

With new leadership committed to reforms, Somalis must make 2018 ‘year of implementation’ – UN envoy

24 January 2018 – Grappling with turbulent politics, persisting terrorism and the risk of famine, Somalia must make 2018 a year of carrying out reforms, a senior United Nations official said Wednesday, urging more international financial and technical support for the Horn of Africa country that underwent a peaceful transition of power to a new President a year ago.

“Like many new governments, his has been through a [steep learning curve](#),” Michael Keating, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Somalia, told a Security Council briefing, referring to Somali President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed ‘Farmajo.’

Mr. Keating said the Somali leader has crafted a commendable national agenda embracing financial reform, job creation, inclusive politics, conflict resolution and reform of the security sector.

In implementing this multi-pronged agenda, the Federal Government faces several major challenges, including the mobilization of adequate technical and financial capacity, ensuring coherent and coordinated approaches by both national and international actors, and managing the powerful constituencies that need to be on side, such as federal member states, parliamentarians, clan power brokers, the private sector and international partners.

“I strongly encourage Somali stakeholders to unite to tackle these priorities and to make 2018 a year of implementation,” Mr. Keating said.

On the political front, he said that, in December, tensions were sharply raised in Mogadishu by the violent arrest of a prominent opposition politician by the national intelligence and security agency and the raid on the house of a leading parliamentarian. The recent replacement of the Mayor has also created waves.

These incidents have highlighted basic problems that need to be addressed, such as inadequate rules and safeguards governing the conduct of politics, including impeachment procedures; blurred roles and lines of accountability of the many security actors; and the perpetuation of corrupt practices and of untraceable money in the political marketplace.

Turning to the humanitarian situation, he said that the risk of famine still looms after four consecutive failed rainy seasons, and the 2018 relief aid plan calls for \$1.6 billion.

“Chronic poverty and persistent humanitarian needs cast an ominous shadow over Somalia,” he warned, noting that an estimated 6.2 million people are in need of assistance.

Continued support will be needed to help Somalia break the cycle of recurrent crises that cause so much suffering and undermine the peacebuilding and state-building process

“Continued support will be needed to help Somalia break the cycle of recurrent crises that cause so much suffering and undermine the peacebuilding and state-building process,” he stressed.

Central to that process is gaining political agreement as to how power will be exercised, shared and accounted for. This requires progress in three key areas: review of the provisional federal constitution; preparation for elections in 2020-21; and conflict resolution and reconciliation, he said.

Regarding conflict resolution and reconciliation, the Federal Government plans to launch a national strategy in the coming months, recognising the multifaceted nature of the many disputes and grievances in the country.

A serious danger exists that long-standing disputes between Puntland and Somaliland, and in particular an armed stand-off in Sool, could erupt into violence in the coming days.

“With the support of international partners including many on this Council, I have urged the leaders of Puntland and Somaliland to declare a cessation of hostilities, withdraw their forces, restore the status quo ante, and open channels of communication,” he said.

Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat, despite or perhaps because it is on the back foot as a result of financial pressures, counter terrorism operations and air strikes, Mr. Keating said, noting that on 14 October, Mogadishu suffered the deadliest attack using improvised explosive devices, with an estimated 512 people killed, nearly all civilians.

Use of ‘sticks and carrots’ to defeat Al-Shabaab

“Defeating Al Shabaab requires both a military and political strategy, the use of both sticks and carrots, as well as sustained efforts to address deficits that lend extremists a degree of credibility,” he said.

These deficits include corruption, lack of education and job opportunities for young people, weak national justice and corrections capacity, and grievances arising from unresolved disputes.

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) remains fundamental for security in the country, but this year will require dedicated effort by the Somali leadership, the African Union and international partners to build political acceptability and operational capability of the Somali security sector, which should enable AMISOM gradually to hand over responsibility to Somali security forces.

To that end, on 4 December, the Federal Government of Somalia and the federal member States, agreed to develop a transition plan in the first quarter of this year, working closely with international partners, most importantly the

African Union, troop and police contributing countries and major international investors in Somalia's security, including the European Union.

"Premature drawdown of AMISOM forces will be a gift to Al Shabaab and risks undermining the gains that have been made, at great human and financial cost, over the last decade," he said.

Somalia is making definite progress, but continued progress is dependent not only on the strong political will and skill of the federal government, but also cooperation and partnership with federal member states, parliament, clan elders, business and international partners.

