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Seventy-eighth year

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Provisional

<i>President:</i>	Mrs. Frazier/Ms. Gatt	(Malta)
<i>Members:</i>	Albania	Ms. Dautllari
	Brazil	Mr. De Almeida Filho
	China	Mr. Dai Bing
	Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
	France	Mr. Olmedo
	Gabon	Mrs. Ngyema Ndong
	Ghana	Mr. Agyeman
	Japan	Mr. Ishikane
	Mozambique	Mr. Fernandes
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
	United Arab Emirates	Mrs. Nusseibeh
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Dame Barbara Woodward
	United States of America	Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield

Agenda

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia (S/2023/109)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Somalia

Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia (S/2023/109)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Somalia to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Anita Kiki Gbeho, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia; Mr. Mohamed El-Amine Souef, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia; and Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/109, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia.

I now give the floor to Ms. Gbeho.

Ms. Gbeho: I thank the Security Council for the opportunity to brief it on this situation in Somalia at this meeting held on the important theme "Somalia — a women and peace and security perspective". I am pleased to do so alongside the recently appointed Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), Ambassador Mohamed El-Amine Souef, with whom I collaborate closely, as well as the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous.

Since the previous Security Council meeting on Somalia (see S/PV.9125), held on 7 September 2022, despite many challenges, the Federal Government of Somalia has made significant progress in advancing its key national priorities. Close cooperation with the federal member states has been sustained, momentum in the fight against Al-Shabaab has been regained

and Somalia remains on track to complete the debt relief process in 2024. Through regular meetings of the National Consultative Council (NCC), His Excellency President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has undertaken efforts to prioritize Federal Government and federal member state relations and to advance State-building priorities.

In the December meeting of the NCC, Federal Government and federal member state leaders, with the exemption of Puntland, agreed a federated model regarding the allocation of powers and on justice, both of which are key elements for the completion of the constitutional review. Puntland requested additional time to consider its position on those matters and has asked for further consultations with the Federal Government of Somalia. I encourage the Federal Government and the federal member states to continue dialogue within the NCC framework towards consensus on Somalia's State-building agenda.

I welcome the continued commitment of the Federal Government to implementing the women and peace and security agenda, as demonstrated by the launch of the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). The launch of the plan is timely, as it provides a framework to address the challenges that persist for women in Somalia. More has to be done to enable equal representation in all facets of public life. To that end, enhancing women's political participation also remains critical. That includes not only codifying the commitment that Somalia's political leaders made on the 30 per cent women's quota in relevant legal and electoral frameworks, but also ensuring that it be safeguarded by all entities. In that regard, the United Nations continues to support newly elected women representatives. For example, through the joint programme on women and peace and protection, the United Nations supported the establishment of the Federal Parliament's Upper House women's caucus. Moving forward, we must remain focused on advancing women's participation and equality. I call on all stakeholders to redouble their efforts towards achieving that objective.

As the Government seeks to advance its post-election priorities, including conducting operations against Al-Shabaab and managing the devastating impact of the drought, recurrent political conflicts continue to command the Government's attention. In South-West state, for instance, clashes took place on 23 December related to the timing of the state presidential election. A South-West state reconciliation conference, held under

the auspices of President Mohamud and the Speaker of the House of the People, Sheikh Aden Mohamed Nuur, was able to avert an escalation and address political grievances. In Laascaanood town, Sool region, the fighting that broke out on 6 February continues and has led to increased humanitarian needs. An inter-agency assessment reports that more than 185,000 people have been displaced, 89 per cent of whom are women and children. At least 63 civilians were killed and more than 363 people injured. Efforts to stop the fighting are ongoing, but the situation, including the targeting of civilian infrastructure, remains alarming. I would like to reiterate the previous statements by the United Nations and international partners condemning the violence, calling for the resolution of political tensions through dialogue and calling for unhindered humanitarian access to urgently address the needs of those displaced and impacted.

Al-Shabaab continues to pose a serious threat to peace and security in Somalia. The year 2022 was the deadliest for civilians since 2017, with a 60 per cent increase in civilian casualties as compared to 2021. Over the past few months, the Federal Government has made progress in countering that threat by targeting Al-Shabaab's military and financial operations and ideological narrative. The Somali security forces, reinforced by the use of local militias, have conducted successful operations against Al-Shabaab in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states. Operations are expected to gradually move into other areas of Somalia.

