



### Serving the people of Somalia

#### HIGHLIGHTS

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- Raisedon Zenenga appointed as Deputy UN Special Representative
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## UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL

### In February, the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing, briefed the Security Council on the situation in Somalia.

(Statement as delivered, New York, 19 February 2024)

Madam President, Distinguished Members of the Security Council,

I welcome this opportunity to address you on developments in Somalia since my last briefing in October. I am pleased to do so alongside the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC), Souef Mohamed El-Amine. I pay tribute to the African Union's mission, ATMIS, and the dedicated service of its personnel and troops.

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has made solid progress in recent months in the implementation of its priorities, including

the completion of a critical security roadmap presented at the Somalia Security Conference on 12 December last year. Since my last briefing, Somalia has also gained admission to the East African Community, reached the completion point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, secured the lifting of the arms embargo and most recently secured the endorsement of the African Union (AU) Executive Council for a seat on the Security Council in 2025-26. These are very significant achievements.

The UN family in Mogadishu has faced a challenging start to the year, particularly the incident that took place in Galmudug on 10 January involving one of our helicopters. We are working closely with the Federal Government and all partners to secure the safe return of passengers and crew. I would also like to recognise the tragic death of a member of the United Nations Guard Force Unit (UNGU) who was killed in an Al-Shabaab indirect fire attack on our UN compound on 11 January. Despite these tragic events, our focus remains on supporting Somalia with its rightly ambitious agenda over the year ahead.

My briefing today will provide brief updates on eight areas:

1. Political developments
2. Regional developments
3. Security update
4. Women, peace and security
5. Human rights
6. Humanitarian situation and links to climate change
7. Economic development
8. Transition

#### Political developments

Madam President, I will begin with an update on political developments.

The National Consultative Council (NCC) proposals of 27 May on the proposed new electoral model continue to be debated intensely. On the positive side, there is broad public support for the transition to One-Person, One-Vote (OPOV) elections, but there is also a realisation that the timelines proposed by the NCC are too ambitious. The UN is working with the Ministry of Interior Federal Affairs and Reconciliation to develop a realistic plan which will ensure the momentum towards OPOV is maintained.

We welcome the recent approval by Parliament of the procedural rules for constitutional



changes. This sets a clear pathway on process. It is now urgent to reach an inclusive consensus on the electoral framework. On the constitution, we encourage all parties to engage in the spirit of compromise to finalise the process. Without an agreed constitution, Somalia remains vulnerable to perennial crises with no agreed rules of the game to enable resolution.

I commend the people of the Federal Member State of Puntland on the peaceful conclusion of the electoral process on 8 January 2024. President Said Abdullahi Deni – the sixth President of Puntland – was re-elected by the Puntland State Assembly to a second term in office. The presence of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and three Federal Member State Presidents at the inauguration on 25 January was a positive signal. We hope this has created the foundation for a reset of dialogue with full re-engagement of President Deni in the NCC process. The planned Garowe conference on the future of Somalia could be an important part of this reset, with the opportunity for wider consultation with key stakeholders, including women and youth.

In Laascaanood and the Sool region, the situation has remained calm since the violence of November 2023. There is, however, no formal ceasefire. We continue to urge all parties to work towards an immediate exchange of detainees, a commitment to no further violence and to start dialogue to address the underlying drivers of the conflict. We continue to provide humanitarian assistance to those affected and to support the de-mining and early recovery.

### Regional developments

Madam President, my second update concerns regional developments.

On 1 January, Ethiopia and “Somaliland” announced a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which reportedly grants Ethiopia a 50-year lease of 20 kilometres of coastline in exchange for certain political and economic benefits to “Somaliland.” The full details of the MOU are not available, but public pronouncements have generated strong hostile public reactions in Somalia. It is also worrying to see Al-Shabaab exploiting

this situation as a tool for recruitment. We recognise that the strong feelings in Somalia are putting pressure on the Government to respond, and we encourage the President to remain measured in his response.

I echo the words of the Secretary-General who has recalled that the Security Council has repeatedly affirmed its respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of Somalia, and called for all parties to engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue and to refrain from inflammatory words or actions that could further escalate tensions.

This situation must be resolved through constructive dialogue. In that regard, it is disappointing that no significant progress was made at the recent Africa Union summit.

### Security update

Madam President, my third update focuses on the security situation.

Countering Al-Shabaab remains one of the Government’s top priorities. Heavy rains and flooding hampered operations towards the end of 2023. However, since the rains eased in December, government forces have had some success in the south and east of Galmudug state. The Government is now preparing for the resumption of large-scale operations.

The UN is pleased to report some positive developments on stabilisation in newly recovered areas. Specifically, there has been progress in the delivery of rule of law, governance, reconciliation, and the provision of basic services. UN joint programmatic efforts are being deployed in recovered areas; nevertheless, funding for those initiatives remains limited. I urge international partners to provide the resources needed to meet vital stabilisation needs in newly recovered areas.

The handover of security responsibilities of the State House and Villa Somalia to the National Security Forces on 14 December 2023 was an important symbolic milestone for Somalia. There were some delays on completion of Phase 2 drawdown, but it was completed successfully in full by the end of January.

As planning is now underway for a new AU-led mission from January 2024, plans for

drawdown may need to be revised to allow for a smooth transition to any new force and to prevent a security vacuum from emerging during the transition phase. It is essential that any further drawdown of ATMIS forces is undertaken in a manner which ensures protection for local communities and enables the ongoing presence of the international community in Somalia.

I welcome the commitment by the Federal Government on 11 February to relocate all high-explosive ammunition from the Halane armoury by 25 February. This is critical to minimise the danger posed to the international community and surrounding local residents.

### Women, peace and security

Madam President, my fourth update is on Women, Peace and Security.

We have continued to work with the Government, women in the Federal Parliament and civil society to advance the implementation of the 30 per cent women’s quota. Despite concerted efforts, women’s political participation and representation remains a significant challenge. To illustrate this, only one of the new members of Parliament of Puntland is a woman, among sixty-six representatives. The electoral model, security issues, patriarchal structures, and the lack of financing for female political campaigns have all contributed to this under-representation.

