

Somalia has 'once in a generation' gender equality opportunity – UN Women chief

Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, the Executive Director of the United Nations entity dealing with issues related to gender, [UN Women](#), has encouraged Somalia to continue making progress in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka's comments were made on Sunday in Baidoa, the interim capital of Somalia's South West State (SWS), at the start of a three-day visit to the country, said [UNSOM](#), the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia.

Visiting as part of a delegation led by the Somali Minister of Women and Human Rights Development, Deqa Yasin, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka met with the acting president of South West State, Hassan Hussein Mohamed, cabinet ministers, female members of the SWS regional assembly and civil society representatives.

There are 31 female legislators in South West State's parliament, more than in any of Somalia's other states. Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka congratulated Mr. Mohamed for the high participation of women in the parliament, whilst urging him to go further, saying "We expect you to do even better in the future."

Somalia is currently reviewing its constitution, ahead of federal elections planned for 2020. The previous federal elections, in 2016, were held under an indirect suffrage system, which a report from UNSOM, released earlier this month, credited with the formation of a more diverse Parliament: almost a quarter of those elected were women, up from 14 per cent in 2012.

The report called for the 2020 elections to establish a system of representation that is inclusive of all citizens, based on the one person, one vote principle.

Speaking during Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka's visit, Minister Yasin said: "We can have an impact on the constitutional review process to make sure (a future constitution) contains language that gives women opportunities in a very specific way, so that girls and women will benefit in the future."

With the UN Official's visit to Baidoa coinciding with [World Humanitarian Day](#), Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka took the opportunity to thank humanitarian workers in the country for their sacrifices and their dedication to communities who are targets of violent people and extremism.

Since the beginning of the year, there have been an estimated 74 incidents of violence affecting humanitarian personnel in Somalia, resulting in the deaths of seven workers. A further 18 were abducted, and six are still being held captive.

“We are there with them [every step of the way](#),” added Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka. “(We) call on all of those who work in the humanitarian space to have targeted interventions to ensure that the security of women and girls is addressed and their participation as leaders and not just as victims is also enhanced.”

On arrival in the country on Saturday, the senior UN official met with Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khairi and Foreign Minister Ahmed Isse Awad in the capital, Mogadishu, as well as with women representatives from the business community, politics and civil society.