However, the potential for a relapse into violence cannot be ruled out.

The United Nations continues to convene partners to coordinate our joint efforts towards conflict resolution. ...My team and I have had numerous engagements with all key stakeholders, including President Bihi, President Deni of Puntland, elders, the Dhulbahante leaders, and the newly formed Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC) Committee. Our key messages to all parties are (i) to push for an immediate exchange of detainees, (ii) a commitment to no further violence and (iii) to the start of dialogue. The UN is also supporting demining efforts and a humanitarian needs assessment to enable people to return home.

Security update

...Conflicts in Somalia continue to take a heavy toll on civilians. Last year, we saw the largest increase in civilian casualties since 2017. Sadly, early data indicate a similar trend in 2023, with 1,289 civilian casualties recorded so far. This is partly attributable to Al-Shabaab attacks but also the conflict in Laascaanood...

A particular challenge over August and September was that the military offensive was taking place alongside preparations for the second phase of the drawdown. The subsequent request by the Federal Government of Somalia for a 90-day technical delay, while maintaining overall security transition timelines, was endorsed by the African Union Peace and Security Council on 30 September. Work is now underway to mobilise the funding to support this. I urge



all partners to consider providing support to fill the funding gap for ATMIS to ensure the mission can deliver its mandate, and troops do not go unpaid.

Mr. President, the UN is now assessing the drawdown and its implications. Our foremost concern is the impact of the drawdown on the civilian population. As such, I welcome the recent Joint Technical Assessment, which reviewed lessons from the Phase I drawdown on civilian populations. The safety and security of Somali people must be at the centre of our minds as we move forward with the transition. For the UN, we are assessing the potential impact of the drawdown on our operations and our ability to deliver our mandate.

Women, Peace and Security

Mr. President, my fourth update is on Women, Peace and Security, which remains at the forefront of UNSOM's work. The UN is working with the Government through the joint programme on Women, Peace and Protection, focusing on engaging and empowering women in peace-building processes. As the UN scales up its work on stabilisation in newly recovered areas, we are paying particular attention to the role of women as peacemakers. The UN also continues to undertake advocacy to strengthen the legislative framework for addressing impunity regarding sexual violence.

On the political side, UNSOM continues to work with female members of the federal Parliament, including as part of the ongoing efforts to implement the 30 per cent quota for women. To this end, capacity development training for parliamentarians continues to be provided by the United Nations. I also recently met with courageous Somali women leaders and heard of their pioneering work to ensure Somali women play a significant role in critical areas, from politics to climate change. These women stressed the need to agree on a clear plan to achieve the 30 per cent women's quota. In our engagements with Somali officials, the United Nations continues to raise the importance of women's rights and to ensure women are consulted

and their views are reflected in legislative frameworks.

Humanitarian situation and links to climate change

Mr. President, the fifth part of my briefing focuses on the humanitarian situation and links to climate change. The humanitarian crisis in Somalia remains deeply concerning, with close to four million people continuing to be food insecure and in need of assistance. The situation is projected to deteriorate further from mid-October to December, mainly due

to the enhanced Deyr rains exacerbated by the El Niño phenomenon expected to cause flash and riverine floods in large parts of the country. The number of food-insecure people is predicted to rise to around 4.3 million, with 1.2 million displaced. It is essential that we scale up programmes that tackle the underlying drivers of the humanitarian crisis and integrate humanitarian response with longer-term climate adaptation.

Critical is also the funding of the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, which seeks more than 2.6 billion dollars to meet the priority needs of 7.6 million people. Currently, the plan is only 39.4 per cent funded, and partners are having to prioritise the most vulnerable in areas with the greatest severity of needs. I call on all of Somalia's friends to increase the much-needed funding and to do so without delay.

Human Rights

Mr. President, my sixth update will be on human rights. Legislative developments in the reporting period are encouraging. I commend the Federal Government for approving the Disability Rights Bill as well as the Child Rights Bill and the Juvenile Justice Bill. The Age Verification Policy, the first formal procedure for age assessment in the country was also adopted. The UN provided technical support and advice in drafting these bills and policy, and I use this opportunity to call for their timely enactment and implementation.

Despite this progress, more needs to be done. I reiterate my call for the Somali authorities to urgently adopt legislation to address sexual violence crimes in compliance with the international human rights obligations to which Somalia has already committed. I also urge the Government to harmonise all legislative and policy reforms to define the child as a person under the age of 18 years. As highlighted in my briefing to the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Government must take all necessary precautions to protect children during military operations.

Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC)

Mr. President my seventh update is on the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). I am encouraged by the commitment and progress made by the Government of Somalia towards reaching the HIPC completion point by December. I welcome in particular the passage of the Audit Bill as one of the final milestones. Looking ahead, it is essential that agreement is reached with Puntland to ensure the state can benefit from post HIPC large scale concessional finance and to enable the finalisation of the fiscal federal model for Somalia as a whole.

Transition

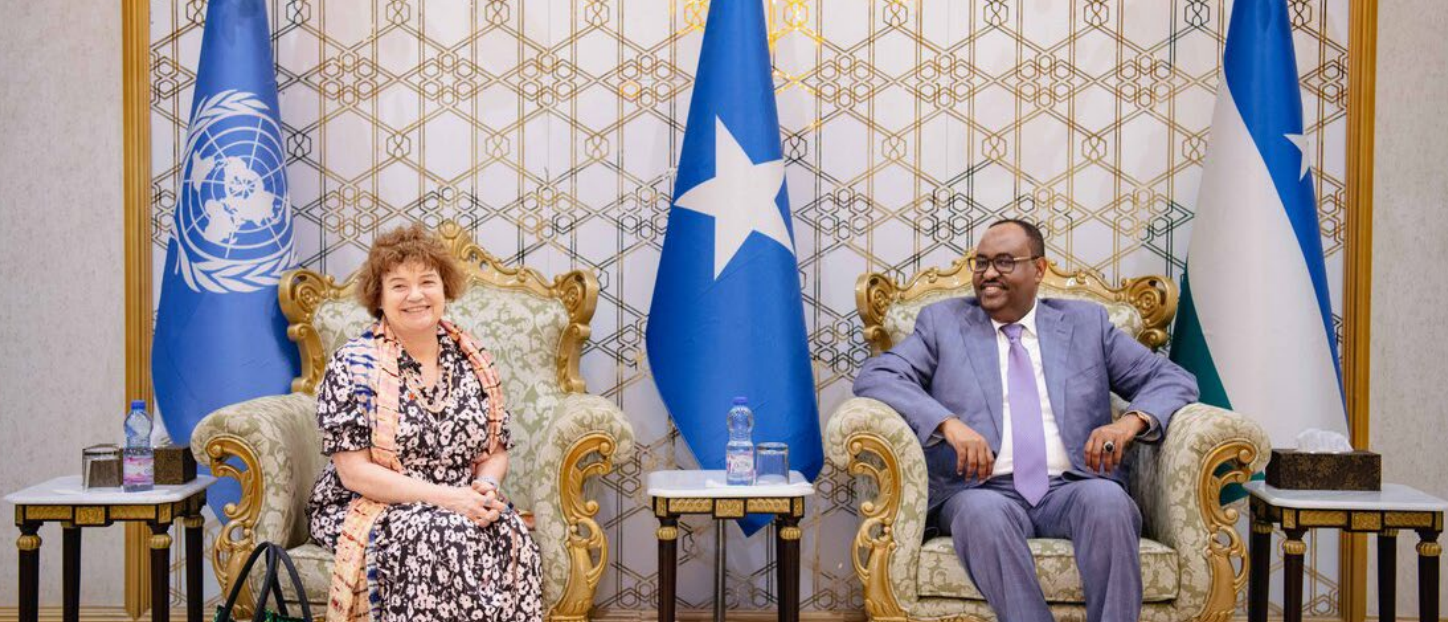
Finally, Mr. President I would like to update on the UN's preparation for the three transitions outlined in the 2022 UNSOM strategic review. The Transition Cell is now fully established with three different work streams for each of the three transitions. You will hear from the SRCC more detail on the security transition. Looking ahead, I commend the Government for the work underway to prepare for a post-2024 security architecture. It is essential to prepare early for a smooth security transition and for this to be based on a clear assessment of capabilities needed and funding requirements. I look forward to the December security conference, which will be a critical opportunity to agree on the detail of the post-2024 security architecture.

In conclusion, Mr. President and Distinguished members of the Council, Somalia is at a critical juncture. While there is every expectation that Somalia will prevail, this is more likely if there is honest reflection of areas where things are off track as well as celebrating many successes. I urge all international partners to continue to support Somalia to ensure we lock in the gains achieved so far. The UN remains firmly committed to supporting Somalia to achieve and consolidate peace and prosperity.

Thank you.

Read the [full transcript here](#).





UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE DISCUSSES POLITICAL AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS IN PUNTLAND

In November, continuing her regular engagement with its Federal Member States, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing, visited Puntland, where she met with its leadership, political actors and civil society.

Later the same month, the international partners issued a [statement](#) expressing their concern about the risk of higher tensions. While in Garowe, the UN top official in Somalia discussed Puntland's relations with the Federal Government, the crisis in Laascaanood, and elections.

Elections

At a joint media encounter with Puntland's President Said Abdullahi Deni, the UN Special Representative recognised the efforts of Puntland's leaders to reach out to different groups. Ms. Laing encouraged the President to expand this outreach to "not just opposition leaders, elders and clan leaders, but also people who have a stake – the youth, the women and scholars and – to include them to ensure that when the elections take place there's consensus and of course peaceful elections."

Ms. Laing reaffirmed the United Nations' commitment to work with the government

and people of Puntland towards peaceful parliamentary and presidential elections recognised by all the stakeholders.

Federal Government and Puntland relations

Amidst Somalia's ongoing peacebuilding and state-building efforts, the UN Special Representative and President Deni discussed the relationship between the Federal Member States (FMS) and the Federal Government.

In May this year, members of the National Consultative Council (NCC) – with the exception of Puntland – issued a communique and a new agreement focused on democratisation. In this and the previous NCC meeting in March, Puntland President Deni had not been in attendance.

"I was encouraged to hear that the President [Deni] is continuing to be willing to engage with the President [Hassan Sheikh Mohamud] and eventually more widely thinking about the kind of issues that need to be on the table to ensure Puntland's views are represented," said the UN official.

Laascaanood crisis

At the Garowe media encounter, Ms. Laing also spoke about the crisis in Laascaanood, which resulted in around 280,000 people being displaced. The conflict which erupted in February this year caused the loss of many lives and damaged the livelihoods of the affected population.

"Firstly, to commend Puntland for reaching out and supporting the many IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons] who came here from Sool region, up to 100,000. I know that's been a big responsibility

and we thank Puntland for receiving those people warmly," said the Special Representative.

In October, Ms Laing updated the security council on the situation in Laascaanood, saying that while the situation was calm at the time, and people were returning home, there had been ongoing conflict resolution efforts to mitigate the potential for a relapse into violence.

"My team and I have had numerous engagements with all key stakeholders, including President Bihi, President Deni of Puntland, elders, the Dhulbahante leaders, and the newly formed Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC) Committee," Ms Laing told the Security Council, adding, "Our key messages to all parties are to push for an immediate exchange of detainees, a commitment to no further violence and to the start of dialogue."

While in Garowe, Ms. Laing also met with leaders of opposition parties and representatives of local civil society organisations.





UN INDEPENDENT EXPERT HIGHLIGHTS CROSS-CUTTING NATURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Wrapping up her second visit to the Horn of Africa country in November, the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia highlighted the interlinkages of human rights and other developments in the country.

Addressing the Somali media at a press conference at the end of a 14-day visit to Somalia the Independent Expert, Isha Dyfan, said, “It is important to recall the cross-cutting nature of human rights. The struggles against armed groups, [for] peace, security, development, humanitarian action, climate change and the environment cannot be addressed in isolation from human rights.”

Her visit saw her travel to the cities of Belet Weyne and Hargeisa, as well as Mogadishu. Her encounters were wide-ranging and included meetings with the Federal Government of Somalia and its Federal Member State counterparts.

At the press conference, Ms. Dyfan shared some preliminary observations before presenting her full report to the United Nations Human Rights Council and General Assembly next year.

“The exchanges focused on legislative,

policy and programmatic developments, progress, challenges, remaining gaps and priorities for the future, based on the key benchmarks highlighted in my previous reports submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council,” Ms. Dyfan said.

“In addition, I held meetings with civil society representatives – including journalists, internally displaced persons, vulnerable and marginalised groups minorities, migrants and persons with disabilities – to exchange views on human rights issues of concern and to provide ideas on the way forward,” she added, while also noting that she met with representatives from the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and various UN agencies, funds and programmes.

Protection of civilians

In her press remarks, on the topic of the protection of civilians, the Independent Expert noted that Somalia’s security situation remains unstable, with civilians facing daily threats and targeted killings and infrastructure damage by Al-Shabaab as well as from inter-clan conflicts.

The Independent Expert noted that she had recently met with the Chair of the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn Committee regarding the current human rights situation in Laascaanood. Conflict broke out there in February 2023, leaving at least 81 civilians dead and another 410 injured, with an estimated 200,000 people displaced, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation.

