

Somalia: UN urges steps to ensure future elections not 'marred' by rights abuses seen in recent polls

In a [report](#) released on Monday, the United Nations urged Somalia to take steps to ensure future elections are not marred by the human rights violations and abuses committed during the 2016-2017 electoral process.

"Insecurity, weak justice institutions, and an insufficient human rights protection system contributed to the lack of accountability for human rights violations throughout Somalia," the report says, looking back at the 2016 polls and calling for prompt action to bolster human rights protections ahead of the 2020-2021 electoral process.

The report – from the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UNSO](#)) and the UN human rights office ([OHCHR](#)) – details violations and abuses by State security forces, including the police and intelligence agencies, and non-State groups, including Al Shabaab, before, during and after parliamentary and presidential elections held in late 2016 and early 2017.

While it documents the killing of 44 clan leaders and electoral delegates during that period, it reveals that only two of these reported killings were investigated and prosecuted.

As such, the joint report calls for "prompt, independent and impartial investigations into human rights violations and abuses committed in the context of the electoral process."

In addition, the report highlights repeated attacks, intimidation and other forms of harassment against reporters, human rights defenders and political leaders, noting that this violence "impeded the free flow of information" and undermined "the ability of citizens to benefit from and contribute to democratic processes" in an informed manner.

"As Somalia continues the arduous task of building institutions and constructing peace, respect for human rights must be at the core of this enterprise," said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein](#).

"This includes guaranteeing all public freedoms, such as the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, and of peaceful assembly and association," he stressed, adding that "it is essential that victims' rights to remedy and reparation are respected".

Because conditions for universal suffrage were not in place in 2016, a system of indirect suffrage was used with 275 electoral colleges of 51 delegates each. The colleges elected the 275 members of the House of the People, who then elected the new President, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, on 8 February

2017.

While this system allowed for a more diverse parliament, with half its members newly elected and women's representation at 24 per cent (compared to 14 per cent in 2012), "more needs to be done" for the next elections, said the report.

"Women, persons with disabilities, minority clans and civil society groups had limited or no access to the electoral process as it was a political process based on clan distribution," said Michael Keating, the head of UNSOM. "Looking ahead to elections due in 2020-2021, we are urging the Government to establish a system of representation that is inclusive of all citizens, based on the one person, one vote principle."

In addition, given that in 2016 the list of candidates included former warlords and a military commander accused of war crimes, the report recommends that candidates be vetted regarding their respect for human rights.

[To beat hunger and combat climate change, world must 'scale-up' soil health – UN](#)

On Sunday, more than 2,000 scientists gathered in Rio de Janeiro under the theme "Soil Science: Beyond food and fuel," for a week of exploring the increasingly complex, diverse role of soils; grappling with resilient agriculture practices to address environmental and climatic changes; and confronting threats to food security and sovereignty.

"Soil degradation affects food production, causing hunger and malnutrition, amplifying food-price volatility, forcing land abandonment and involuntary migration-leading millions into poverty," [said](#) José Graziano da Silva, the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in a video message noting that approximately one-third of the Earth's soil is degraded

The FAO [The Status of the World's Soil Resources](#) report had identified 10 major threats to soil functions, including soil erosion, nutrient imbalance, acidification and contamination.

Mr. Graziano da Silva stressed the importance of sustainable soil management as an "essential part of the Zero Hunger equation" in a world where more than 815 million people are suffering from hunger and malnutrition.

Soils and climate change

“Although soils are hidden and frequently forgotten, we rely on them for our daily activities and for the future of the planet,” the FAO chief said, underscoring the important support role they play in mitigating or adapting to a changing climate.

Mr. Graziano da Silva specifically pointed to the potential of soils for carbon sequestration and storage – documented in FAO’s [global soil organic carbon map](#).

“Maintaining and increasing soil carbon stock should become a priority,” asserted the UN agriculture chief.

He also noted how soils act as filters for contaminants, preventing their entry into the food chain and reaching water bodies such as rivers, lakes and oceans, flagging that this potential becomes limited when contamination exceeds the soils’ capacity to cope with pollution.

In his message, Mr. Graziano da Silva noted the [Global Soil Partnership](#) in which FAO works with governments and other partners to build technical capacity and exchange knowledge on sustainable soil management through the [Voluntary Guidelines for Sustainable Soil Management](#).

“Let us make soils a vehicle of prosperity and peace, and show the contribution of soils to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,” concluded the FAO Director-General said.

