

Responding to COVID-19 and supporting fair elections in Somalia

Thank you, Mr President. Let me, if I might, thank our briefers – of course, to SRSW Swan and, if I might, to you as well, Jim commend your relentless professionalism and commitment in difficult circumstances. I also want to thank Ambassador Madeira and Director Marcaillou.

Mr President, in light of COVID-19, let me start by expressing our solidarity with Somalia in facing this global pandemic and commend Somalia for the measures they have taken to contain the spread of the virus. I also want to welcome the work of the United Nations in coordinating a coherent response between international organisations including the WFP, WHO, UNICEF and NGO partners.

We want to urge all partners to respond to Somalia's COVID-19 Response Plan which calls for additional, aligned and coordinated funding. The United Kingdom gave \$420 million in the last financial year to Somalia and in light of the response plan we are considering now what more we can do. And I would also just like to mention that today, the UK has announced a \$25 million contribution to the African Union Fund, set up last month by President Ramaphosa to tackle COVID-19.

Mr President, despite the pandemic and the Secretary-General's calls for a ceasefire, Al-Shabaab continues to launch attacks. We strongly condemn the recent attacks in Mogadishu, including against the UN, AMISOM and the international community. And I want to pay tribute to the ongoing commitment and sacrifices of AMISOM troop contributing countries and the efforts of the Somali Security Forces. I want to join UNMAS in their concern about the use of IEDs in Somalia. This is why this Council imposed a ban on IED components and it's why we have recommended strengthening support on tackling IEDs in the AMISOM text.

Mr President, it is clear that COVID-19 poses significant challenges to Somalia. We need to recognise this. That this should not distract us from supporting Somalia to make the gains made and supporting Somalia on making progress on security, greater political engagement and elections.

On security reform, there has been important progress over the last year. Somalia has recovered additional territory from Al-Shabaab, trained Somali security forces, developed a threat assessment; and become a member of INTERPOL. There is now greater international engagement on the question of what security support in Somalia will look like after 2021. In March the UK supported a Wilton Park-convened conference in Ethiopia. In April the African Union and Somalia chaired a ministerial conference. We should build on this momentum.

Somalia has also started the process of updating the Somali Transition Plan. Rapid progress in updating and, above all, implementing the Transition Plan

is vital if Somalia is to meet their own December 2021 deadline to take over lead responsibility for national security. The independent assessment, requested by this Council, will help us decide how best to support Somalia's vision post-2021. Both the revised security strategy and the independent review should guide our decision making in a timely fashion.

Mr President, the long-term goals of a Somali political settlement, including One-Person-One-Vote elections and progress on the constitutional review, remain unchanged. We are seeing progress on technical preparations for elections and we welcome the UN's efforts to enable Parliament to reconvene virtually and AMISOM's support on security. It is vital that the Government, Parliament, Electoral Committee, Joint Parliamentary Committee, and Federal Member States work together and take urgent and inclusive steps to help facilitate timely, constitutional and inclusive One-Person-One-Vote elections.

There is no reason why COVID-19 should prevent the key preparatory work from taking place. This is the time for government and opposition to put aside differences and find compromise. Decisions on the electoral code, seat allocation, definition of constituencies, women's quota and provisions for Somaliland and Benadir are needed urgently, and it is good to hear that we should see progress on these issues in the next few weeks.

Mr President, I want to express deep concern about recent actions taken to repress the media with arrests of journalists in Somalia. We welcome the recent positive steps to facilitate accurate reporting on COVID-19 by the Office of the Prime Minister. The media has a vital role to play in Somalia. We call for Somali journalists to be able to perform their work and we call also on Somali leaders to ensure the political space is kept open.

Mr President, reconciliation is central to Somalia's state-building efforts. There has been some progress in Jubaland, South West State and Galmudug, but critical issues remain. We look to the Federal Government to drive forward reconciliation efforts and we need to see high-level political dialogue with the Federal Member States. This dialogue was urgent before and is even more urgent in the light of COVID-19. There is no room for division in the face of a common enemy.

In conclusion, Mr President, let me emphasise three points.

First, the importance of an enhanced and coordinated response to supporting Somalia in its fight against COVID-19. We should all do what we can.

Second, the importance of this Council, the United Nations, the region, the AU and the wider international community in continuing to support Somalia to achieve progress on holding timely One-Person-One-Vote elections and moving ahead on security reform. Somalia's future security and development depends on continued progress.

And finally, I reiterate our call, the call that the Council has made many times, for the Federal Government and Federal Member States to work together to build a stronger and more peaceful Somalia.

Thank you, Mr President.