“I reiterated my call for dialogue and urged all parties to refrain from divisive rhetoric. All

grievances and tensions should be resolved peacefully and through dialogue,” Ms. Dyfan said. “I am deeply concerned about reports of large numbers of detainees and expect those involved, to abide by human rights and international humanitarian law, in particular the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure.”

Legislative developments

On the topic of Somalia’s legislative developments, the Independent Expert noted that at a meeting with the Federal Government of Somalia, she received confirmation that eleven bills relating to security were passed, and that various ministries were progressing on policies and frameworks.

“The Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation... has been working through community engagement to foster integrity between the army and local community, provided training in human rights and international humanitarian law as well as conducting specialised training on women, peace and security,” Ms. Dyfan said. “The Ministry of Youth and Sports facilitated reconciliation and consultation sessions on youth, peace and security by organising youth tournaments, forums and panel discussions.”

“In the area of rule of law, the Federal Government reported that the Juvenile Justice Bill has been presented to the Federal Parliament and it has initiated an amendment to the Prison law,” she continued. “I also note the Federal Government’s request for technical assistance to improve and accelerate the process of legal drafting.”

Freedom of expression

On the topic of freedom of expression, the Independent Expert said she remained “concerned” about laws and guidelines which impose restrictions in this area.

“The use of the Somali Penal Code against journalists and media workers and the constant threat of being arrested, held in detention, and subjected to trials, fines and imprisonment leads to self-censorship,” Ms. Dyfan said.

She added that she looked forward to the declaration of a moratorium on the use of the penal code against journalists, as well as the updating of the Somali Penal Code in line with the commitment of Somalia during previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycles.

Created in 2006, the UPR is a unique process which involves a periodic, peer review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States, providing them with an opportunity to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights.

Under the UPR, every four and a half years, the human rights record of all UN Member States is reviewed, on equal footing, by fellow States during an inter-governmental Human Rights Council Working Group session in Geneva, Switzerland.

Women's rights

On the topic of women's rights, the Independent Expert praised the efforts of various Somali organisations providing support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, describing their work as “essential and must be encouraged and supported.”

She called upon Somali authorities to take measures to end the practice of female genital mutilation.

“Female genital mutilation is a harmful traditional practice, which continues in Somalia and violates the right to health and the right to life, often resulting in the death of the victim,” Ms. Dyfan said.

On Somali women's involvement in all facets of their society, Ms. Dyfan said she was encouraged by the continued advocacy by all stakeholders on gender equality and women's representation and participation in political and public life.

“In particular, the work on the 30 per cent minimum quota has been ongoing by the female members of parliament, through their two caucuses,” Ms. Dyfan said.

At Somalia's last federal electoral process in 2022, the target of the 30 per cent quota for women's parliamentary representation was not achieved. The final percentage of parliamentary seats held by women was just 21 per cent, down from 24 per cent in the previous electoral cycle in 2016.

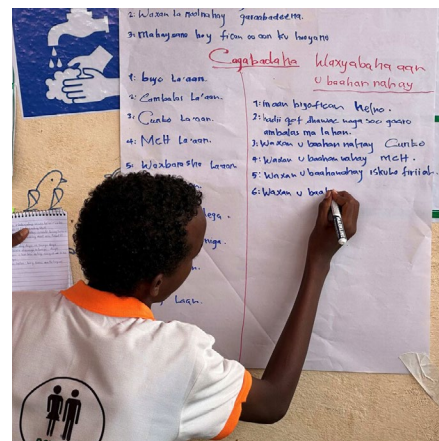
Flooding

Referring to her meeting with internally displaced people (IDPs) in the city of Belet Weyne, located in the Federal Member State of Hirshabelle, the Independent Expert said they had told her that armed conflict and climate-related disasters, including drought and floods, had left them destitute.

With Somalia having to regularly deal with the climate-related impact of droughts and flooding and their impact on economic, social, and cultural rights, the Independent Expert called for the Federal Government to focus beyond urgent humanitarian aid to also build resilience in Somali communities by putting in place mitigation and adaptation measures in the medium- and long-term.

Children's rights

On the issue of children's rights, the Independent Expert flagged that she continued to follow developments relating



to the legal framework for the protection of children, especially the Juvenile Justice Bill and the Child Rights Bill, which in its current form maintains the age of majority at 18.

