

2019 ‘a critical year’ for Somali politics and development says Security Council

In the wake of the Somali Government's decision last week to expel the head of the UN's assistance mission, [UNSOM](#), the Security Council on Saturday cautioned that 2019 would be "a critical year" for the east African nation that is reconstituting itself after decades of conflict.

In a statement following on from UN Secretary-General António Guterres [on Friday](#), deeply regretting the Government's declaration that Nicholas Haysom was persona non grata, the 15 Council members expressed their regret, and thanked the veteran South African lawyer and senior UN official "and underlined their full support" for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) and its mandate provided last year under [Security Council Resolution 2408](#).

The members of the Security Council underlined that 2019 would be a critical year for Somalia, and called on its leaders to work together to advance political and security reform – *Press Statement*

"The members of the Security Council underscored the strong and continued commitment of the international community to support peace, stability and development in Somalia, and reiterated in this regard their expectation of full cooperation between Somalia and the United Nations."

Mr Haysom was accused by the Somali Federal Government of interfering in its internal affairs, by questioning the detention of an opposition candidate for state-wide office, who had been a leader in the extremist Al-Shabaab group, before defecting. The Government said he had not undergone sufficient rehabilitation or proved his commitment to democratic politics. In protests against the jailing of the candidate in South West state days before the vote, at least 15 died and many were detained, according to news reports.

Mr. Guterres said on Friday that in the interests of putting the Somali people, and the work of UNSOM first, he would be appointing a new Special Representative and head of mission, "in due course". He offered Mr. Haysom his "full confidence" in his long and successful track record on service to the UN.

Strained relations between central and regional government, and the legislature, together with the complex web of inter-communal politics, have caused tensions across the country, as further elections on Somalia's road to full democratic government beckon next year.

"The members of the Security Council underlined that 2019 would be a critical

year for Somalia, and called on its leaders to work together to advance political and security reforms. The members of the Security Council reaffirmed their respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia”, said the statement.

Members also “paid tribute to the contribution of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), UNSOM, the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), and all Somali and international actors working to bring peace and stability’.

Burkina Faso: Dozens killed in clashes, UN chief condemns attacks

More than 40 civilians have been reportedly killed during intercommunal clashes this week in northern Burkina Faso, prompting [UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#) to issue a statement on Friday night condemning the violence and “deteriorating security situation” in parts of the West African country.

The first deadly attack on Monday night took place in the village of Yirgou, according to news reports, by suspected extremists, with reprisal attacks taking place the following day, against local ethnic Fulani Muslim herding communities in the Barsalogo district.

The UN chief expressed his deep condolences to the families of the victims and wished a swift recovery to those who were injured in the clashes.

According to news agencies, landlocked Burkino Faso has seen a rise in jihadist violence over recent months, which has long plagued neighbouring Mali to the north, and is a major security threat across the whole Sahel region. On Monday, the Burkinabe Government declared a state of emergency in some northern provinces close to the Mali border.

“The Secretary-General is concerned over the deteriorating security situation in some parts of the country, where the authorities declared a state of emergency. He is also concerned about the intercommunal violence,” said [Friday’s statement](#) issued on behalf of the UN chief.

“The Secretary-General reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to support Burkina Faso in its efforts to fight terrorism, sustain its security sector reforms, promote national reconciliation and create conditions for sustainable peace and development” the statement concluded.

Palestinian students 'compelled to drop dreams because of financial cuts'

For students attending schools funded by the UN relief agency for Palestine refugees, ([UNRWA](#)), uncertainty over the future has become a constant worry, said the agency's Director of Operations in Gaza, Matthias Schmale.

UNRWA faced an unprecedented financial crisis during 2018 that threatened the provision of essential services to millions of Palestine refugees, including more than 500,000 school students. Although sufficient funds were provided to reopen classrooms in September, there are no guarantees that 2019 will be any easier.