Consolidating the gains in the newly recovered areas will require strong linkages between military operations and stabilization initiatives, comprised of reconciliation and justice components and aimed at bolstering good governance and service delivery. In that regard and in line with Somalia's national stabilization strategy, efforts have focused on supporting communities and newly established district authorities in several recovered areas.

In parallel, the Government continues efforts towards generating forces to gradually assume security responsibilities in line with the Somalia Transition Plan. The handover of the ATMIS Maslah camp to the Somali National Army in mid-January was an important step in that process, having paved the way for the handover of similar much camps in future. However, funding remains a critical challenge. I reiterate previous calls by the Secretary-General to ensure predictable and sustainable funding to ATMIS and adequate resourcing

for Somali security forces. That remains vital to the security transition.

With five consecutive poor rainy seasons, the current drought is unprecedented in its severity. Humanitarian needs continue to steadily rise, with about 8.3 million people — nearly half of Somalia's estimated population — requiring assistance and protection in 2023. Needs are also more pronounced among minorities and marginalized groups.

Thanks to generous donor support, Government efforts and local community initiatives, humanitarian organizations scaled up their response and reached 7.3 million people in 2022. While famine has been prevented for now, it remains a threat if the April-to-June rains underperform as forecast and humanitarian assistance is not sustained. The 2023 humanitarian response plan, launched on 8 February, seeks \$2.6 billion to meet the priority needs of 7.6 million people. I urge donors to stand with Somalia at this difficult time by providing the required resources early.

Despite great adversity, the people of Somalia continue to demonstrate strength, resilience and resolve. The progress made by the Federal Government of Somalia to advance peace, security and development has generated positive momentum to enable further advances in the State-building agenda. At the core of that agenda lies the completion of an inclusive and consensus-based constitutional review process. That remains a priority in the period ahead.

As the United Nations, we stand ready to support those efforts and, as always, to support Somalia in implementing its vision of a secure, stable and peaceful nation.

The President: I thank Ms. Gbeho for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Souef.

Mr. Souef: I thank Security Council members for the opportunity to address them on the situation in Somalia. I am pleased to be joined alongside Ms. Kiki Gbeho, Officer in Charge and Deputy Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSAM). And to quote the United Nations Secretary-General at last week's African Union Summit, "the ties between the African Union and the United Nations have never been stronger." That sentiment is also true of the strong partnership that exists among the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), UNSAM

and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSO).

Before turning to the ATMIS's overview of the situation in Somalia, I would like to underscore two points of appreciation.

First, and on behalf of ATMIS, I would like to express our gratitude to the Security Council for its strong and continued support to the Mission and its commitment to peace and security in Somalia.

Secondly, I would like to pay tribute to His Excellency President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud for his strong leadership. Under his leadership, Somalia is now witnessing concerted efforts to advance peace and security. In fact, the African Union believes we are witnessing an emergence of a transformative change in Somalia across various fronts.

On behalf of the African Union, I want to assure the Security Council that ATMIS will continue to pursue its strategic objectives as mandated by the United Nations. The African Union's dedication to supporting Somalia is solid and enduring and will extend beyond the life span of ATMIS, which ends on 31 December 2024. That is our aspiration to ensure Somalia forms part of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa by the year 2063.

Since the most recent briefing by ATMIS in September 2022 (see S/PV.9125), Somalia has continued to register significant progress on its key national priorities, particularly those outlined in the Federal Government's six-pillar work plan. As noted earlier, leading those efforts has been President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who I am pleased to report has taken decisive steps, mainly to accelerate inclusive politics and dialogue as a means of advancing the country's priorities.