“I understand that it has been approved by the Federal Cabinet, is awaiting assent by Parliament. I also commend the age verification guidelines signed by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs which will assist age assessment and should be applied consistently by the Federal Government. However, I note that the National Action Plan on Children has not yet been adopted,” Ms. Dyfan said.

“I reiterate the call made by the Secretary-General Report on Children and Armed Conflict of June 2023 for all parties to immediately cease and prevent violations and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law,” she added. “I stress the need to continue prioritising the protection of children in light of the phased ATMIS drawdown.”

Independent Experts

Ms. Dyfan said she will elaborate on her preliminary observations in a comprehensive report to the UN Human Rights Council and UN General Assembly next year, when she also hopes to return to Somalia.

Independent Experts like Ms. Dyfan are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures' experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organisation and serve in their individual capacity.

Read the [press statement here](#).





16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM: UN CALLS FOR MORE PROGRESS TO END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In November, marking the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, the United Nations in Somalia called for more progress in fighting this scourge.

Three areas were highlighted: the adoption of legislation to strengthen the protection of all persons from gender-based violence, greater support for survivors and accountability for perpetrators of gender-based violence.

"The current laws that protect persons, especially women and children, who are the most vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, need to be amended to reflect current realities, such as the definition of rape which should meet international standards," the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing, said in a statement issued on the International Day to End Violence against Women, which kicked off the 16 Days campaign.

"Somali women and girls need to be able to go about their daily lives safely and securely, and a key step forward is the urgent adoption of legislation to address crimes involving sexual violence – there is an urgent need for Somalia to invest in legislation that will ensure that persons who commit these crimes will be held

accountable," Ms. Laing added.

On support for survivors and accountability, the United Nations is working with the Government to provide one-stop centres where women and girls can go to following a sexual violence incident. At these centres, survivors receive medical and psychosocial support and have the opportunity to report such incidents to the police in a safe and secure environment.

Commencing on 25 November, in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the annual 16 Days campaign runs till 10 December, Human Rights Day. It aims to increase awareness, galvanise advocacy efforts and share knowledge and innovations to end violence against women.

During the 16-day period, the United Nations in Somalia worked with the Federal Government of Somalia, its Federal Member State counterparts and

civil society to highlight the need to end gender-based violence (GBV), with a special emphasis on the need to accelerate the legislative process for enacting laws to protect women and girls.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) launched a podcast series on combating Gender-Based Violence in Somalia, 'Gobaad: Dignity for All,' to raise awareness and take action against GBV. The series featured eight episodes that explored various aspects of GBV, such as online harassment, disability and gender inequality, and the role of the government and collective action of the international community in addressing this issue.

Civil society organisations in Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa and Garowe, with UN support, organised advocacy meetings to push for concrete ways of investing in women and girls to prevent gender-based violence in their areas.





SOMALIA'S MILESTONES FOR RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

On the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) in December, the United Nations commended the Federal Government of Somalia and organisations of persons with disabilities for their progress on promoting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

In a statement for the occasion, UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing, said, "We congratulate the Federal Government, through the National Disability Agency (NDA), for the completion of Somalia's first nationwide disability survey – this is an important step forward in highlighting the challenges faced by persons with disabilities."

"Civil society groups working on disability issues are also playing a significant role in raising awareness, and they should be recognised for this," Ms. Laing added.

Somalia ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2019, establishing the National Disability Agency (NDA) and in 2023 the Cabinet submitted the Disability Rights Bill to



the Parliament. The next step is for the Parliament to pass the Bill and, thereafter, it being signed into law.

The United Nations has collaborated closely with the NDA and civil society groups across Somalia to advocate for disability rights and inclusion.

According to the Somalia National Development Plan 2020-2024, persons with disabilities are the most vulnerable in Somalia and are among the disadvantaged groups that lack any form of social and labour protection.

Based on a global average of 15 per cent of the population having a disability, it is estimated that approximately 2.5 million people in Somalia have a disability. However, due to the prolonged conflict and humanitarian crises, this figure for Somalia is likely to be higher.

Observed annually on 3 December,

the International Day of Persons with Disabilities was established in 1992 by the UN General Assembly. The Day aims to promote an understanding of disability issues and mobilise support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities.





HUMAN RIGHTS DAY AND 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Marking both Human Rights Day and the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December, the United Nations reaffirmed its unwavering support to Somalia in the full realization of the Declaration.

The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing, in a statement issued on the day, said, "The principles and values of the Universal Declaration are as relevant today as they were when the document was first drafted. Human Rights Day is an opportunity to celebrate Somalia's achievements when it comes to their promotion and protection. Somalia is at a crucial stage of development focused on achieving its vision of an inclusive peaceful and stable Somalia based firmly on human rights."