I met again with senior women leaders in February. They had three key messages for me. Firstly, a minimum of 30 per cent representation at all levels must be enshrined in the constitution currently under review. Secondly, they reiterated their strong support for one-person, one-vote elections. And thirdly, they strongly oppose the Memorandum of Understanding between Ethiopia and “Somaliland” given its potential to lead to conflict in the region, recognising the disproportionate effect conflict has on women and girls.

### Human rights

Madam President, my fifth update concerns Human Rights.

On the legislative front, the Offences of Rape and Indecency Bill (ORIB) was approved by the Somali Cabinet. Defining a child as a person under the age of 18 years is a positive step. However, there are articles in the bill that are not aligned with international human rights standards. For example, the definition of rape must contain the element of consent as part of the crime, and the crimes of indecency must be clearly defined so that conduct that is prohibited and is punishable under the law is clear. The UN has offered technical assistance to promote compliance and is working with partners to advocate for the Bill to be amended to comply with international human rights standards.



I'm concerned about the high number of children casualties due to explosive remnants of war and crossfire incidents which have had a particular impact on children. I remain gravely preoccupied by the number of violations attributed to Al-Shabaab as well as the group's continued abduction of children for the purposes of recruitment and use. I call on all parties to the conflict to immediately cease and prevent violations and to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

#### **Humanitarian situation and links to climate change**

Madam President, my sixth update is on the humanitarian situation and links to climate change.

Somalia's humanitarian crisis remains dire. In 2023, Somalia experienced the worst drought in decades, followed by El Niño impacts leading to heavy rains and extensive flooding in October and November 2023. This affected more than 2.4 million people, inundated farmlands, and damaged critical infrastructure.

The 2024 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan will require USD 1.6 billion to meet the needs of 5.2 million most vulnerable people in Somalia. This is, however, a 37 per cent reduction from 2023. This reduction is in line with a new approach to make the humanitarian response highly targeted and prioritised, given the dwindling funding outlook globally. This will require greater collaboration with development and peace actors to address underlying vulnerabilities.

Integrating climate resilience strategies into the humanitarian assistance is important for creating sustainable, long-term solutions to Somalia's complex challenges, and this demands a holistic response that goes beyond the traditional aid models in order to build resilience through durable solutions. Following the recent Committee of Parties (COP28) and HIPC completion, there is significant momentum to advance access to climate financing to Somalia. Somalia also joined the Task Force to Access Climate Finance, which should allow it to unlock funding pledged at COP28.

#### **Economic development**

Madame President, my seventh update is on economic development.

I would like to congratulate the Government and all partners that supported Somalia to successfully conclude the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief process in December. It is encouraging that Somalia will access grant financing from the World Bank for another year. The UN supports the Government's priorities on domestic revenue mobilisation, accountability and commitment to deliver social services for its citizens.

On financing for state-building, the UN is facing a huge shortfall for its strategically important joint programming. Without adequate funding, we will not be able to deliver on the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which is aligned with Somalia's National Development Plan. I urge international partners to make adequate resources available to the Somalia Joint Fund.

#### **Transition planning**

Last but not least, Madam President, I would like to update you on strategic aspects of transition planning.

At the Security Conference in December, the Federal Government of Somalia presented its plan for the transition of full security responsibility to national ownership. International partners signalled their collective intention to support the FGS in countering insurgency and building a stable and prosperous future. As the ATMIS drawdown proceeds, Somalia has requested a new, repurposed, and smaller AU mission, focused on protection. This security umbrella will also be essential to enable the implementation of the UN mandate and the efforts of the wider international community in Somalia.

The Federal Government of Somalia is requesting an evolved UN logistics support package to strengthen national systems and capacity. The United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) Independent Review, will explore how to achieve this in a way that strengthens the capacity of the Somali Government. Predictable, sustainable funding for the new AU mission is vital. We are working with the AU and FGS, to explore all potential funding modalities, including applying resolution 2719 on the financing of African Union-led Peace Support Operations. We are also working with AU and partners to ensure our collective support to the security sector is more coherent and establish more innovative, nimble, cost-effective ways of working. We recognise we must 'do business' differently to ensure a more sustainable approach.

#### **Conclusion**

Madam President, in conclusion, Somalia remains resilient and the Federal Government's commitment to its state-building agenda remains strong. The efforts of the campaign against insurgency are commendable, but much more is needed to ensure that its gains are sustained. I would like to assure the people of Somalia of the UN's unwavering support towards the state-building agenda and to underscore that the support of this Council is central to Somalia's success. Through our collective support, Somalia is demonstrating that a country can emerge from prolonged conflict to one that delivers for its people and acts as a force for good in the region.

Thank you.



## **RAISEDON ZENENGA APPOINTED DEPUTY UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE**

**UN** Secretary-General António Guterres announced in January the appointment of Raisedon Zenenga of Zimbabwe as his new Deputy Special Representative in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

Mr. Zenenga succeeded Anita Kiki Gbeho of Ghana, to whom the Secretary-General expressed his gratitude for her dedicated service in Somalia.

Mr. Zenenga previously served as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Libya, where he also served as Assistant Secretary-General and Mission Coordinator of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) since 2020. Mr. Zenenga brings extensive experience in supporting political processes and mediation, managing complex peace operations, and working with Government and other key stakeholders in conflict and post-conflict settings. He has over 30 years of experience in the United Nations, including with United Nations missions in Liberia, Libya, Iraq-Kuwait, Sierra Leone, Somalia and South Sudan, as well as at the United Nations Headquarters.

He previously held the positions of Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Somalia and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. He also served in other senior roles at the United Nations Headquarters supporting peacekeeping operations in Africa. Mr. Zenenga began his professional career in his country's Diplomatic Service.

Mr. Zenenga graduated from the University of Zimbabwe, where he studied public administration and political science.



# UNIVERSITY FOR PEACE GRADUATES ENCOURAGED TO WORK TOGETHER TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

**A group of graduate students from Somalia and elsewhere were today encouraged to put their educational achievements at the service of solving their countries' – and the world's – problems.**

**“C**ongratulations! You've already achieved a lot; we wish you all the very best. Please stay here solving Somalia's problems. But not just Somalia's problems, the problems of the region, the problems of the globe,” the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing, said in her remarks to the students.

The top UN official was addressing graduate students at the University for Peace's (UPEACE) third graduation ceremony in the Somali capital of Mogadishu.

