

The role of women in Somalia's peace, security and stability

Thank you Madam President, I'd like to start by thanking our briefers Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed and Dr Shukria Dini.

Madam President, I am very struck and I am grateful to Ireland for convening this briefing. Here in the Security Council we tend to focus on the so-called big picture of political crises and including the security situation in Somalia. But today we have a chance to focus on the day to day lives of Somali women and girls are shaped by those big picture factors. As we heard from Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed and Dr Shukria Dini, Somali women and girls are not just passively affected by politics and security: they can be powerful agents of change.

I would like to make three points in this regard. Firstly, we should be clear that both the COVID-19 pandemic, and Somalia's persistent political crises have prevented substantial progress on Somalia's other priorities including on the Women, Peace and Security agenda. That is the opportunity cost of the current crisis.

This setback exacerbates Somalia's political problems. Gender inequality and the perpetual cycle of violence against women and girls contributes toward Somalia's protracted insecurity, instability, and Al-Shabaab's insurgency.

In this respect, I want to underline that the United Kingdom is deeply concerned by the continued pervasiveness of sexual and gender-based violence in Somalia. Reports indicate that rates of forced marriage and female genital mutilation have increased during the pandemic. We again urge Somalia's leaders to prioritise adoption of the 2018 Sexual Offences Bill as soon as possible and to implement its provisions.

Secondly, Madam President, to solve these problems as we've heard, we to ensure women have a seat at the table when decisions are made. For Somalia's long-term development to be inclusive and effective, it is vital to take steps to bring about equal participation and representation of women in decision-making and leadership positions.

As we have heard today from Dr Shukria, and as we have heard before from female Somali civil society leaders, women have an important, constructive role to play in Somalia's development and they deserve a level playing field.

The United Kingdom therefore calls again on Somalia's leaders to deliver their commitment to ensure that a minimum of 30% of Parliamentary seats go to women in the ongoing elections, in accordance with the 2020 and 2021 electoral agreements. As the Upper House electoral process moves towards its conclusion it is disappointing to see that Somalia's leaders have failed to meet this commitment. We urge Somalia's leaders to take steps to ensure that their commitment is met for the upcoming Lower House elections.

Thirdly, Madam President, we also encourage Somalia to accelerate the finalisation, adoption and full implementation of its National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, in close cooperation with civil society. This is a vital component of efforts to strengthen women's participation in peacebuilding and socio-economic progress.

The United Kingdom reiterates its commitment to continue to work constructively with Somalia to strengthen the role of women in peace and security and advance progress in human rights and democracy to enable long-term stability.