

Briefing to the UN Security Council
by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia
Mr. Michael Keating

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Mr President,

We meet at an auspicious moment – at the conclusion of an extended and exhaustive parliamentary electoral process and just 12 days before the election of a new president.

We also meet when Al-Shabaab is doing everything it can to discredit and disrupt the process, as we are seeing in Mogadishu and in the attack in Kulbiyo today. Allow me to extend my deepest condolences to the families of the soldiers and civilians whose lives have been lost.

An immediate priority is to ensure that the date set by the Joint Federal Election Committee for the presidential vote is adhered to. The date has been set on technical grounds; pressures to change the date on political grounds should be resisted.

It is also essential that the last stage of this process is conducted transparently, according to the rules that have been agreed and that have been designed to ensure a free and fair election. All candidates must honour the provisions of the Code of Conduct they signed when registering their candidacy.

This is particularly important because the parliamentary stage of the process was marred by several instances of malpractice, including bribery and vote buying, harassment and intimidation, manipulation as well as repeated and protracted delays. Some were high profile and egregious, though the majority of contests were correctly conducted. They were widely watched including through social media.

The electoral process, Mr President, has held up a mirror to Somalis in which they have seen the good and the bad regarding how power is exercised, the relationship 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.

Many important lessons have been learned. The *ad hoc* electoral bodies have done a remarkable job, but had difficulties withstanding political pressures, threats and inducements. The electoral timetable was subject to repeated delays, often because the process was used to try to resolve very long standing disputes, between clans, states or other actors.

The point is that the process was essentially a political one, used for inter and intra-clan negotiations and reconciliation, and should be in part evaluated as such. The electoral features were essential as they set the stage for the move to universal suffrage.

These lessons must be addressed in planning One Person One Vote elections scheduled for 2020. The National Independent Electoral Commission needs to be empowered, a voter registry established, and a robust legal mechanism put in place to adjudicate disputes and sanction abusive behaviour. Efforts in this regard must begin as soon as the electoral process concludes.

Despite the problems it has faced, the process has had very encouraging outcomes and does mark an important milestone in Somalia's evolution and post-conflict transformation.

An Upper House has come into existence, its 54 members chosen on a federal state rather than a clan basis. This embodiment of the emerging federal character of Somalia could play a central role in advancing a genuinely national agenda.

The number of voters has significantly increased. The electorate was expanded from 135 male elders in 2012 to over 13,000 individuals, 30% of whom were female.

Almost a quarter of the MPs 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.

There has been genuine electoral competition. Voting took place in six locations around the country, again reflecting emerging federal state structures.

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.

And despite the horrendous attack by Al-Shabaab on a hotel used by parliamentarians in Mogadishu only two days ago, terrorists have been unable to derail the electoral process. This in and of itself is an important message.

Mogadishu will remain an unusually target-rich environment until the presidential election is concluded, another reason why the schedule should not be allowed to slip.

Let me pay tribute here also to AMISOM and to Somali security and intelligence forces for protecting electoral sites around the country. They deserve great credit for fulfilling a dangerous job in very difficult circumstances.

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, if voting for the next President is not secret or seen as compromised by corruption, coercion or external interference, then the country could face a protracted period of uncertainty.

This is the last thing Somalia needs. Somalis expect and deserve an administration that will address a number of urgent priorities. Many of these are on the agenda of the presidential candidates, including the incumbent.

Let me name four: reform of the security sector; acceleration of the constitutional review; reconciliation and resolution of many festering conflicts around the country; and strengthening governance, both at the centre and locally, both to generate revenues and provide services.

Unfortunately, Mr President, there is also a fifth, urgent priority: responding to the current drought. 5 million people are estimated to be in need around the country, from Somaliland and Puntland in the north to coastal areas in the centre and Jubaland in the south. An estimated 320,000 under-5 year olds are acutely malnourished. Coping capacities have been eroded to the point of collapse.

The Drought Response Plan seeks \$864 million, \$300 million of which is required in the first quarter of this year.

The Famine Early Warning System Network reports that famine is now looming, that urgent action to ramp up assistance and ensure access is needed to mitigate the potential for large scale loss of life.

The drought also has serious political and security implications. It is exacerbating competition for resources such as water and intensifying local conflicts. The number of displaced people is visibly growing. Reports and images of malnutrition are circulating in social media.

The perceived inability of the federal and local governments to respond will damage their legitimacy – and will be exploited by Al-Shabaab. The drought is being cited by Somaliland as a key factor in postponing its elections from March until October. Revenues from the livestock trade are dropping, financial resources committed to drought response will impact public and security sector payroll commitments.