[Free and secure access needed in DR Congo conflict zone to tackle Ebola – WHO](#)

After seeing first-hand the complexities of the Ebola response in the conflict-affected region of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Head of the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) [called for](#) “free and secure” access to the disease-affected people.

“All of those participating in the response must be able to move freely and safely in conflict areas to do the work that is needed to bring the outbreak under control,” said Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, WHO’s Director-General. “The population must also have access to treatment centers that save lives and stop the spread of disease.”

While this is the country’s 10th Ebola outbreak, it is the first time that

the disease has struck a densely populated active conflict zone. As was done in the recent outbreak in the west of the country, WHO is supporting the Ministry of Health in key aspects of the response.

A little more than a week since the government declared the new Ebola outbreak, Dr. Tedros, Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa and Dr. Peter Salama, WHO Deputy Director-General for Emergency Preparedness and Response, went on a two-day mission to the city of Beni as well as to Mangina, the epicentre of the epidemic where most of the confirmed cases have been reported so far.

A range of armed groups are active in the area and, according to WHO, this insecurity is creating a challenge for health teams attempting to reach communities for active case finding and monitoring, often requiring armed escorts. The violence can also discourage members of the community from coming forward for treatment.

“WHO has vast experience with delivering health services in conflict zones in Africa,” said Dr. Moeti. “We will build on this experience to ensure that our staff and partners can do their work and save the lives of the people we are here to help.”

On Wednesday, health responders in DRC launched a vaccination campaign to mitigate the risk of spread of the disease.

FROM THE FIELD: Sailing a traditional and sustainable path in Fiji's tropical waters

Young people in Fiji are helping to revive indigenous cultural practices of the Pacific Ocean island while learning about sustainable transport thanks to an initiative supported by the UN Development Programme ([UNDP](#)).



Uto ni Yalo Trust/Samuella Ulacake

They are sailing the traditional 72-foot long Fijian boat, Uto ni Yalo, which translates as 'Heart of the Spirit' and which is navigating along ancient Pacific trade and migratory routes to help re-establish historical ties. It's also reviving significant cultural links between people all over the region.

The boat is ferrying relief supplies to islands in the wake of tropical cyclones – demonstrating how low carbon sea transport can offset Fiji's fossil fuel reliance and become a viable option for cargo transfer between remote maritime islands.

Ahead of [International Youth Day](#) marked annually on 12 August, [read more here](#) about how young people are engaging with Fiji's spiritual heart.

[Safe spaces offer security and dignity for youth, and help make the world 'better for all': Guterres](#)

The world's young people need safe spaces – both physical and digital – where they can “freely express their views” and “pursue their dreams” was the core message of United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to mark this year's International Youth Day.

“The [hopes of the world](#) rest on young people,” said the UN chief on Friday, in advance of the official Day, which is celebrated annually on 12 August.

“Peace, economic dynamism, social justice, tolerance – all this and more, today and tomorrow, depends on tapping into the power of youth,” he added.

There are currently 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the world – the largest youth population ever.

Political instability, labour market challenges and limited space for political and civic participation have led youth to becoming increasingly more isolated, raising the need for more safe spaces where they can meet, engage and express themselves.

We must invest so that young people have access to education, training and decent jobs to achieve their full potential --
Secretary-General Guterres

Mr. Guterres pointed out that more than 400 million young women and men live amidst armed conflict or are vulnerable to organized criminal violence.

Moreover, he elaborated that “millions face deprivation, harassment, bullying and other infringements of their rights.”

[Safe spaces](#) offer security and dignity while interacting. These include civic spaces to engage in governance issues; public spaces to take part in community activity such as sport digital spaces to interact virtually across borders; and well-planned physical spaces for diverse youth; especially those vulnerable to marginalization or violence.

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), specifically [Goal 11](#), emphasizes the need for the provision of space towards inclusive and sustainable urbanization.

“We must invest so that young people have access to education, training and decent jobs to achieve their full potential,” underscored the Secretary-General.

“The United Nations is strongly committed to listening to the voices of young people – and opening pathways for meaningful participation in decisions that affect them,” he continued, announcing a new strategy to be launched in September “to step up our work with and for young people.”

“In making the world safe for young people, we make the world better for all,” concluded Mr. Guterres, “I wish all a happy International Youth Day!”

For her message for the day, Jayathma Wickramanayake, the UN Youth Envoy, stressed: “Young women and girls are particularly vulnerable, as are young refugees and migrants, youth living in conflict-prone or humanitarian settings, and LGBTQI young people,” referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

Events to celebrate International Youth Day 2018 will take place all over the world to promote youth engagement and empowerment.