

Stage ‘gradually being set’ for Somalia to move to a new phase in sustaining peace – UN envoy

27 January 2017 – Briefing the Security Council on the situation in Somalia, the United Nations envoy for the country noted today that the recently concluded election was a “mirror” to Somalis, showing them the good and the bad regarding how power is exercised, relations between elders, clan power brokers, politicians, business, ordinary citizens, women and men.

“They do not like everything they have seen, least of all the levels of corruption, and the absence of institutions that can ensure legal and financial accountability,” said Michael Keating, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia.

Mr. Keating’s briefing follows an extended parliamentary electoral process and comes less than two weeks ahead of presidential polls. It also comes against the backdrop of increased Al-Shabaab militancy aiming to disrupt the elections, as evidenced by a series of recent attacks.

Stressing the importance that the last stage of the electoral process is conducted transparently and according to the agreed rules, designed to ensure free and fair elections, he noted: “The election of a President accepted as legitimate by the population and by the international community will set the stage for Somalia to tackle the serious challenges ahead.”

However, he added: “If voting [...] is seen as compromised by corruption, coercion or external interference, then the country could face a protracted period of uncertainty.”

Despite problems, progress thus far ‘very encouraging’ – UN envoy

In his briefing, Mr. Keating, who also heads up the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), told Council members that despite the problems seen in the recently concluded elections, the process also had “very encouraging” outcomes, marking an important milestone in the country’s evolution and post-conflict transformation.



Special Representative and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) Michael Keating briefs the Security Council. UN Photo/Rick Bajornas

For instance, the number of voters had increased significantly and the electorate was expanded from 2012’s 135 male elders to over 13,000 individuals (30 per cent of them female). It was also particularly notable that almost a quarter of the members of parliament are now female.

“A truly remarkable achievement, the result of effective political mobilization of women, supported by the UN and the international community and some Somali leaders,” noted the Special Representative.

“The new Parliament is younger, more diverse and is likely to be more responsive to the electorate than the previous one. In short, this Parliament is more legitimate and representative than any since the last elections were held in 1969,” he noted.

Humanitarian plight adding to human suffering

Turning to the humanitarian challenges facing the Horn of Africa country, he reported that about five million people are estimated to be in need around the country and an estimated 320,000 under-five-year-olds are acutely malnourished.

“Coping capacities have been eroded to the point of collapse,” he noted.

The week before last, the humanitarian community in Somalia had launched an \$864 million to reach 3.9 million people with urgent life-saving assistance in 2017, \$300 million of this amount is required in the first quarter of this year.

Further, noting the political and security implications of the drought, Mr. Keating said that a perceived inability of the federal and local governments to respond will damage their legitimacy – something that will be exploited by Al-Shabaab.

“In a nutshell, failure to support the drought response could halt and even undermine the pursuit of key state-building and peace-building objectives,” he cautioned.

‘It is the Somalis who will determine their own fate’

Reiterating that progress is fragile and reversible, and fraught with complexity, he said the stage is nevertheless gradually being set for Somalia to move to a new phase in sustaining peace, preventing and resolving violent conflict, and in building a functional, federal State.

“Ultimately, it is the Somalis who will determine their own fate – but your support is central to their chances of success,” he concluded.