*“This is the only tertiary institution mandated exclusively to deliver peace education, and that has particular relevance here in Somalia,”* Ms. Laing added. *“I think the fact that your own president, the current president, is a graduate of the university says it all – and it was very inspiring to hear him receive his Ph.D. recently.”*

In 2022, Somalia's President Hassan Shekih Mohamud was conferred with a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the same academic institution and focused on peace, governance and development. His dissertation

was titled, ‘Examining the Challenges of Clan Politics in State-building: A Case Study of Somalia.’

The 73 graduating students were made up of 14 women and 59 men from Somalia, India, Nigeria and elsewhere. They were receiving postgraduate degrees in a range of areas, including peace, governance, development, environment, international law, human rights and more.

In addition to the students and their families, and the UN Special Representative, attendees included Somalia's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Jibril Abdirashid Haji Abdi; the Ambassador of the European Union to Somalia, Karin Johansson; the University for Peace's Rector, Francisco Rojas Aravena; and other representatives from the international community in Somalia.

### Interdisciplinarity

In her remarks, the UN Special Representative noted the interlinkages between education and development, especially as it applies to Somalia.

*“A lot of international partners, including the United Nations, focus very much on basic education, primary and secondary. And, of course, that's important. It creates the foundation,”* Ms. Laing said. *“No country can really get to where it wants to be in the world economy today without a thriving and very good higher education sector. So, I think it's absolutely right that Somalia should set its aspirations high.”*

The top UN official also encouraged the students to collaborate with each other given that most global problems today require solutions of an interdisciplinary nature. She also raised the possibility of collaboration with the United Nations on various areas of research.

### Day of Education

The ceremony coincided with the International Day of Education, which the UN General Assembly established through proclamation in 2018 in celebration of

**“**This year, the theme of ‘learning for lasting peace’ resonates with the core of the mission of UPEACE**”**





“The UPEACE’s commitment to Somalia’s peacebuilding process is unwavering through education, research, and collaborative initiative”

the role of education in peace and development. The occasion was noted by the University for Peace’s rector, as was the day’s theme.

“This year, the theme of ‘learning for lasting peace’ resonates with the core of the mission of UPEACE and underscores the vitality of education as a cornerstone of peace, development, and sustainability – without peace, there is no stability; without peace, there is no development; and without education, there is neither peace, nor stability, nor sustainable development,” Mr. Aravena said.

“The UPEACE’s commitment to Somalia’s peacebuilding process is unwavering through education, research, and collaborative initiative. We are dedicated to contributing to the nation’s journey towards peace, stability, and prosperity,” he added.

#### UPEACE and Somalia

With its main campus in Costa Rica and established by the UN General Assembly in 1980, the University for Peace’s focus areas include conflict prevention, human security, human rights, environmental security and post-conflict rehabilitation.

“UPEACE’s unique attributes lie in its specialised United Nations mandate for global community with interdisciplinary curriculum, commitment to practical learning, and emphasis on sustainable development,” said the Director of the UPEACE Somalia



Programme, Mohamed Yusuf.

The Somalia programme was initiated in late 2018 with the aim of promoting stability in Somalia after years of conflict. In the Horn of Africa country, it offers specialised post-graduate programmes with a focus on peacebuilding, conflict prevention, human security, human rights, environmental security and post-conflict resolution.

“A couple of years ago, many Somalis had to leave the country to do post-graduate studies, whereas today, you find other Africans actually coming to Somalia to graduate – this is a testimony to the improvements that have been made in Somalia over the past four years through UPEACE,” said the Director of the UPEACE Africa Programme, Professor Samuel Ewusi.

The impact of the institution was not lost on the graduates.

“You stand here today as a generation poised to write a new chapter in Somalia’s history – a proud and blessed nation of Somalia with a vision of quality education and lasting peace,” said Jibril Afyare, a student who also work

as the director of international cooperation for Somalia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in his remarks to the gathering.

“As a working mother, having the education I need to develop my knowledge while being at home and caring for my children is such a great opportunity that UPEACE has made a reality for me,” said Leila Abdullahi Daus, one of the Somali master’s graduates in Environment, Development and Peace.

“UPEACE Somalia gives a wonderful opportunity to study from the core to achieve excellent professionalism, learning from Somalia’s maritime industry, geopolitics, and international relations,” said Daniel Jesudoss Jeyabalan from India, who was among the ten doctoral graduates in the area of Peace, Governance and Development.

According to UPEACE, in the coming years, a range of new certificate courses and master’s and doctoral programmes will be introduced. These include in areas such as Environmental Security and Governance, Sustainable Natural Resource Management, Climate Change Policy, and Sustainable Food Systems.



“UPEACE Somalia gives a wonderful opportunity to study from the core to achieve excellent professionalism”



## FARDOWSA WEHLIYE

DIVING INTO SOMALIA'S SEA

FOR WORK, HEALTH AND FUN

**Fardowsa Wehliye loves the sea and swimming in it. “My affinity with the sea is boundless. Living so close to the sea triggered my initial interest. It felt like it was in my DNA,” she says.**

**H**er love for the sea started around 2005, when she was seven years old. At that time, she lived in Mogadishu’s Shangani neighbourhood, from where the surrounding Indian Ocean is still visible.

The Somali capital was a refuge for her and her family from the violence and civil strife engulfing the country at the time. The nearby sea was a refuge from the capital’s hustle and bustle, but also from its frequent security threats and incidents.

For her, it was an alluring but also deadly attraction.

“My father used to take the whole family to the beach on Fridays between 2005 and 2009 – these were my first encounters with the ocean. Though infrequent because of the fighting, they used to fill me with joy,” Ms. Wehliye says.

“I would run towards the water,” she adds, “but I had my father, and images of drowning

people, at the back of my head and that kept me where shallow water was.”

Little did she know at the time that her experiences at Mogadishu’s beaches would lead to a life spent in the sea, both for work and pleasure.

“One of those weekends at the beach I went a bit deeper and immersed myself in the water but almost drowned. This experience sparked my determination to master swimming skills,” Ms. Wehliye says.

Now, 19 years afterwards, Ms. Wehliye is an advocate for Somali women taking up swimming or, at the very least, engaging with the country’s more than 3,300 kilometres of coastline whether for work or pleasure.