"When all of these constituencies cooperate, huge strides can be made," he said.

[World's most vulnerable countries on track to achieve universal Internet access by 2020 – UN report](#)

24 January 2018 – The world's least developed countries are narrowing 'digital divide,' and with millions of people now taking advantage of smart phones and other digital devices, keeping up this momentum can put their societies on the fast track to sustainable development, the United Nations said on Wednesday.

"It is vital that all stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector and UN system – continue to build momentum through collaboration and sharing of innovative solutions," highlighted Fekitamoeloa Katoa 'Utoikamanu, the top UN official for least developed and other vulnerable countries, [launching](#) a new report on universal and affordable Internet.

"[Least developed countries](#) with a strong government commitment, recognizing the importance of digital technologies for national development, and backed by enlightened policy and regulatory actions including steps to develop skills, can achieve universal and affordable access to the Internet," [added](#) Houlin Zhao, the Secretary-General of the UN International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

The report, *Achieving universal and affordable Internet in least developed countries*, also states that the progress augurs well for the implementation of the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, as well as the [Istanbul Programme of Action](#), which charts a development course for least developed countries.

A key highlight of the progress is the launch of third generation (3G) mobile

telephony and data services in all 47 countries in that category as well as over 60 per cent of the population there covered by a 3G network. Overall, four in five people in these countries have access to mobile-cellular network.

Information and communication technologies are transforming lives everywhere and offering limitless opportunities for sustainable development ITU chief Houlin Zhao

These improvements are already having a positive impact in areas including financial inclusion, poverty reduction and better health services.

Furthermore, the anticipation that these countries will achieve (on average) 97 per cent mobile broadband coverage, making Internet prices relatively affordable by 2020 can translate into strong, home-grown innovation; new business opportunities; and more improvements health and education services, added Ms. 'Utoikamanu, the UN High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

While the picture is largely positive, there are some gaps which need to be overcome, find the report, including address issues related to limited capacity in information and communication technology (ICT) skills and wider socio-economic matters such as education levels and gender equality.

Corrective action, according to report, can include fostering competition, infrastructure, taxation policies, education and developing ICT sector plans.

The 47 least developed countries represent the most vulnerable segment of the international community. They comprise more than 880 million people – about 12 per cent of world population – but account for less than two per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP) and about one percent of global trade in goods.

The report, which also measures progress in these countries against Sustainable Development Goal target 9.C on universal and affordable access to the Internet is a joint undertaking by the Office of the Office of the UN High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States ([OHRLLS](#)); and ITU.

[Service and Sacrifice: Chadian peacekeepers on a UN mission for peace](#)

in Mali

24 January 2018 – As Tahir and his fellow Chadian peacekeepers set out on their daily patrol through the dusty streets of Kidal, in northern Mali, the question he faces is always the same – will he and his team return safely to the United Nations base?

“Many of my friends have died here in Mali. We lived together, ate together. Unfortunately, they lost their lives here,” said Chief Sergeant Mahamat Tahir Moussa Abdoulaye.

The UN peacekeeping mission in Mali, known by its French acronym [MINUSMA](#), has become one of the most dangerous peace operations in the Organization’s history. Since 2013, 155 peacekeepers have lost their lives in the West African nation.

“Many of those who came here in this UN Mission are dead, others will have the scars of their wounds for life,” Tahir said, referring to his fellow Chadians who have served with MINUSMA.

Established in 2013, MINUSMA supports the Malian peace agreement by helping to restore State authority, advance diplomacy, strengthen security and promote human rights.

In the true spirit of the United Nations Charter, Chad has stepped up to provide protection to people in conflict
USG for Peacekeeping Operations
Jean-Pierre Lacroix

According to the Secretary-General’s most recent report on Mali, over the course of 2017, the security situation there worsened and attacks against MINUSMA and Malian defence and security forces increased and intensified.

The Chadians, in particular, have paid a heavy price. As of the end of 2017, of the 57 fatalities suffered by Chadian military and police while serving with the UN, 47 have occurred in Mali since 2013.

“[UN peacekeeping](#) – and the millions we serve – rely on Member States of the UN to provide the personnel and resources to ensure that our operations can effectively protect civilians and support political processes in some of the world’s most dangerous and complex environments,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations. “Our Mission in Mali continues to work tirelessly to help bring peace to the country.”