The agency's 711 schools provide free basic education for Palestinian refugee children in the West Bank – including East Jerusalem – Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. But despite reopening after a long summer break, UNRWA was forced to take some difficult decisions which had a direct impact on the students' daily lives.

UN News's Reem Abaza was recently in Gaza where she visited the Ar Rimal girls' school, where UNRWA launched its major global fundraising campaign last year called 'Dignity is Priceless' to address mainly education and health needs, and to ensure that the schools opened their doors.

"During the summer vacation we usually feel happy and enjoy our time, but last time we were afraid wondering if UNRWA might close or we might not be able to go to school", said Raghd, a 6th grade student.

Hada, 14, stated that when school began "everybody was very anxious", and that when they "knocked on the door of the social counselor asking for support, they were reminded that she was no longer there". In several schools, the position of social counselor was abolished due to financial constraints.

"The school is trying as much as it can to teach us in a hands-on method, and in past years when we studied chemistry we used to do experiments. I have dreams to be something big in the future, but I have to cut those dreams down because of the situation we live in now", Eva, 14, told UN News.

Those concerns were shared with other students from the neighboring A-Zeitoun school for boys.

UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, Matthias Schmale, said he "understood the concerns of the students very clearly, but that their determination also serves as a source of inspiration".

"A very moving moment very recently was when a girl called Jenin, who is part of our school parliament here in northern Gaza, came to me and said that in January when we launched the 'Dignity is priceless' campaign I gave her an

UNRWA pin," he said.

"She told me that in 'the dark moments when we didn't know if the school year would open on time', she looked at this pin, and it gave her courage, hope and optimism". Then she gave me a little black bracelet and asked me to look at it, when I would feel uncertain."

UNRWA operations have been hit hard by the United States decision at the beginning of 2018 to cut back its funding of the Agency by around \$300 million. That constituted the largest ever reduction in funding in UNRWA's history.

UNRWA was [established](#) by the General Assembly in 1949 to provide assistance and protection to a population of some five million registered Palestine refugees in various countries throughout the Middle East. Apart from schooling, it provides relief and social services, camp infrastructure and upgrading, health care and emergency assistance as needed.

[The 'abuse of food relief in Yemen' must end now](#)

On Friday, the United Nations' World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) demanded that the stealing of food by warring factions in Yemen must stop immediately; and welcomed a statement from Houthi rebel leaders saying that the situation was now under investigation.

WFP's demands were issued in a letter to the Houthi leadership as well as in a news release on New Year's Eve.

"This is an issue that affects not just WFP but all aid agencies working in Yemen and indeed in war zones everywhere and no-one can say for certain how widespread this problem is", said WFP spokesperson Hervé Verhoosel, noting that humanitarian food assistance was being diverted in Houthi-controlled areas, including the capital of Sana'a, and, to a lesser extent, in the Government-controlled areas as well.

According to news reports, factions and militias on both sides of the conflict have blocked food aid from reaching groups suspected of disloyalty, diverting it instead to front-line combat units or selling it for a profit on the black market.

The UN agency has learned that many desperately poor people have taken to selling part of their food rations for education, medicines and rent.

An ounce of prevention worth a ton of cure

The Yemen Government gave WFP permission to biometrically register beneficiaries, by identifying and authenticating each individual based on person-specific data.

The *de facto* authorities in Sana'a have a responsibility to take action against those involved in stealing – *WFP spokesperson*

So far, WFP monitoring has identified seven centres in Sana'a city where an estimated 1,200 metric tons of food was diverted in August and September, equivalent to about one per cent of the food provided nationally each month.

"It is our monitoring systems that detected there was a problem", Mr. Verhoosel explained. "We are committed to ensuring our food assistance reaches those who most need it."

As the local partner organization involved in the abuse has at the same time helped provide food assistance to three million people, WFP underscored that the authorities must investigate and dismiss those responsible, regardless of whether the corruption was carried out by the Government or non-governmental organizations.

