

# Ambassador to witness preparations of the historic local elections

The British Ambassador to Somalia, Kate Foster, today (Tuesday, 28 September 2021) visited Garowe ahead of the planned local elections in October, to underline the importance of the elections to the wider democratisation process in Puntland.

In her first visit to Puntland since her appointment, Ambassador Foster met with President Said Abdullahi Deni, where they discussed progress towards the One Person One Vote (OPOV) election as well as wider UK support to the region. Ms Foster also met with officials of the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC), congratulating them on the progress of the planned local elections.

On Federal elections, Ambassador Foster called for Somali leaders to work together and move forward to deliver on their commitments to hold credible national elections on time and in accordance with the 27 May Agreement. Puntland State will hold its first OPOV local elections in October 2021.

The pilot elections in the three districts of Qardho, Eyl and Ufayn will be an opportunity to test the viability of the electoral model ahead of state-wide local governance elections expected to take place in early 2022.

Speaking during the visit, British Ambassador to Somalia, Kate Foster, said:

I'm delighted to be here in Puntland State, my first visit as British Ambassador. It's a pleasure to discuss our support here, the strong progress towards elections in Puntland, and to meet the Transitional Puntland Election Commission (TPEC) and civil society.

The upcoming local elections in Puntland are of historic significance. If completed successfully, they will demonstrate that One Person One Vote elections are possible in Somalia. The pace of voter registration indicates that people want to have a more direct say in selection of individuals and associations that represent them

I want to congratulate the Puntland State Government, and the Transitional Puntland Election Commission on the strong progress that's been made, with UK and international community support.

As we head into the Lower House elections, stakeholders have a

responsibility and an opportunity to ensure there is a conducive environment for free, fair and peaceful elections. Strong civil society engagement in the process is crucial.

During the visit, Ms Foster also welcome President Deni's continued commitment to supporting the timely implementation of the federal electoral process and his willingness to work with actors across the political spectrum in seeking a resolution of the current dispute between President Farmajo and Prime Minister Roble.

She also discussed wider support to Puntland. The UK is supporting 18 communities to build their capacity to conflict and climate-related shocks and stresses through the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia programme.

The UK is also supporting 45 health facilities in Puntland, providing emergency humanitarian assistance, particularly during COVID-19.

In addition to meeting with President Deni, Ms Foster also held meetings with representatives of the civil society and political parties, reiterating the continued importance of strong civil society engagement in the political process, both in terms of election observation and civic engagement.