

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**REMARKS AT OPENING OF
THE ISTANBUL CONFERENCE ON SOMALIA
Istanbul, 22 May 2010**

Excellencies,
President Sheikh Sharif,
Foreign Minister Davutoglu,
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for being here today. It is a clear sign of your commitment and solidarity with the people and Government of Somalia, at a time when they badly need our support.

I thank the Turkish government for its generosity in hosting this conference. This is yet another welcome sign of Turkey's willingness to take on the most difficult international problems.

I would also like to pay tribute to the African Union Mission in Somalia... to those countries that have contributed troops... and to Somalia's neighbours and friends, who have shown great commitment in supporting Somalia and the peace process.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Somalia is one of the world's most intractable crises. For twenty years, conflict over power, resources and land has destroyed lives, created hundreds of thousands of orphans and devastated communities.

Some say this conference is being held too early. Others believe it comes too late. The truth is that there will probably never be a perfect time.

But one thing is certain. If we do not redouble our efforts, there will be little chance for peace in Somalia.

We are here today to start making that change... by considering the challenges Somalia faces – and the opportunities it presents.

First, the challenges. Continuing insecurity and conflict in parts of Somalia are attracting extremist elements from outside the country, as well as radical young Somalis from the diaspora. This poses a threat to Somalia, to neighbouring countries and beyond.

There is a dire humanitarian crisis. Some 3.2 million people – more than forty per cent of the population - are in need of aid. Of these, 1.4 million are internally displaced.

I urge the international community to do everything possible to make sure they receive the help they need.

The absence of law and order has allowed the relatively new phenomenon of piracy to flourish. This has created a threat to international shipping, and caused runaway inflation of food prices inside the country.

The United Nations is expanding its role in combatting piracy. The Security Council has adopted several resolutions and the international naval presence has made it more difficult for pirates to attack vessels successfully. As recently requested by the Security Council, I will soon submit a report on options for prosecuting and imprisoning the pirates.

A UN Trust Fund has been set up to support the prosecution of suspected pirates; I urge the donor community and the shipping industry to contribute generously. But still the attacks continue, and increase in number.

The status quo presents another challenge. Some Somalis oppose change in their country not for ideological reasons, but because they are profiting from the current anarchy.

This includes human traffickers, who promise to help desperate people start new lives overseas, but often abandon them at sea.

It also includes traders who import goods to Somalia tax free, and then smuggle them to neighbouring countries and beyond. Others make millions of dollars from destroying forests for charcoal to sell abroad.

These people will resist our efforts to bring stability and the rule of law to Somalia.

But despite these serious problems, it is not too late. We must recognize the opportunities in the current situation.

For the first time in two decades, there is some progress towards stability in Somalia. The Djibouti Agreement brought together former adversaries to create an internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government.

Despite some internal divisions, this Government has survived repeated attacks by extremists, and remains committed to peace and reconciliation.

The recent cooperation agreement with the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jammah group could serve as a blueprint for other opposition groups to build on. I also commend the unified composition of the Somalia delegation to this conference.

In this regard, I encourage Puntland to continue maintaining its stability and political cooperation with the TFG. I also urge “Somaliland” to continue peacefully resolving internal political disputes.

The Transitional Government is also developing its security sector institutions. It has issued an annual budget for 2010, placed Radio Mogadishu back on air, and rehabilitated some key buildings.

These actions – some concrete, others symbolic – show the Government’s good faith with the people of Somalia and the international community.

The Transitional Federal Government represents Somalia’s best chance in years to escape from the endless cycle of war and humanitarian disaster.

The only way to restore stability is to support this government – both in its reconciliation efforts and, where necessary, its fight against extremism.

If the international community acts now, we can make a difference.

This Conference is an opportunity to show the Somali leadership that we are ready to work seriously in partnership with them.

In return, I urge the Somali authorities to demonstrate the will and commitment to work together, resolve their internal disputes, and unite against the threat of extremism.

The Government must also start to deliver improved services to the Somali people, pay salaries to the security forces fighting on their behalf, and continue efforts to build up security sector institutions.

This would go some way to fulfilling two of the three pillars of the Djibouti Agreement: political cooperation and security.

The third and final pillar is reconstruction.

Here, a large part of the answer lies with the Somali business community. Somalia's business leaders – both inside the country and in the diaspora – are one of its main assets. They should play a key role in the reconstruction phase of the peace process.

I am particularly delighted at the participation of the business community and the civil society in this conference. I take note of the discussion regarding the “Principles for an enabling Environment for Responsible Business Activities in Somalia”. We look forward to working with the Somali parties to develop a business compact for Somalia.

One of the most important aims of investment and increased commercial activity must be to generate employment for Somalis, and particularly young people.

They need an alternative to joining armed extremist groups, or piracy.

I hope this Conference will also pave the way for a new arrangement, whereby countries involved in fishing or other activities off the Somali coast could contribute to a fund, managed in a transparent way, dedicated to helping coastal communities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Helping Somalia to recover is clearly a significant challenge.

But it is not insurmountable. And we must succeed.

This Istanbul Conference sends a strong signal, not only of hope, but also of commitment.

In a country that has been consumed in conflict for twenty years, peace does not come overnight. It requires painstaking, sustained efforts, and a long-term strategy.

Next month, Somalia will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its independence – a time when, without concern for regional or tribal affiliation, Somali patriots united behind the cause of liberty and dignity for their country.

Let us mark this anniversary with our resolute support and solidarity, so that Somalia can make a new start.

Thank you.