“Swimming has numerous benefits. It is an exercise that involves all of the body’s muscles. People keep asking me whether I go to the gym, but my only secret is swimming. I would urge people to adopt swimming as a lifestyle choice. I believe it can replace all other forms of exercising,” Ms. Wehliye says.

### Cultural misperceptions

The decades of war and civil strife mean that Somalia has had no formal resources to ensure water skills and safety for most Somalis. With so many other priorities for its development, there are no records kept of the number of people who drown or experience other mishaps in the water.

Anecdotally, some Mogadishu residents say many lives have been lost at the city’s

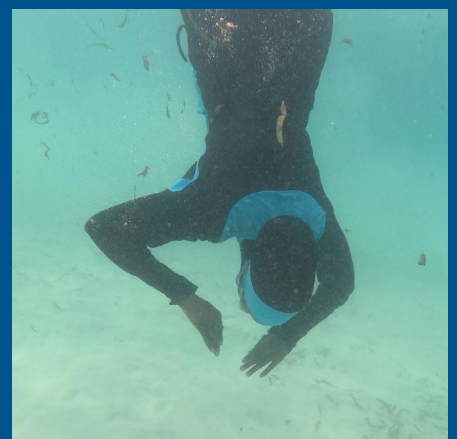
beaches due to poor swimming skills, as well as ignorance of basic safety precautions. Many Somali youth are reportedly denied parental permission to go to the beach for fear of drowning.

The City University of Mogadishu introduced her to swimming as part of her marine science undergraduate degree.

In 2018, Ms. Wehliye joined the Bah-Dabaalato, loosely translated as ‘swimming community,’ to learn how to swim and more.

“I heard many instances of people drowning, and I thought we could do something about it. That is when I decided to join the Bah-Dabaalato to learn but also to help teach swimming,” she says.

The Bah-Dabaalato is a local community initiative set up in 2017 by a group of friends. It now has 45 active members –







seven of them young women – with Ms. Wehliye serving as its chairwoman.

*“We also act as lifeguards. The other day, a lady was swimming in Lido Beach. She was drowning, but fortunately, one of the Bah-Dabaalato team was nearby and rescued her. We want swimmers to have the skills to save themselves and assist others when the need arises,”* Ms. Wehliye says.

For its swimming classes and training, the group uses Mogadishu’s main swimming spot, Lido Beach, located in the city centre, and Jazeera Beach, located some 15 kilometres south of the capital.

The Bah-Dabaalato does not charge prospective swimming students, but it does have one condition – after mastering swimming, its graduates must teach another person how to swim.

In addition to the Bah-Dabaalato’s volunteers, the city authorities have their beach patrol and life rescue service but this has been dormant due to budgetary restrictions.

### **Women and swimming**

Within the Bah-Dabaalato’s remit, Ms. Wehliye has a particular focus: getting more Somali women and girls into the water with the necessary training and skills.

*“We prioritise confidence-building activities. We develop our members’ confidence in water; we teach them how to float, how to do basic kicks and how to survive in water, and knowing the survival skills allows you to stay in the water as much as it takes. One should learn these before starting swimming. It boosts your confidence, too,”* Ms. Wehliye says.

This is no easy feat – swimming is not a common pastime for Somali women. This is due to social and cultural misperceptions; for many, swimming is considered dangerous and a man’s activity.

*“In Mogadishu, few homes have swimming pools. Schools do not offer swimming courses, and no centres teach people how to swim,”* Ms. Wehliye says. *“There are no spaces*

*dedicated to female swimmers. You can imagine how numerous the challenges are.”*

*“Culturally, our society does not encourage swimming. It is considered too dangerous even for boys,”* she adds. *“In a deeply conservative Somalia, girls who go to the beach to swim might be frowned upon.”*

Getting Somali women and girls into the water is also complicated by the issue of bathing gear.

A good quality, female swimming costume which is also culturally acceptable in Somalia costs around \$60 while a lower-quality one costs around \$25. Obtaining either option in Somalia is not easy.

*“Swimsuits tailored for Muslim women are not available and, even if there are any, they are beyond the reach of an average person,”* notes Ms. Wehliye. *“We resort to placing our orders with a business owner who can buy on our behalf abroad.”*

### **To the sea**

Ms. Wehliye’s journey to the sea was not a given. She was born far from it in the city of Baidoa, in Somalia’s South West State, in 1997, when the country was in the throes of its civil war, and while her mother was visiting relatives.

Baidoa is some 250 kilometres from Mogadishu, where Ms. Wehliye’s family was living at the time. They had moved there from Baidoa in an attempt to find somewhat safer surroundings. Even in the Somali capital, the family kept moving

from one district to another to escape the violent clashes between warlords then jockeying for power.

Her father, Mohamud Wehliye, strongly believed in the power of education to transform lives. He overcame financial limitations and challenged societal traditions for his daughter to stay in school despite the ongoing civil war.

Ms. Wehliye notes that her father’s belief in education came from his childhood experiences. While a boy in Mogadishu, in the early 1950s, the only schools providing formal secular education were run by the Italian colonial administration – but his parents did not want him to attend these schools in fear of non-Islamic influences.

*“He used to go to school secretly. He used to hide his books from his parents. When his parents discovered this, they ripped his books apart. He was never disheartened. He educated himself that way. He never treated boys and girls unequally,”* Ms. Wehliye says.

In 2006, Ms. Wehliye started her education at the Mujamac Umul Qura School in Mogadishu for primary schooling and then continued in Al-Fajr Secondary School in Elasha Biyaha on the southern outskirts of the capital.

*“My childhood was tough because of war. I did not enjoy it at all. I used to see dead*

“My childhood was tough because of war. I did not enjoy it at all. I used to see dead bodies on my way to school.”



I am passionate about fishery data collection and fishery management. I want to contribute to better research and data collection

bodies on my way to school. It got even worse when I lost my dad," she recalls. Her father passed away in a car accident in Mogadishu in 2012.

Fortunately, Ms. Wehliye's top grades meant that her tuition fees were waived, sparing her family too much of a financial burden. However, her father's demise cast a shadow over her continuing education. Again, fortune – via her family – was on her side: a maternal cousin took her under his wing and covered the remaining, minimal school charges.

She completed her secondary school two years later, in 2014, and then sought to continue her education.

And, once again, it seemed that Somalia's sea was beckoning – Ms. Wehliye enrolled in the City University of Mogadishu's Department of Marine Science and Fisheries, from where she obtained her Bachelor's degree in Marine Science in 2019.