To sustain and further reinforce the momentum of inclusive politics, we have repeatedly witnessed the President visit front-line positions across Somalia, lending his personal support to ongoing reconciliation processes. The result of those visits has been consensus-building among local communities in support of Somalia's ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab. Specifically, the President's visit to the Middle Shabelle region in November resulted in a cessation of hostilities between two local communities that have since played a central role in the Federal Government's removal of Al-Shabaab from the region. Similarly, the President called for a cessation of hostilities and

communicated the Federal Government's readiness to facilitate dialogue and a resolution of the conflict between Somaliland forces and local communities in Laascaanood. In response, Somaliland called for a ceasefire and a peaceful resolution of the conflict. International partners, including ATMIS, firmly condemned the continuing violence and reports of the mobilization of armed groups, and further urged all the parties to adhere to the ceasefire, exercise restraint and engage in constructive dialogue to establish a path to a peaceful resolution.

Earlier this month, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, together with the Speaker of the House of the People, successfully led a two-phase reconciliation process in South-West state, which concluded with an agreement among its stakeholders. With the dispute now resolved, I applaud the determination of all stakeholders to support the Federal Government's plans to open a new front against Al-Shabaab soon.

I remain encouraged that Somali leaders continue to pursue dialogue through the National Consultative Council to sustain Somalia's political stability. Since May 2022 we have witnessed continued and regular meetings of the National Consultative Council. The National Consultative Council is now helping to advance Somalia's national priorities, including security and key areas of peacebuilding and State-building. The National Consultative Council met recently in December, bringing together the Federal Government and the federal member states, except for Puntland, to agree on key outstanding issues of federalism and democratization. Noting Puntland's stated position on its relationship with the Federal Government, I am optimistic that Somali leaders can reach a political agreement on key outstanding issues within the framework of the National Consultative Council. I am also encouraged that Puntland has signalled a willingness to continue pursuing a dialogue with the Federal Government and I look forward to its participation in the upcoming meeting of the National Consultative Council.

Somalia has been defined by its insecurity for decades. However, I am pleased to report today that the Federal Government is not only poised for lasting peace by leading on silencing the guns in Somalia, but is also taking steps to bring about prosperity for its citizens. In that context, I welcome the efforts of Prime Minister Hamse Abdi Barre, whose Cabinet approved more than 14 bills within a short period that have now been sent

to Parliament. Many of them will ultimately help to create regional and international confidence and attract foreign investment, enabling Somalia to realize its great potential. Somalia's bid to join the East African Community and the recent visit of the East African verification team to Somalia are good indicators of the prosperity that awaits Somalia in the coming years.

I am particularly pleased that during the forty-second ordinary session of the Executive Council of the African Union, Somalia signalled its intention, as a next step to its imminent admission to the East African Community, to become a State party to the African Continental Free Trade Area. That positive message again illustrates the Federal Government's commitment to delivering on its laudable work plan — in this case, a key priority milestone for its economic pillar. At the African Union, as we celebrate 2023 as the Year of the African Continental Free Trade Area, we are proud that Somalia continues to place the importance of job creation, poverty reduction, improved welfare and sustainable development at the heart of its future.

Despite Somalia's security challenges, I am pleased to be able to say that Al-Shabaab is now under immense operational pressure and losing vital terrain. It is failing to maintain its hold on its centre of gravity, which is local community support, something that we continue to witness as local communities increasingly join the offensive led and owned by the Somali security forces. It is important to note that Al-Shabaab is now being disrupted, degraded and defeated thanks to the security forces' courageous actions and gallant sacrifices. Recent Al-Shabaab losses of several areas in Hirshabelle and Galmudug — including Middle Shabelle, Hiraan and towns in Mudug, such as the port of Xarardheere — all represent strategic and operational gains for the Federal Government.

Despite the current and positive security momentum moving swiftly across Somalia, in the ATMIS area of responsibility we are mindful that Al-Shabaab still has the capability to carry out decisive operations, including complex attacks using improvised explosive devices both from suicide vehicles and carried by people, ambushes, kidnapping, assassinations and indirect fire attacks. While Al-Shabaab's tactics, techniques and procedures remained mainly unchanged during this reporting period, our threat picture suggests that it is trying to change some of its tactics. A key concern remains its use of commercial drones, which are likely

to attain an armed capability in the future, a worrisome trend that we have observed in other terrorist theatres.