"To improve the support to beneficiaries, we have been looking into the introduction of cash-based transfers in some areas", said Mr. Verhoosel. "However, given the risk of corruption, we have made it clear to the *de facto* authorities that we will not introduce cash-based transfers unless we are authorized to implement a biometric identification system that uses personal data, including iris scans and ten-finger prints".

WFP is tackling the issue by tracking and monitoring suspected locations and closely inspecting distribution centres.

"The *de facto* authorities in Sana'a have a responsibility to take action against those involved in stealing from the beneficiaries and in trading of food aid," he stressed. "They should allow an independent beneficiary selection process and a biometric-based registration system."

Mr. Verhoosel said that the biometric identification system had been rolled out in Government-controlled areas and that authorities in Sana'a had yet to agree to implement the system.

UN Special Envoy to pay a visit

Meanwhile, Martin Griffiths, the UN Special Envoy for the country, is set to visit Yemen and Saudi Arabia on Saturday in his latest round of consultations with the warring parties, where a fragile truce has been holding in the key port city of Hudaydah, since 18 December.

According to the UN in Geneva, Mr. Griffiths is expected to meet with the Ansarallah leadership, (the official name of the Houthi movement), as well as

with the head of the UN-convened Committee monitoring the Hudaydah ceasefire, General Patrick Cammaert; as well as UN Humanitarian Coordinator Lise Grande in Sana'a. He will then meet the President of Yemen, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, and other officials in Riyadh.

UN chief expresses 'full confidence' in top Somalia official following Government expulsion

The UN Secretary-General said on Friday he "deeply regrets" the Somali Government's decision to expel his [Special Representative](#) in the country, adding that he had "full confidence" in Nicholas Haysom's abilities and track record as an international civil servant.

According to news reports, Mr. Haysom was accused of violating diplomatic rules and overstepping his authority by the Government, in questioning the legal basis for the arrest of a former al-Shabab deputy leader early last month, who was standing for election in South West state.

The defector from the jihadist group, Mukhtar Robow, had not been properly rehabilitated and was therefore ineligible to stand as a candidate, according to Somalia's Ambassador to the UN, Abukar Dahir Osman, who [spoke in a Security Council meeting](#) on Thursday. He urged the UN not to interfere in the "internal affairs" of the country which lay beyond its agreed mandate.

The Secretary-General has full confidence in Mr. Haysom, an experienced and respected international civil servant who has distinguished himself in numerous senior leadership roles

Highlighting his deep regret over the Government decision, first reported on Tuesday, UN chief António Guterres said in [a statement](#) issued by his Deputy Spokesperson on Friday that any declaration Mr. Haysom was persona non grata in Somalia, does not accord with diplomatic rules. "The doctrine of persona non grata does not apply to, or in respect of, United Nations personnel," he said.

"As described in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the doctrine applies to diplomatic agents who are accredited by one State to another in the context of their bilateral relations. The United Nations is not a State and its personnel are not accredited to the States where they are deployed, but work under the sole responsibility of the Secretary-General," the statement continued.

“The Secretary-General has full confidence in Mr. Haysom, an experienced and respected international civil servant who has distinguished himself in numerous senior leadership roles, in the field and at UN Headquarters.”

The South African lawyer has served as Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan, head of the UN mission in Afghanistan, [UNAMA](#), and also worked in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, after heading up the UN constitutional support team in Iraq during the critical 2005-2007 period.

In the 1990s, he served as Chief Legal and Constitutional Adviser in the Office of President Nelson Mandela, South Africa’s first democratically-elected leader.

Mr. Guterres said he was “totally committed to ensuring that the needs of the Somali people are at the forefront of the work of the United Nations in Somalia”, adding that the UN support mission there, [UNSOM](#), “needs to be able to carry out in the most effective manner its mandate to support the country.”

He said that he would therefore appoint “in due course” a new Special Representative for Somalia and Head of UNSOM.

“The Secretary-General remains strongly committed to assisting Somalia in its efforts to achieve peace, stability and prosperity for all” his statement concluded.