But the young student was about to dive even deeper into academic studies focused on sea-related science. That same year she was awarded a Turkish Government scholarship and moved to Istanbul for three years to attend Istanbul University.

"When the news reached me, I had mixed feelings, I could not believe my eyes when I received the notification email. I was elated and grateful to be chosen from among many applicants. Three years later, after the graduation at Istanbul University, I felt rewarded for my efforts," she recalls.

She obtained a Master's degree in Fisheries Technologies and Management in 2023.

### Next generation

As a pioneer female graduate in marine science, Ms. Wehliye is also contributing to educating the next generation of marine scientists in Somalia.

She lectures at her old alma mater, the City University of Mogadishu, at the department she attended. In addition to teaching, she is also involved in fisheries research, fish processing technologies



and exploring ways of advancing Somali fisheries through improved infrastructure and technology.

"I am passionate about fishery data collection and fishery management. I want to contribute to better research and data collection. It is a shame we have such a long coast and how little we know about it," she says.

Ms. Wehliye also represents Somalia in the Women in Marine Science network (WiMS). Launched in 2017 at the 10th Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association Scientific Symposium, WiMS aims to address the gender equality issues that are facing women marine scientists.

Battling stereotypes about women and the sea – both in the workplace and outside of it – is something that Ms. Wehliye can relate to and is determined to change.

"Despite stereotypes, cultural barriers, and discrimination, I urge Somali girls to be bold and pursue their passions. You can excel like anybody else. There are people who would tell you that you don't belong in this field of science. Don't listen to them," she says.

### The sea and the UN

Away from the myriad health benefits involved and due to its ability to promote cohesion, sports is recognized by the United Nations as a tool to build peace and development in post-conflict environments, with it being a fundamental right and a powerful tool to strengthen social ties and promote sustainable development and peace, as well as solidarity and respect for all.

In relation to Somalia's seafarers and shorelines, the United Nations works closely with Somali authorities – at both federal and Federal Member State levels – on strengthening their skills for dealing

with their country's maritime domain. This includes through the development of strategic policy frameworks, capacity building and capability enhancement initiatives, as an important step towards establishing Somalia's 'blue economy.'

This work is undertaken by the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), as well as other UN entities and international partners, most notably the European Union Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) in Somalia.

In February 2023, the Federal Government of Somalia launched the Women in the Maritime Sector (WiMS) National Action Plan. The plan aims to enhance and empower Somali women in their country's maritime sector by increasing their opportunities and highlighting their achievements.

The Somali-led process for the Action Plan began in 2019 and was developed through an inclusive approach involving various ministries from both the Federal Government and the country's Federal Member States, with support from EUCAP Somalia and UNSOM.

For Ms. Wehliye, these initiatives are all well and good and appreciated – but she also has some more immediate needs for now.

"We receive many requests, actually, more than we can handle due... We need swimming pools for women, costumes, swimming goggles, proper shoes for swimming, kickboards, swimming caps and snorkels, among other gear," she says. "Anyone wishing to donate swimming kits may reach us on Bah-Dabaalato social media pages where our contacts are available."



## UN CALLS FOR INVESTING IN SOMALI WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

On the occasion of International Women's Day in March, the United Nations called on the Somali authorities to invest greater effort in ensuring women's inclusion in politics and making the minimum 30 per cent quota for women's parliamentary representation a reality.

*"The minimum 30 per cent quota will go a long to helping promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Somalia. Despite numerous challenges, Somali women continue to make significant contributions to peacebuilding and reconciliation – this is through service as Members of Parliament, on civil society organisations and on youth associations, to name a few – but there needs to be even more investment of resources to build on this progress as investing in women is a cornerstone for building inclusive societies,"*

said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, Catriona Laing.

*"Somali women continue to remind stakeholders that ensuring inclusion and the 30 per cent quota in legislation is an achievable request given commitments already made by Somali leadership in the past,"* she added.

Somali women leaders have been engaging stakeholders – including the National Consultative Council, religious and traditional leaders, the Speakers of Parliament, the Independent Constitutional Review Commission and the Oversight Committee – on the need for legislation and mechanisms to implement and achieve the women's quota.

In Somalia, the UN supports the Federal Government in its efforts to increase women's political participation and enact laws that strengthen the protection of women and girls, that comply with Somalia's human rights obligations and meet international human rights standards. The UN also partners with the Federal Government and civil society to end harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

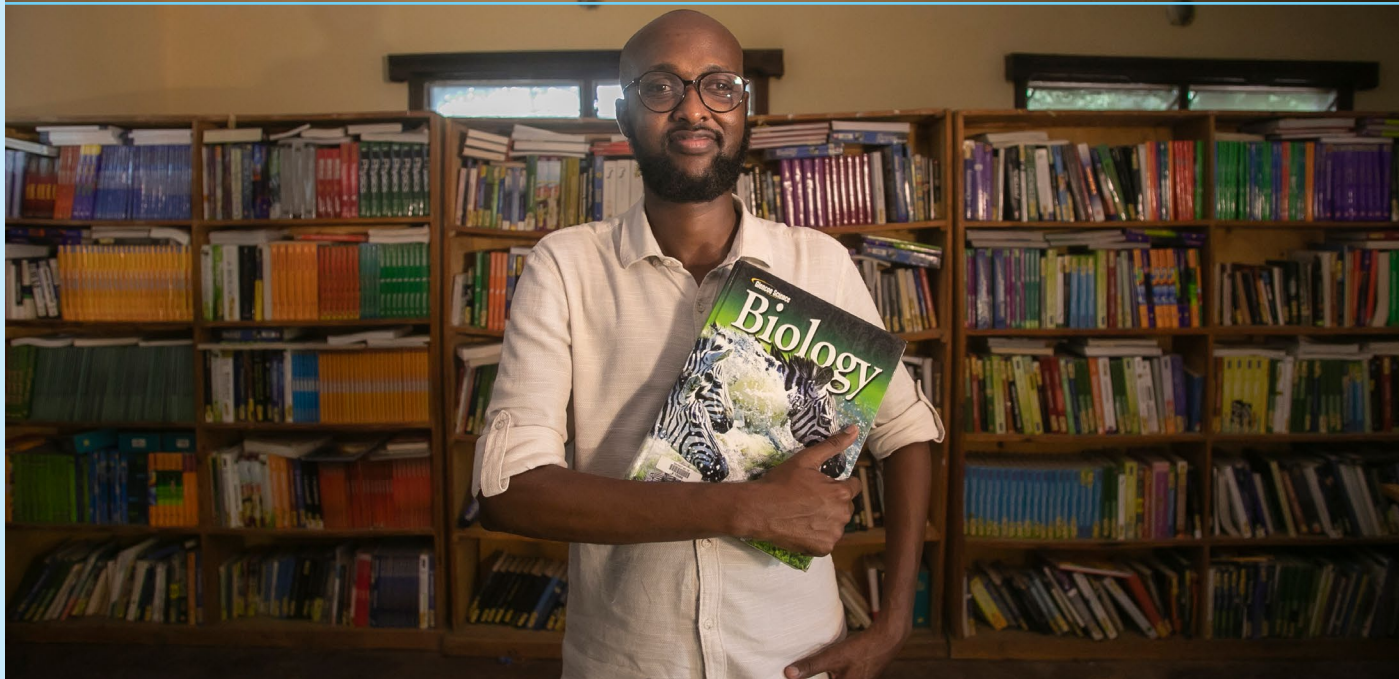
The theme for this year's International Women's Day was 'Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress.' The occasion has been observed around the world since 1875 to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, as well as to mark a call to action for accelerating gender equality.