Proclaimed by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration is a milestone document which enshrines the inalienable rights that everyone is entitled to as a human being – regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Human Rights Day was

established to mark this historic occasion.

Throughout 2023, range of activities were held around the globe to commemorate the UDHR's 75th anniversary and promote human rights awareness. Somalia was a part of the global campaign with a series of consultations, panel discussions, art and film competitions with a particular focus on the theme of the 75th anniversary of the UDHR: dignity, freedom and justice for all.

In November, in Somalia's first-ever human rights art competition, three Somali artists were awarded places while the art of all the finalists became an exhibition at the National Museum of Somalia. The competition and its related exhibition were jointly organised by the National Museum and the United Nations.

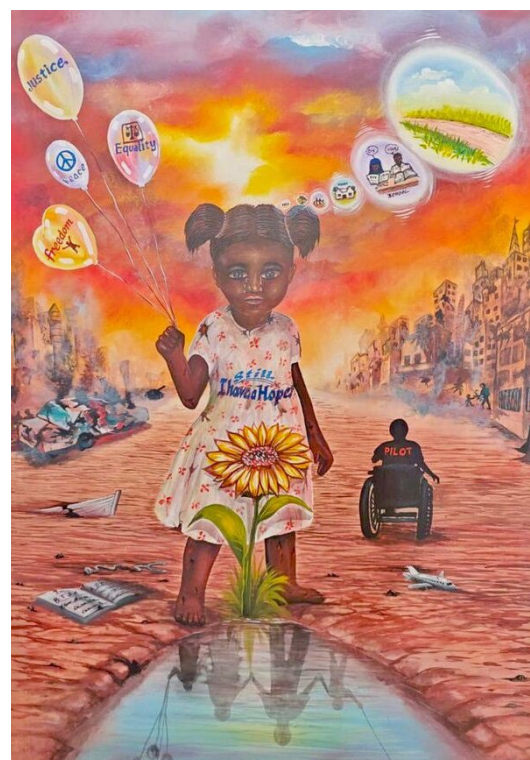
The winner was Mogadishu-based artist Salman Osman Shariif, with Mohamed Abdulkadir Mohamed and Abdi Aweys Hassan, coming second and third, respectively. The themes of their paintings were equality, justice and freedom.

At the event, the Chief of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia's (UNSOM) Human Rights and Protection Group, Kirsten Young, said, "I think that the exhibition that we see today is extremely powerful. I think we have all been touched by every piece that we have seen... and it is a very special gift that the National Museum is giving to Somali citizens – that it is possible to use this gorgeous space, to share, to document the

history of Somalia and the rich culture, but also issues of justice, equality and hopes and dreams."

The United Nations has also engaged with audio-visual artists inviting them to participate in the 2023 Human Rights Short Film Competition. The award ceremony took place in the National Theatre of Somalia who was also the co-organiser of the event.

"Audio-visual art is a powerful medium to translate human rights into the day-



to-day lives of all Somalis. Art can also serve as a catalyst for dialogue, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the principles enshrined in the UDHR [Universal Declaration of Human Rights],” said the UN Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representative for Somalia, Anita Kiki Gbeho, to filmmakers and audience gathered in the theatre.

The competition provided a platform for Somali filmmakers to showcase their talents while addressing human rights issues in Somalia through the power of storytelling and the medium of film.

The winning entry was ‘Kiin’ – a Somali girl’s name – directed by film producer Ahmed Aweys Hassan.

“I choose to produce films that touch on human rights subject, because it is the only way to speak for the voiceless people – this is the only way to give them a voice,” Mr. Hassan said after being presented with his award.

His short film’s scriptwriter was Ibtisam Yahye. She spoke about the importance of eliciting emotions in the audience to make them want to act and stand-up for human rights.

“I believe that our film invokes a lot of emotions in people, and this is the best way to make them feel the injustices that are going on in the world. It is always good to show them and not tell them, to make them feel so that they will act,” Ms. Yahye said.

The first runner-up in the competition was Abdisamad Hassan Omer, also known as ‘Biriye,’ with his film ‘Qab iyo lil’ (transl.: ‘Arrogance and Grave’), while Salman Osman Shariif placed third with his animated short film ‘Wali waxaan leeyahay rajo’ (transl.: ‘I still have hope’).