“In the true spirit of the United Nations Charter, Chad has stepped up to provide protection to people in conflict,” he added. “We pay tribute to the Chadians who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of peace, and thank the people and Government of Chad for their continued partnership with the UN and their commitment to peace,” he added.

Given the increasingly challenging nature of today's conflicts and the high number of recent peacekeeper casualties, the United Nations is actively engaged in seeking solutions that will reduce fatalities, improve the safety and security of our personnel and improve the overall performance of UN peacekeeping operations to protect the vulnerable and nurture a fragile peace.

Before being deployed with MINUSMA, Tahir had already fought against the Boko Haram terrorist group in Chad and Nigeria. "We are born warriors, we are born in war and we have always heard the sound of gunfire."

But as he tells his contingent: "As peacekeepers, we are not here on a war mission, but on a mission for peace."

As conflicts have evolved, so too has the role of peacekeeping operations; once required to monitor and observe ceasefires, today's peacekeeping operations must perform a range of functions, including protection of civilians, promoting the rule of law, upholding human rights, supporting credible elections, building institutions of governance, supporting disarmament efforts and minimising the risk of unexploded ordnance.



Chad is one of the 20 largest contributors of uniformed personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations, with more than 1,400 troops and police deployed in three missions around the world: Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti. Pictured, a Chadian military peacekeeper on patrol in northern Mali. *UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti*



As part of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)), Chadians strive daily to save lives in one of the world's most dangerous peacekeeping operations. Forty-seven Chadians have been killed in Mali in recent years. *UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti*



The Chadian troops protect convoys in the most dangerous regions controlled by terrorist groups. Pictured, officers checking for explosives. "We cannot go for 200 kilometers, 300 kilometers without being blown up by a mine," said Colonel Abdelsalam Malick Yacoub, Commander of the Chadian Contingent in Kidal. *UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti*



Patrols last throughout the night, with troops on duty stopping only to eat, stretch their legs and pray. *UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti*



There are 1,379 military and 17 police from Chad serving in Mali under the UN flag. Their mandate is to support the Malian peace agreement by helping to restore State authority, advancing diplomacy, strengthening security,

promoting human rights, and supporting national authorities in protecting cultural heritage. *UN Photo/Marco Dormino*



To accomplish their goals, Chadian troops work closely with the communities they help to protect. Above, Chadian contingent patrols the northern Mali town of Kidal. *UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti*



The Chadian peacekeeping presence also supports the joint task force comprised of the Group of Five Sahel countries – which also includes Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger – to combat terrorism and organized criminal activity, and promote stability and development in that region. Pictured, Chadian peacekeepers on foot patrol. *UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti*

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Today, some 110,000 peacekeepers from more than 120 countries, serve in 15 peacekeeping operations around the world. Operating in highly volatile environments far away from their families, peacekeepers make sacrifices in the service of peace every day.

For Tahir and thousands like him, the reward is in the knowledge that men, women and children in these areas are safer as a result of their work.

This is the first in a series of stories by UN News as part of a campaign highlighting the [contributions and sacrifices](#) of the men and women who serve around the world in UN peace operations.

[Central African Republic: UN, partners seek \\$515 million in humanitarian aid for 2018](#)

24 January 2018 – With more than half the population in the Central African Republic (CAR) projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2018, the United Nations, the Government and partners are seeking \$515.6 million in contributions to address the crisis.

“The situation requires [greater attention](#) more than ever,” said the UN Humanitarian Coordinator, Najat Rochdi, at the launch of the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan on Wednesday.

The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)) notes that due to violence perpetrated by armed groups, more than one in four Central Africans is either internally displaced or a refugee.

The number of internally displaced persons has increased by more than 70 per cent since the first quarter of 2017. This has prevented thousands of children from enjoying their basic right to education. The combination of these factors means that 2.5 million out of the total 4.6 million Central Africans will need humanitarian assistance in 2018.

Ms. Rochdi, however, called upon the international community to remain confident and optimistic, stressing that a synergy of national and international efforts would allow all to accompany the country in its march towards the well-being of the population, peace and development.

In 2017, thanks to the support of donors and the unwavering commitment of the humanitarian community, \$255 million has been mobilized to deliver food assistance to those in need.

Over 60,000 children benefited from assistance, particularly educational activities in displacement sites and host communities. Generous contributions have permitted the return of smiles on the faces of these children, she said.