### PHOTO HIGHLIGHT

Sports in Somalia play a vital role in promoting peace and coexistence. Shown here, fans celebrate the win of Galmudug's team against Hirshabelle in January, during the final match of the Somali Football Federation's inter-regional FMS tournament in Mogadishu.







## ABDULLAHI MIRE "EDUCATION IS THE MIDWIFE OF PEACE AND STABILITY IN SOMALIA"

**At just 37 years of age, Abdullahi Mire has already lived something of a full and remarkable life. He has gone from being a Somali refugee to an internationally-recognised advocate for refugees.**

It has been a sometimes-dizzying experience, but one that Mr. Mire is determined to make the most – he knows he has been fortunate and is determined to give something back to those with fewer opportunities.

He has nothing but gratitude for where his path has led in life.

But he has a special appreciation for a Somali girl by the name of Hodan Bashir whom he met in 2017 and had a major impact on that path.

Aged 17 at the time, Ms. Bashir was living in the Dadaab refugee complex in northern Kenya, where hundreds of thousands of people fleeing war and poverty were living.

Mr. Mire, working as a journalist for an international news outlet, had gone to Dadaab for some reporting on the situation there.

*"She approached me with a request: to buy her a biology textbook. She aspired to become a doctor. She did have access to a chemistry textbook; she had to share it with 12 other girls in her class," he says.*

*"At night, only one girl could take the book home. This situation arose because refugee camps can be dangerous for young girls at night. Boys could study together at someone's house and return home safely. But every night, 11 of those 12 girls lacked a book to study from," he adds. "One girl, whenever she had the book, stayed up late into the night – she was determined to absorb as much knowledge as possible from that single textbook."*

Mr. Mire returned to Nairobi some days later and, once there, he proceeded to a nearby bookshop and bought a dozen text books for the young student and her classmates.

*"Imagine – that textbook cost just \$7, and such a small amount of money can go a long way to help a refugee to study," he says.*

But it was not enough. Something from the exchange niggled at him for days.

*"I asked myself why I, an adult and educated journalist, couldn't show the same courage as a young girl. I wanted to do something for my community. Why couldn't I ask others to buy more textbooks too?" he says.*

And so, from these inauspicious beginnings, the Refugee Youth Education Hub (RYEH) was created, setting Mr. Mire on his journey from being a refugee to becoming someone who helps refugees.

### Early start

Mr. Mire's visit to the Dadaab refugee complex in 2017 was far from his first time at the location – he spent most of his formative years there.

Born in southern Somalia in 1987, Mr. Mire moved to Dadaab in the 1990s when his family fled their home country's bloody conflict. He spent 23 years in the refugee complex, before he was eventually resettled in Norway. He could have stayed there, but felt the pull of his community and returned to east Africa as a young adult.

The sprawling Dadaab complex has a population of around 373,000 people – registered refugees and asylum-seekers – as of October 2023. Most of them are from Somalia and some 56 per cent are children. Many have been there for years.

Operations in the complex are coordinated by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which, along with its partners and with the support of the Kenyan government and host community, has for more than three decades provided all essential services for the refugees – including education.

According to a 2019 UNHCR report – 'Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis' – as refugee children grow older, the barriers preventing them from accessing education around the world become harder to overcome: only 63 per cent of refugee children go to primary school, compared to 91 per cent globally. Around



the world, 84 per cent of adolescents get a secondary education, while only 24 per cent of refugees get the opportunity.

Dadaab has three camps: Hagadera, Ifo and Dagahaley. In them, there are 22 pre-schools and 22 primary schools. There are also six secondary schools, five primary accelerated learning centers and nine Alternative Basic Education centres. Additionally, there are 6 vocational learning centers. All these schools follow the Kenyan curriculum. There are also some religious schools.

The number of students enrolled across pre-school, primary school and secondary school stands at just over 62,000.

Yet, despite these signs of progress, challenges remain in its educational activities.

According to UNHCR, in some of the schools, teachers work double shifts as one group of children attend school in the morning and another group comes in the afternoon. The lack of textbooks, teaching material and stationery contribute to low performance in the schools in the camps. This is on top of the strong demand for more classrooms, desks, textbooks and teachers.

Out of those students who graduate from secondary school, only a small number are able to progress to further education.

Mr. Mire was one of them.

He went on to tertiary study at Kenya's Kenyatta University, from which he graduated with a diploma in journalism and public relations in 2013.

He became a journalist, although alternated this employment with stints with the UN's International Organization for Migration in Mogadishu and the southern Somali cities of Baidoa and Kismayo. His work

centred on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration issues, aimed at taking combatants out of their groups and helping them to reintegrate as civilians into society.

### Books and more books

Ms. Hodan's request for a biology book led to some textbooks being sent to her and her classmates from Nairobi.

She could not know that what began as a delivery of a dozen textbooks would lead eventually to a torrent of tens of thousands of books for the residents of the Dadaab refugee complex.