The other two filmmakers to make it to the finals were Zahra Abdihagi Mahamed, the director of ‘Ka Talaabidda Caqabadaha’ (transl.: ‘Breaking Barriers’), and Shakir Mohamed Abdullahi for his animated short film ‘Danyar’ (transl.: ‘Deprived’).

Outside the capital, the UN supported a range of activities in Baidoa to mark the occasion, including a youth football tournament, a panel discussion on the role of youth in protecting human rights and consultation with the South West State parliamentarians on related bills.

The global campaign ended with simultaneous high-level events in various regions on 11 December. The United Nations in Somalia was present at the regional event for Africa, held in Nairobi, at which it highlighted the human rights situation faced by Somalis and the role of art in helping them achieve dignity, freedom and justice for all.



RADIO MOGADISHU

SAVING HISTORIC AUDIO RECORDINGS

FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS OF SOMALIS

Sitting in a small, windowless room in a government building in the Somali capital, Mohamed Yusuf Mohamed loops another audio tape onto the dilapidated machine and presses a few buttons.

After a few clicks, the antiquated device starts to whirl and its wheels spin – one tape down, and another couple of hundred thousand or so to go.

In the adjoining room, there are shelves more than three metres in height which teeter under a layer of dust and thousands of audio reels.

Given the decrepit equipment and limited staffing at hand, the project Mr. Mohamed and other colleagues are working on will take many decades to complete.

Their actions are part of a long-running effort to digitise some seven decades of unique historical recordings belonging to Radio Mogadishu.

"I arrive here at 8:00 a.m. and work until 4:00 p.m., digitising around 30 to 40 songs per day with very limited equipment," he says.

Mr. Mohamed feels some pressure.

At stake are the only remaining audio recordings of much of Somalia's history, with thousands of reels of music, poetry, religious texts, political speeches and drama shows stemming all the way back to the station's creation. Much of it is in a poor state.

Nonetheless, Mr. Mohamed is conscious of the importance of his work.

"I feel fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in improving the history of my country," he notes.

First broadcaster

Somalia gained independence on 1 July 1960, when the UN Trust territory of Somaliland – the former Italian Somaliland – and what was then British Somaliland united to form the Somali Republic.

Radio Mogadishu came into existence earlier. It was established in 1951, during the period when Somalia was held under the trusteeship of the United Nations and administered by its former colonial power, Italy.

It began broadcasting news in Italian, and Somali programming followed soon afterwards.

In the 1960s, Radio Mogadishu was modernised with assistance from the Soviet Union, and began broadcasting in Amharic and Oromo as well as Somali and

Italian. In 1983, Radio Mogadishu's sister organisation, Somali National Television (SNTV), was established.

War breaks out

This growth and progress of the national broadcaster came to a halt in 1991. Radio Mogadishu closed soon after the start of Somalia's civil war, which followed the overthrow of then-President Siad Barre.

The station's premises fell into the hands of warring factions. In 1993, the archives sustained some damage during clashes between one of the factions and international peacekeepers deployed in the city at the time.

The violence that engulfed the country led to the destruction of much of Somalia's cultural heritage. Museums were stripped of their collections, with items destroyed or sold on the black market. SNTV's archives were destroyed, and the material in Radio Mogadishu's vaults was targeted.





As the civil war raged, there were various attempts to destroy or steal the vault's contents. Only the courageous efforts of certain individuals hampered those attempts.

One of those individuals was Abshir Hashi Ali, then serving as a police colonel. In 1996, amidst the violence, he decided that he would protect the archives for future generations of Somalis.

"This site stores the history and data of Somalis... The archive was neglected, and there were many militias in the area. However, there were always good people from the local authorities who helped me to save this precious treasure," Mr. Ali recalls.

"My aim was to protect this important heritage for the Somali people, wherever they are. My prior life as a police officer helped me to be resilient and to work for a long time in a place where I have no personal interest nor was I being paid a salary," he adds.

Following the re-opening of Radio Mogadishu in 2001, Mr. Ali was made the station's archives manager.

The majority of the 35,000 magnetic, reel-to-reel, tape recordings in the Radio Mogadishu archives – made up of Somali-language tapes, records and limited manuscripts – survived the war, although most of its foreign language collection was not so fortunate.

Following the re-opening in 2001, which occurred during the administration of Somalia's then-Transitional National Government, the station operated from its original, small compound in central Mogadishu.

Its dedicated staff broadcast a range of programmes – news, music and talk shows – despite the threats and reality of violent retaliation from the Al-Shabaab terrorist group, which regularly fired mortars to silence the station.

