

'Somalia at a critical juncture' says UN's political chief in her first visit

Unity is essential for Somalis to achieve lasting peace and stability, the top United Nations political affairs official said on Thursday during a visit to the Horn of Africa country, which faces numerous challenges, including the establishment of an effective federal governance system and a combat against Al-Shabab insurgents.

"I wanted to come to [show how important Somalia is to the United Nations](#)," Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo said in an interview after meeting with Federal President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmaajo at the presidential palace in the Somali capital. Mogadishu.

"It's a high priority" for her and UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#), she added.

The visit is her first field trip since she was appointed to the high-ranking position one month ago and is part of a regional tour of three countries in the East Africa, including Kenya and Nigeria.

"I had a very good discussion with the President, and it is very clear Somalia has made a great deal of progress over the last decade," Ms. DiCarlo stated, adding that she had assured the President of the UN's continued support to Somalia.

Ms. DiCarlo expressed satisfaction with the progress the country has achieved on the political and security fronts and noted recent efforts to expedite the constitutional review process.

Speaking at the presidential palace, Ms. DiCarlo said the aim of her first field visit was to support the ongoing political and peace processes in the country as well as explore how best to assist Somalia to overcome some of its challenges, ranging from the humanitarian situation and security to the political agenda.

The UN official commended the work undertaken by the federal constitutional bodies and the recently held National Constitutional Convention that underscored inclusivity, cooperation, and compromise for the good of the country as critical aspects for finalizing the constitutional review process within this year.

"Somalia is at a [critical juncture](#). Progress on the constitutional review could lead to a breakthrough. Unity of Somalis is essential to advance federalism, reduce violence, defeat extremism, tackle the humanitarian challenges and deliver real benefits to the population," the Under-Secretary-General added.

Also today, the Security Council issued a [Presidential Statement](#) on Somalia.

[UN envoy welcomes temporary ceasefire by Afghan Government; urges Taliban to reciprocate](#)

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan ([UNAMA](#)) has welcomed a week-long ceasefire announced by the Government with the Taliban and called on the militant group to reciprocate the temporary pause.

UNAMA chief Tadamichi Yamamoto [commended the authorities](#) for the preparedness they expressed “to initiate, in good faith, any steps to toward a formal peace process.”

“The way forward must not rely on a military solution but rather a democratic process, and I once again urge the Taliban to take up President [Ashraf] Ghani’s peace offer and start direct talks with the Government to put an end to the suffering of the Afghan people.”

The ceasefire, announced by the Government starts on the 27th of Ramadan (12 June) and will run through the end of Ramadan to fifth day of Eid-ul-Fitr. The international military presence in the country has also indicated that it will honour the pause in fighting.

It follows the Afghan Government’s call for unconditional peace talks with the Taliban at the Kabul Process II conference in the Afghan capital in February, according to UNAMA.

The announcement also comes on the back of calls by more than 2,000 religious scholars who had gathered this week in the capital, Kabul, to denounce the ongoing conflict and urge all warring sides to embrace peace added the UN mission.

“The UN continues to stand with all Afghans in solidarity, and remains committed, along with the broader international community, to an Afghan-led peace process that will end the war,” it said.

DPRK should release political prisoners ahead of summit with US – UN expert

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) should begin to release political prisoners ahead of denuclearization talks with the United States and engage with the United Nations on human rights, a UN expert on the country said on Thursday.

Tomas Ojea Quintana, the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the DPRK](#), made his comments after welcoming Pyongyang's release of three US nationals last month.

Speaking to journalists in Geneva, Mr. Quintana called for "a concrete gesture" from DPRK regarding those held under arbitrary arrest in the country.

"It might be a gradual process, it's not that I'm saying you should open up all these prisons and release the prisoners, because I am a reasonable expert. What I am saying is there is a need to follow up on the release of the US prisoners in a gradual process."

The exact number of political prisoners being held in DPRK is unclear, but the rights expert – who two years into his mandate has yet to be invited to visit DPRK – agreed that there may be more than 80,000.

As a former UN Special Rapporteur on Myanmar, Mr. Quintana noted that an amnesty there had resulted in the liberation of 2,000 detainees.

In a press conference at the UN, the expert insisted that human rights should play a role in upcoming denuclearization negotiations in Singapore, in light of previous failed attempts to negotiate with DPRK where people's economic, social and cultural rights were "left out."