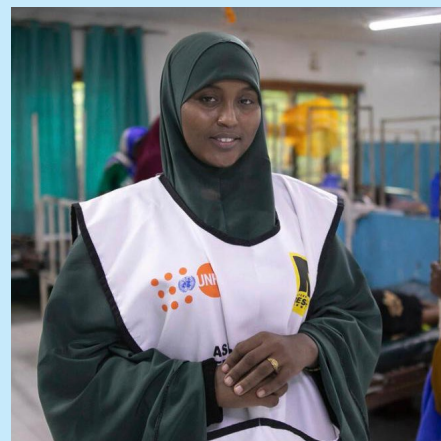
After mulling over what more could be done, Mr. Mire, with some friends and associates, in 2018 landed on the idea of creating the RYEH, a local, refugee-led non-governmental organization which aims to empower young refugees and advocate for them, their voices and ambitions.

*"Education is at the core of all we do: from providing direct support of school-aged children through our Dadaab Book Drive, to the acquisition of new skills in our livelihood programmes, to working with communities to improve communication and enhance social inclusion. We believe that education is critical to delivering the belonging, dignity, equity, and justice we all need and demand,"* according to RYEH's website.

The 'Dadaab Book Drive' has been a major activity for RYEH.

It was started in 2018 and, since then, RYEH has collected more than 150,000 donated books and distributed them to the students and children of the Dadaab refugee complex. Donors have included another NGO, Books for Africa, as well as UNHCR and the Embassy of Qatar to Kenya.

*"The Dadaab Book Drive was a big campaign.*



*It targeted Somali diasporas and international organizations. It was and is a successful initiative,"* Mr. Mire says. *"It is a generous thing to do for these children."*

*"The number of students will continue to increase in these schools. And what does this mean? They all need books. Imagine a book shared by 10 students. That's why Refugee Youth Education Hub continues to advocate for the rights of these students. We also encourage international organizations, companies, and individual well-wishers to help us get as many books as possible. Then we can make the ratio one to one,"* Mr. Mire says.

RYEH secured another 60,000 books for three public libraries it set up in Dadaab.

*"The public libraries quench the thirst for knowledge of Dadaab's youth. It is also a space for them to do assignments and read for pleasure,"* Mr. Mire says, adding, *"I hope they will develop a reading culture by the end of the day."*

With support from Books for Africa, UNHCR, Qatar Charity, UNHCR and the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO), RYEH now has seven full-time staff and 100 volunteers providing education and livelihood services to the youth and children in the Dadaab refugee complex.

*"This camp has made intellectuals. They are smart students. Some have gotten into Ivy League universities in the United States, like Princeton. Some have also gotten into universities in Canada,"* Mr. Mire says. *"It has also produced excellent journalists, teachers, writers, and other professionals – Dadaab youngsters can help rebuild their home country. They need the same opportunities as others."*

There is also the aspect of Somali youth being pulled into the orbit of terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab, the kind of group whose violence was one of the reasons Mr. Mire's family fled Somalia in the first place.

*"Illiteracy has led to the indoctrination of young men with radical ideologies. If you can't*



read, someone else will do it for you," Mr. Mire says. "Someone will brainwash you. That is what happened to many of those youth."

### International recognition

Mr. Mire was working at his desk in his Nairobi home one evening late last year when his efforts in Dadaab suddenly took on a new dimension.

On the morning of Tuesday, 28 November, he received an email informing him that he had been nominated for the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Awards.

"My reaction is one of tears and joy for me, my family and REYH volunteers," he says. "All over the world, people started sending me congratulatory messages."

Then, in mid-December, he was announced as the award's 2023 Global Laureate. He was flown to UNHCR's headquarters in Geneva, to take part in the award ceremony.

"I want to dedicate this award to the one who made my path easier and encouraged me to use my own agency to make a difference in this life – to my mother, thank you. You made it possible for me to thrive," he said in his acceptance speech.

"And," he added, "I want to dedicate this award to every child – from Somalia to Afghanistan to Venezuela, from Myanmar to the Middle East, from Congo to Central America – who has been scooped up in someone's arms as they ran 'because anywhere was safer than here.'"

Established in 1954, the UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award honours individuals, groups and organizations who go above and beyond the call of duty to protect refugees, as well as internally displaced and stateless people.

It is named after Fridtjof Nansen, a Norwegian explorer, scientist and diplomat who became the first High Commissioner for Refugees at the League of Nations in 1920. He developed the "Nansen passport" shortly afterwards, which served as an identity document and a travel permit for refugees until 1942. He also organized a relief programme for millions of Russians affected by a famine in 1921-1922. For his crucial work, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1922.

### Future outlook

Since his award, Mr. Mire has been giving thought to how he can build on his achievements so far for the good of others.

He is conscious that being a laureate is not an end in itself – that it comes with responsibilities and obligations.

"In a nutshell, my ultimate plan is to extend this initiative to Somalia, especially in cities

like Kismayo, Baidoa, Garowe and several others soon," he says, adding that he knows it will not be easy but that he is determined, and he is considering a target of one million donated books for those in need.

Mr. Mire has been visiting Somalia since his win to explore how he can contribute to his home country's development.

"I want to change not only lives of refugee children and youth in Dadaab but also internally displaced people (IDPs) all over Somalia," he says. "The only way to do that is through education."

"You will improve their lives. How? By educating them well," he adds. "Education must be a priority for societies to progress. This is especially true for those recovering from decades of conflict. Education is the midwife of peace and stability in Somalia, if not more."

On a recent visit to Mogadishu, he met with a range of international partners, including from the UN system. They included the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia (UNSOM), Catriona Laing, and the Deputy Representative for Somalia of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Mandy Owusu, among others.

"Abdullahi's life-story and efforts are a testament to the drive and potential of young Somalis to really contribute and make a difference to their country's development – I commend him on his work and applaud the recognition he has received with the Nansen Refugee Award," said Ms. Laing. "I hope he can serve as an example to many others."

As it continues its path to peace and stability after decades of conflict, Somalia has made important strides in rebuilding its education system, with steps such as the introduction of a unified curriculum for primary and secondary schools and a standardized exam system.

However, challenges to education in Somalia remain – especially when it comes to education for IDP children.