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

Mr President,

Security sector reform must not be delayed or derailed. The prospects for peace and stability depend upon Somalis assuming greater political and financial responsibility for their own security. A plan for achieving this is urgently required.

AMISOM and the Troop Contributing Countries, as they have made clear, will not stay forever. Their presence has been and remains indispensable to securing Somalia, to creating the space for the federal state building project, and to protecting the elections. They will not stay unless the immediate funding issues are addressed, and unless they believe that there is a credible plan whereby Somali security forces and police are able to hold areas that have been liberated from Al-Shabaab.

The 20% cut in the EU's generous support for the AU in Somalia is a source of great concern. AMISOM funding needs to be put on a sustainable and predictable basis. I urge the Council to review the options for doing this, including the use of Assessed Contributions. The

SRCC will no doubt address you on these matters, including need for immediate support for planned offensives against Al-Shabaab.

But even as the financial problem is addressed, the larger issue of sustainable security in Somalia remains, given additional urgency by the stated intent of several Troop Contributing Countries to leave.

Key to this will be building Somali National Security Forces, whether army, police, maritime or intelligence, that reflect the emerging federal state that are trusted by all Somalis and not seen as monopolized by certain clans, are accountable to the political leadership, and affordable.

Years of investments, Mr President, by the international community have yielded limited results. Al-Shabaab is degraded but remains a potent threat. One reason is that the approach to security has in the past been largely military and operational. This is essential of course, but not enough.

The imperative for the incoming President and government is to reach a political agreement among Somalis regarding the architecture, ownership, funding and purpose of the security forces as the basis for more coherent and coordinated support by the international community, notably the AU, the UN and its partners. I hope the elements of this can be put in place by the time of the next High Level Conference on Somalia, scheduled to take place in London in May.

The AU and the UN are committed to working closely together with major investors, the broader international community and the new Somali administration on a comprehensive approach to security in Somalia. This needs to draw upon the respective capacities and strengths of the key stakeholders, whether in funding and supporting AMISOM, building Somali National Security Forces, establishing and extending the rule of law and state authority at the local level, and in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Sustainable security and Somalia's sovereignty require reduction of the country's heavy financial dependence upon the outside world and success in raising domestic revenues for the provision of public goods, including rule of law and security. The International Financial Institutions have a critical role to strengthen financial management capacities and accountability mechanisms.

Another priority is the resumption of the constitutional review process to address critical outstanding political issues. These include delineation of responsibilities between the President and Prime Minister, between the Upper House and the House of the People; and the respective roles and responsibilities of the Federal Government and Federal Member States in a range of areas, including resource and revenue sharing, the judicial system and the roadmap towards one-person, one-vote elections in 2020. The agreement reached between the Federal government and Federal Member States on policing is a good precedent; it now needs to be implemented.

The constitutional review process, Mr President, is all the more meaningful now that the federal map of Somalia is complete, with the creation of HirShabelle in November.

The electoral process has put into sharp relief the many unresolved disputes and conflicts around the country. The highest profile are between Somaliland and Somalia, and the dispute in Galkacyo, but there are at least half a dozen others, any one of them has the potential to turn violent at a great human and political cost. My Somali interlocutors have made it clear that they want the UN, working with its AU, EU and IGAD partners, to focus on building Somali capacities to prevent and resolve conflicts and to support reconciliation processes.

Grounding this in the rule of law, with a strong and constructive role by the new Parliament, could be one of the strongest guarantors of long-term stability and durable governance in Somalia.

Ordinary Somalis must benefit from our collective efforts. Significant work remains to be done to improve the country's dismal human rights situation. I am particularly concerned by the plight of children affected by conflict and the unacceptable incidence of abduction and forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab. The majority of its militants consist of children, deliberately targeted in communities and areas under Al-Shabaab's control. I would like to add my voice to that of Secretary-General Guterres, as he highlighted in his recent report on children and armed conflict, to speak out against this alarming situation.

Mr President,

As requested by the Security Council, the UN family has started a review of its presence in Somalia, with a view to support the next political cycle and in particular to address the priorities I have just outlined. I would like to mention that given the postponements of the electoral process, this review will obviously not be completed by the end of this month. However, we intend to engage with the new government as soon as possible, and to revert to you in the coming months.

Allow me to conclude by thanking members of this Council for their unified position on Somalia and for the support that I and my office are receiving from you. As I have said before, progress is fragile and reversible, and fraught with complexity. But the stage is 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.

Thank you, Mr President.