He cited two previous disarmament agreements with DPRK – the 1994 Agreed Framework and the 2003 Six Party talks – which despite being "well intentioned, were not successful".

For the proposed 12 June US-DPRK summit to bear fruit between US President Donald Trump and DPRK's Kim Jong Un, the UN Special Rapporteur insisted that the human rights dialogue should be included, "because human rights and security and peace are interlinked."

Inside DPRK, Mr. Quintana expressed concern that 10 million people there are in need humanitarian assistance, amid concerns over access to food and malnutrition.

The UN is responsible for providing help, he said, before highlighting that a

\$12 million appeal is only one-third funded.

He also wondered about the impact of sanctions on DPRK, particularly outside the capital, Pyongyang, where he described their impact as “quite violent.”

And while Mr. Quintana made it clear that he was not calling for an end to the economic embargo, he raised the question as to whether the UN Security Council would decide to extend it.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council, on an honorary basis, to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or country situation.

[Hunger surges amid deadly conflicts, poor weather conditions in many countries – UN agriculture agency](#)

Despite ample food supplies, persistent conflicts and adverse climate shocks are taking a toll on global food security, according to a new report launched on Thursday by the United Nation’s agriculture agency.

The [Food and Agriculture Organization’s \(FAO\)](#) new [Crop Prospects and Food Situation](#) reveals that since its last report in March, the number of countries requiring external food assistance has jumped by two, namely Cabo Verde and Senegal, to 39.

According to the report, civil war and insecurity in Africa and the Middle East have displaced millions – resulting in [high hunger rates](#).

“Poor rains have hit cereal production prospects in South America and Southern Africa,” FAO explained. “Unfavourable weather conditions are also placing a heavy burden on pastoralists in West Africa.”

The food insecure countries on FAO’s list are: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Haiti, Iraq, Kenya, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea , Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Syria, Uganda, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

Conflict and erratic rainfall

Turning to cereal production, FAO foresees a 1.5 per cent annual drop from

last year's record high, with a larger decline in some areas, such as South and North America and Southern Africa.

"Conflicts have choked agricultural activity in swathes of Central Africa, notably in the Central African Republic and parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where access to food is further hindered by surging inflation," FAO elaborated.

On a brighter note, after consecutive seasons of drought-reduced harvests, fresh rains point to cereal production gains in East Africa.

Meanwhile, abundant rains recently triggered flooding in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya, displacing some 800,000 people. In contrast to the trend in the subregion, high staple food prices are rising in Sudan and South Sudan, intensifying food insecurity risks.

In the absence of humanitarian assistance, the number of severely food insecure people in South Sudan is expected to rise to 7.1 million people during the June-July lean season.

Turning to Asia, the cereal harvest is projected to remain similar to last year's, with recoveries in countries affected by unfavourable weather conditions, including Bangladesh, Viet Nam, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and, to a lesser extent, Sri Lanka.

While favourable crop conditions in India and Pakistan mean wheat outputs are expected to rise further, fair weather will not be enough to boost crop production in war-afflicted areas, as chronic conflicts impede access to fields such as in Iraq and Syria, where this year's harvests are expected to decline further.

[Security Council calls for efforts to boost role of young people in peace efforts](#)

The international community is being urged to increase the role of young people in negotiating and implementing peace agreements, in line with a resolution adopted unanimously by the Security Council on Wednesday.

The 15 ambassadors [called on](#) the UN Secretary-General and his Special Envoys to take young people's views into account in security-related discussions and to facilitate their participation at decision-making levels.

They also asked countries to protect educational institutions and to ensure

they are accessible to all youth, in addition to taking measures to address young women's right to education.

The wide-ranging resolution was tabled by Sweden and Peru.

In introducing the draft, Swedish Ambassador Olof Skoog said it underlines the contribution young people can make to peace and security if they are actively engaged.

They are also crucial to forging an inclusive vision of a shared future, Peru's Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra stated following the vote.

Recognizing that the marginalization of young people is detrimental to building sustainable peace and countering violent extremism, the Council called on all relevant parties to consider ways to increase their representation when negotiating and implementing peace agreements.

The resolution also placed importance on creating policies for youth that would "positively contribute" to peacebuilding efforts, such as in the areas of social and economic development.

Other examples cited include supporting projects designed to grow local economies, or those that provide youth employment opportunities and vocational training, or which promote youth entrepreneurship and constructive political engagement.