According to a recent snapshot report produced by the Somalia Education Cluster, of which the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a lead agency, this year "between 3.6 million and 4.9 million school-aged children in Somalia will not have access to formal education in 2024, and that nearly 2.4 million school-aged children will require humanitarian assistance to enable them to begin, return to, or remain in school."

“Abdullahi’s life-story and efforts are a testament to the drive and potential of young Somalis to really contribute and make a difference to their country’s development”







# CLIMATE CHANGE: SAVING NATURE FROM RISING TEMPERATURES AND CONFLICTS

**Climate change has become such a major factor of global instability that even the UN Security Council has added it to its agenda.**

**At** the UN Environment Assembly which took place in Nairobi in February, experts including Christophe Hodder, the climate security advisor to the United Nations in Somalia, had met to discuss the complex link between climate change and conflicts.

Mr. Hodder highlighted the environmental damage caused by war and its consequences, explaining to UN News' Anton Uspensky the vicious circle that is created by conflict and a warming planet as it *"affects ecosystems, human health and climate."*

**Christophe Hodder:** Climate, peace and security are very interlinked. Climate change is leading to environmental degradation and conflict over natural resources. A conflict is profound and multifaceted, and it affects ecosystems, human health and climate. Conflicts such as those around the world, like in Ukraine and Gaza, and other, are stark examples of how warfare can lead to significant environmental degradation and long-term ecological consequences.

Warfare often results in direct destruction of ecosystems through land degradation, deforestation, contamination of water bodies, ecosystems, agricultural lands and

other areas where military operations can pollute and contaminate the air; they can contaminate water; they can contaminate soil. There's also an impact on human health and livelihoods, the environmental damage to agricultural land. This can lead to outbreaks of diseases. It can also, and often does, lead to food insecurity. There are also worries about the release of hazardous substances from military and warfare.

**UN News: What are those contaminants?**

**Christophe Hodder:** There are contaminants like metals, and there is a lot of hazardous waste. There's a lot of chemicals in some of the gunpowder, there's a lot of materials like magnesium. They can go into the water. There's a whole range of them and huge amounts of contamination.

In Somalia, for example, we've seen water points being poisoned. They put poison in water wells as a sort of a controlled insecurity mechanism. So, we can see that

it's direct impact on human health and livelihood and that's where that can lead to food insecurity.

There needs to be an understanding that this leads to long-term insecurity and long-term impact. The other impact is also how warfare destroys 'carbon sinks' such as forests, causing increased carbon dioxide levels in the air. In Somalia, for example, Al-Shabaab and other militant groups hide in forests. A lot of bush clearing happens as part of that. And that means cutting down a lot of the carbon sinks.

We really need to think about post-conflict restoration and what the impact of the war and the warfare is. Conflicts and war also lead to displacement, creating environmental refugees or climate refugees. They need new locations for shelter, water, food, which puts extra pressure on different, on new ecosystems. In Somalia, but also in Ukraine and in Gaza there's been a lot of movement of populations. That led







to environmental degradation as well, and also to biodiversity loss. Warfare leads to significant destruction of biodiversity and of local conservation efforts as well. Protection of wildlife and natural reserves often becomes a lower priority, which can lead to increased poaching, logging and habitat loss.

**UN News: You are a climate security expert working within the UN mission in Somalia. How and at what stage do you assess the dangers and how do you respond to them?**

**Christophe Hodder:** I work on mainstreaming the understanding across security services, military and the UN country team of the interlinkages of climate and conflict. I also do a lot of work around collecting data and information on the interlinkage between climate and conflict. We are looking at climate risk analysis and then provide information over the next six months, a year, five, ten or thirty years on what the climate projection is going to look like and what that means for the military and security.

A lot of my work is around bringing together these security actors looking at state security planning, the police planning, the military planning. What does that mean when we're doing stabilization and how do you then bring in the development funding, the climate financing to actually think about the long-term support to those communities that need it the most? And who are most vulnerable to both climate change but also to militant actors?

My third part is around technical advice: trying to identify where are the biggest

adaptation needs and where are they linked to the security needs. And then looking technically at what type of nature-based solutions, what type of big interventions are needed to make that big adaptation and security and peace gains at the same time.

**UN News: The understanding that warfare is tightly interlinked with climate damage, with environment damage is a relatively new concept. Has your work already provided certain deliverables? Is there an understanding on behalf of conflicting parties that taking environment into account should also be part of the rules of the warfare?**

**Christophe Hodder:** It's an ongoing process at its an early stage. There are different levels of understanding and agreement. It's incredibly complicated. In the one case of Somalia, from the political perspective, there's a lot of understanding and agreement. At the local level, we've actually done quite a few pilots now around nature-based solutions and peacebuilding to understand, how you actually reduce tensions over natural resources that are exacerbated through climate shocks, and what sort of nature-based solutions you need to intervene there to make them long-term. And make them environmentally sustainable. That will then give you a chance to attain both the sustainability goals and the peace-building goals.

We now have the Green Climate Fund (GCF) visiting Somalia next week. This is the first case of a 'fragile state' or 'conflict state', where climate financing is going to be provided. This is a really exciting outcome where we're hopefully going to make some

good announcements around financing.

**UN News: What are those 'nature-based solutions' and at what stage should they be invoked?**

**Christophe Hodder:** We're working with local knowledge and traditional solutions around range land management, around how you rotate cattle, goats... And the issue is, that as the climate crisis increases, then that competition over things like grazing grounds increase. So, between clans, between groups that brings people much more into this competition over that grazing land. We're now thinking around things like how do you create natural resource sharing agreements between groups? Where they understand the impacts of climate change and the future issues of climate change, and where that what's going to happen in the future – with collaboration over the things like grazing lands and areas.

When we get this agreement, we then build the peace around that, we build trust. We then try to find solutions and that's when we do the financing of restoration. For example, restoring the grain, the range land or planting the right type of trees and shrubs to try to help the soil health increase in those areas. And we're trying to do this not just through donor funding.

We're trying to now match this with diaspora. We invite Somalis who live around the world, who are incredibly influential, into funding programs that will help them in the continuation of the growth of this type of sharing agreements. Hopefully, that will lead to a peace building. We'll then link that to the stabilization gains and aims in those areas and then hopefully this sharing agreement can then keep going up. We then work with the districts, the states and then those agreements can continue to go. So that's what we're hoping to see.