Digital hopes

In the ensuing years, Radio Mogadishu has made further progress.

In the late 2000s, it launched a website of the same name, with news articles in Somali, Arabic and English. In 2021, the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MoICT) – which oversees the national radio broadcaster – announced that Italian language programming would be recommenced thanks to support from the Italian government. The following year, the Chinese government funded building refurbishment and renovations.

But it remains a different story with saving Radio Mogadishu's rich archives from further deterioration.

Reel-to-reel tapes are based on a long, narrow carrier tapes of various lengths comprised of acetate, polyester, or PVC; coated with a mixture of magnetic particles, often iron oxide fixed with a binding agent; and wound onto a plastic or aluminium reel of various sizes. This means that they are at risk of distortion and corruption – including breaking, stretching, delamination, demagnetisation, degradation because of overuse – and chemical changes in the binding agent, particularly through absorbing water vapour.

The MoICT has been trying to have the archival material preserved.

"This is the only archive for this nation after the civil war. As time passes, if we do not preserve it, it will only be seen in pictures," notes Somalia's federal Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Daud Aweis.

His concerns are echoed by Radio Mogadishu's director, Abdifatah Dahir Jeyte.

"Urgent action is imperative to safeguard the history, language, culture and literature



“Urgent action is imperative to safeguard the history, language, culture and literature of the Somali nation”

of the Somali nation stored within these archives – considering the vastness of Radio Mogadishu's archives, which contain more than 200,000 tapes, the digital conversion is currently incomplete, covering less than 30 per cent of the total content," Mr. Jeyte says.

"We extend our warmest welcome to institutions and individuals willing to contribute to their digitalisation. This initiative is crucial for preserving the cultural and literary heritage of the Somali nation, which has been meticulously collected over the past half-century," he



“In 2018, a portion of the archive was destroyed in a fire, resulting in the loss of some foreign language tapes”

adds. “Time is of the essence, given that in 2018, a portion of the archive was destroyed in a fire, resulting in the loss of some foreign language tapes.”

Initial attempts at digitisation began in 2013. With the support of the French government, African Union, United Nations and the MoICT, staff worked to preserve the collection and make the music, speeches, plays and prayers available to a generation who had never known how vibrant Somalia was prior to the war. But the attempt foundered with less than a third of the 225,000 items digitised.

Digitising the material is a cumbersome and expensive process. It involves using reel-to-reel digital converters – essentially tape audio output inputted into a recording computer – with some large tapes taking three hours to run.

Currently, with just one working digital converter, the shortage of these items is a major stumbling block. Added to this, using a converter is extremely labour-intensive. Technicians have to load, thread and play tapes that are already fragile and deteriorating onto antiquated converters which are prone to breaking down.

UN support

Working with the MoICT, the United Nations in Somalia has been exploring options for a solution to the urgent digitisation needs of Radio Mogadishu’s archives.

“The open-reel tape collection of Radio Mogadishu is a cultural treasure that all Somalis would benefit from,” says the Chief of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia’s (UNSOM) Human Rights and Protection Group, Kirsten Young.

“Radio continues to play an important role in access to information in Somalia and having access to these rich archives would bring recent history into the homes of many Somalis,” adds Ms. Young, who also serves as the Representative of the Office



of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to Somalia.

The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the ‘Memory of the World (MoW) Programme’ in 1992 to protect against collective amnesia and to call for the preservation of the valuable archive holdings and library collections all over the world, to ensure their wide dissemination.

Digitisation of documentary heritage is an essential pillar for achieving the aim of the MoW Programme.

“After 30 years of conflict, and the almost total destruction or loss of the cultural records and artifacts of the Somali people, the preservation and digitisation of the Radio Mogadishu archive almost compels a response from development and implementing partners interested in the Somali people benefiting from and

having access to and enjoyment of their own culture and heritage,” says the Head of UNESCO’s Somalia Desk, Mark Wall.

“The UNESCO ‘Memory of the World Programme,’ which aims to prevent the forgetting of the past, is an excellent stepping-off place for our subsequent moves in preserving the Radio Mogadishu archive for us all.

“We are keen on creating a programme to collect, document and encourage oral history inscriptions to the Memory of the World register – noting the current lack of audiovisual inscriptions – and hope that a recent joint proposal by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), OHCHR and UNESCO is compelling enough to mobilise funding for the Radio Mogadishu archive project to save, for humanity, the only significant surviving record of life in Somalia before the civil war,” he adds.

