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9 March 2012

As-Salaamu Alaikum.

It has been nearly six weeks since I last wrote, having newly relocated to Mogadishu. I have settled in the capital where being our close proximity to and daily engagement with our Somali interlocutors is helping us to “make up for lost time.” I continue to encourage other members of the international community to join us here without delay to show their continued engagement with Somalia and to be on the ground to help advance the peace process.

The past few weeks have been full of dramatic events. The country is still embroiled in a parliamentary crisis which has frozen even the most basic activities of the lawmakers. Parliament cannot pass legislation or carry out routine tasks. Somalia simply cannot afford to be in this impasse at this key point in its history. Not only does the ongoing power struggle risk derailing the substantial gains that Somali stakeholders and their partners have so painstakingly made, it is holding key processes hostage, such as the approval of the National Security and Stabilization Plan. I am concentrating my efforts on engaging the parties to find a way out of this crisis and to ensure that they get back to work for the benefit of Somalia.

Despite the sobering backdrop of the current situation, we are successfully meeting significant milestones in the Roadmap to end the transition. Following the first Somali National Consultative Constitutional Conference in Garowe, Puntland State, in December, where the steps to end the transition were introduced, we held a second successful Constitutional Conference from 15-17 February. This event, known as Garowe II, articulated a clear vision for Somalia’s future government, comprising a federal system with an upper and lower house and membership comprised of at least 30 percent women. Adoption of the draft Constitution by the National Constituent Assembly has been set for 22 May 2012.

If there is a key point that has emerged from the Garowe process, which has been broadly inclusive and has relied heavily on the input and influence of a broad array of civil society members, it is the realization that the transitional processes are neither exclusive nor top down. A Constituent Assembly that *looks* like Somalia – with as many as 1,000 Somalis from various communities – will be established. Representation will come from the grassroots. This will require an enormous amount of work to meet the deadlines that have been set. The world is watching and we have no time to lose.

This past week I briefed the UN Security Council via video link from Mogadishu on the considerable progress that has been made in the Somalia peace process. With the Security Council resolution 2036 (22 February 2012) to expand the strength of and the UN’s support to AMISOM, the AU forces will be in a position to further stabilize the security situation in Mogadishu and beyond. Already AMISOM has made significant gains, and with the addition of the Kenyan Defense Forces, we expect with that this trend will continue. As the number of recovered areas grows, it will be a priority to support the TFG to promote social reconciliation, restore law, order and justice and encourage the timely formation of local administrations through consultative and inclusive processes. As I have often said, the Somali population must feel the benefit of the peace dividend as soon as possible.

Another message I shared with the Security Council was a word of warning to ‘spoilers’ - those who are benefiting from exploiting the protracted conflict that has prevailed in Somalia over the past two decades. Recently a number of unflattering comments have been

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made in the media about my opinions in this regard. Let me clarify this point: there is a role for *all* people of goodwill in the political process. Spoilers, however, who do not want stability in Somalia or who are trying to circumvent the political process whether groups or individuals and regardless of their political or religious affiliations, must be identified and deterred. It is against this backdrop that my remarks ought to be understood. I remain deeply concerned by the conscious efforts by groups and individuals to derail the Roadmap, engineer another extension of the transition and to obstruct inclusiveness which the Roadmap and the Garowe process seek to accomplish.

I regret that my comments have been interpreted in some quarters as anti-religious and counter to freedom of political expression as well as a criticism of the Executive Branch of government. I apologize for any misunderstanding. On the contrary, my goal was to highlight the dangers inherent in any one group exerting undue political influence due to their proximity to political power. Over the past week, I have had a series of productive and enlightening discussions with religious leaders, elders and statesmen concerning the Al-Sheikh group and their interpretation of Islam. In these discussions, my interlocutors confirmed their support to the Roadmap process and, for my part, I reaffirmed my enduring commitment to the overall success of the Somali peace process. I encourage and welcome political pluralism in the run-up to ending the transition in electing the next leadership as well as of the post-August dispensation.

I travelled recently to the United Kingdom to participate in the London Conference on Somalia. It was not just another international meeting the conference injected fresh momentum into the political process and demonstrated the commitment from key members of the international community to help move the Somali peace process forward in a constructive and coordinated manner. Somalia has yearned for this type of high level attention for years. A clear message that emerged from London was that outreach and national reconciliation must embrace the whole of Somalia and must span all levels of society. We are looking forward to addressing these issues further at the Istanbul II conference in Turkey in June. I call on all Somalis to seize this moment of opportunity.

I was saddened this week to learn of the killing of Ali Ahmed Abdi, a contributor to Somalia Online and a former journalist of Radio Galkayo. He is the fourth Somali journalist killed this year. So far no one has been arrested in relation to any of these murders. This is unacceptable. Somali journalists are working in incredibly difficult conditions to keep the pressure on the criminal elements trying to intimidate the Somali population. Freedom of expression is a critical element of the peace and reconciliation process. I have offered the support of the UN Political Office for Somalia to assist in any way possible.

I close this message with a word of recognition to the Somali Civil Society, such as those journalists who are risking their lives to get their stories out, the youth groups who are working for change, and the women's groups struggling for representation. The Somali status quo will change and the way forward is being led by you, the Somali people. We stand beside you and shall continue to do so.

Warm regards

Amb. Augustine P. Mahiga