Ms. Rochdi called on the international community to go an extra mile in their commitment to ensuring a better future for the children, women and men of the country.

[Amid growing insecurity, time to reassess UN peacekeeping presence in Mali, Security Council told](#)

23 January 2018 – Against the backdrop of worsening security in Mali's central regions and with presidential elections just six months away, a senior United Nations official on Tuesday said it is time to reexamine the configuration of the UN peacekeeping presence in the West African country to reflect the changing circumstances on the ground.

“Looking forward, central Mali is likely to command sustained attention and to become an increasingly prominent feature in peace and reconciliation efforts,” said Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, [briefing](#) the Security Council, and noting that Mopti region has the highest number of terrorist attacks documented.

Describing the situation as “a race against time,” with growing insecurity

claiming hundreds of civilian lives in the north and centre of Mali, Mr. Lacroix said the human rights and humanitarian situation is worsening as well, with aid workers estimating that 4.1 million Malians, or 22 per cent of the population, possibly facing food insecurity in 2018 – a proportion that could reach 30 to 40 per cent of inhabitants in the north and centre.

The goal now must be to create conditions conducive for elections and, going forward, the peace process, he said.

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali ([MINUSMA](#)) was established by Security Council resolution 2100 of 25 April 2013, following an uprising by armed groups earlier that year. The Mission supports the transitional authorities of Mali in the stabilization of the country and implementation of the transitional roadmap.

We believe the time has come to reassess the assumptions that underpin MINUSMA's presence, review its key mandated tasks against achievements on the ground and reexamine the Mission's layout through a comprehensive strategic review USG Jean-Pierre Lacroix

“Five years after the Mission's establishment and two years and a half after the signature of the peace agreement, we believe the time has come to reassess the assumptions that underpin MINUSMA's presence, review its key mandated tasks against achievements on the ground and reexamine the Mission's layout through a comprehensive strategic review,” he said.

Recalling the Council's request to develop a mission-wide strategic plan for a phased implementation of mission mandate and a transition plan that would hand over relevant tasks to the UN Country Team, Mr. Lacroix said that “it would be important that these two plans be informed by the findings of the strategic review to be conducted in the next weeks.”

In the meantime, MINUSMA continues to focus on core mandated tasks with notable achievements in its good offices and ‘protection of civilians’ efforts, he added.

He said that despite persisting capability gaps, including for crucial assets such as helicopters, MINUSMA has pursued its efforts to project the robust posture mandated by the Council, noting that since the beginning of the year, peacekeepers repelled three attacks against advance positions in Kidal region and one ambush in Mopti region, while three improvised devices exploded against Mission vehicles.

While these attacks resulted in only minor injuries to two peacekeepers, the review on peacekeepers fatalities recently conducted by [General Santos Cruz](#) highlighted the need to further enhance efforts, such as ensuring that all peacekeepers receive the training and equipment necessary to operate in such hostile conditions.

“We are currently working with MINUSMA to take all necessary measures to implement the recommendations of the report,” Mr. Lacroix said.



Senegalese UNPOL Officers patrol the streets of Gao, Mali (file). Photo MINUSMA/Marco Dormino

The peacekeeping chief noted that Prime Minister Maiga convened a Cabinet meeting dedicated to addressing insecurity in the central region while the national coordination body of the integrated plan for security for the region is now operational.

Turning to the operationalisation of the G5 Sahel joint force, comprising Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, to combat terrorism and transnational organized crime in the restive region, he welcomed the launch of its second operation, as well as the establishment by the G5 Sahel Secretariat of a coordination cell to provide political oversight to the operations of the joint force.

Meanwhile, consultations for the conclusion of the technical agreement between the G5 Sahel, the UN and the European Union (EU) are progressing, Mr. Lacroix said, noting that the UN is working closely with the EU and the African Union on a joint resource mobilization strategy, ahead of the donors conference of 23 February in Brussels.

Development partners are also stepping up their efforts. Since October 2017, the Peace Building Fund launched four projects focused on Mopti and Ségou regions for a total of \$8 million. These projects aim at enhancing the participation of women and youth in reconciliation efforts and prevent inter-community conflicts, including by restoring traditional conflict mediation mechanisms.

However, most of these initiatives remain in the inception phase and are yet to produce significant changes on the ground, he said, stressing that the upcoming presidential elections will mark the beginning of a new chapter in the stabilization of Mali.