Beyond Somalia, we are also concerned by Al-Shabaab's transnational threat to Somalia's immediate neighbours. However, I am equally encouraged by recent regional security engagements aimed at addressing that threat with a united approach. In that regard, according to our assessment, the recent summit convened by Somalia of the Frontline States, including Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya, will enhance the security framework that ATMIS serves in Somalia.

I would like to take this opportunity to update the Council on the implementation of key aspects of resolutions 2628 (2022) and 2670 (2022). Despite uneven progress, I am pleased to report that key aspects of the mandated tasks are receiving the urgent focus and commitment they require.

At ATMIS we have submitted a detailed and realistic reconfiguration plan that is still under review by the Federal Government. Recently, working with the Federal Government and with support from the United Nations Support Office in Somalia, we handed over the Maslah forward operating base as part of meeting the emerging demands of force generation. We have also deployed to the Bariire forward operating base as part of an operational agreement with the Federal Government and recently collocated with the Somali security forces at the Xawaadle bridge forward operating base.

Alongside our brave brothers and sisters in the Somali security forces, we have contributed to the ongoing offensive to degrade Al-Shabaab in line with the agreed joint Federal Government of Somalia-ATMIS concept of operations of 2022. To date and beyond in our joint kinetic operations, ATMIS involvement in the ongoing offensive has included, first, using ATMIS helicopters to provide close air support; secondly, the provision of casualty evacuation and medical evacuation of Somali security forces troops from the battlefield; thirdly, the provision of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; fourthly, the provision of indirect fire support; and fifthly, the provision of combat service support, such as ammunition, water, drugs and field accommodation, and the provision of advisory support on international humanitarian law and issues related to the protection of civilians, to mention but a few.

I want to be clear: the African Union's support to Somalia, as I mentioned, will remain unwavering. For that reason, I am grateful for the support of ATMIS

troop-contributing countries (TCCs), particularly through their recent commitment to the Somalia Operations Coordination Committee to do more to support to the ongoing offensive. ATMIS TCCs have already committed to deploying critical force enablers, such as attack and utility helicopters, and are now seeking robust long-range intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. When it is feasible for Somali security forces to begin taking over agreed forward operating bases, ATMIS TCCs will create quick reaction or mobile forces at a faster pace. That needs to be encouraged, and more support is needed to sustain the current success of the Somali security forces-led offensive. It will require the Council to consider the encouraging results of Somalia's pace of force generation.

With Somalia on track to meet its target of 15,000 newly trained forces this year, I welcome the recent return of 3,500 Eritrean-trained Somali National Army (SNA) troops, some of whom have already been deployed to the frontlines, as well as the ongoing training of SNA troops in Egypt, Ethiopia, Turkey and Uganda. On 6 February, Somalia's Cabinet Ministers approved the agreement between the Federal Government of Somalia and the United Arab Emirates on military and security cooperation and counter-terrorism. With such a commitment, ATMIS is confident that Somalia is on track to assume security responsibility from ATMIS by December 2024.

Those brave young men and women must be supported with the equipment necessary to fight Al-Shabaab, the appropriate firepower and adequate ammunition supplies. That will only be possible when the Council once again takes into account the progress already made by Somalia in meeting the sanctions benchmarks effectively and in a timely manner as a pathway to lifting the arms embargo. Similarly, with Somalia expected to generate 15,000 forces, there is now an immediate need to increase the level of the current UNSOS support package to the Somali security forces beyond the mandated 13,900 forces. In the interim, ATMIS remains committed to continue providing international humanitarian and human rights law training of trainers to Somali security forces and to supporting efforts to advance the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.

Turning to the adjustment of the timeline of phase one, we believe that this extension should provide the

Federal Government of Somalia and ATMIS the space to complete important mandated tasks. As we have stated, there has been uneven progress, and there remains a need for further consultations on two critical issues: the first is the strategic sector-by-sector approach to the drawdown and the second is the funding of the six-month delay.

Regarding the initial drawdown of 2,000 ATMIS troops, ATMIS has been looking at various options based on the direction provided by the African Union Commission. For a successful sector-by-sector approach, there is a need to undertake more detailed planning with the Federal Government to understand where they would want ATMIS to continue to hold and where the Federal Government would be willing to either take over or accept the risk of some ATMIS troop drawdowns across the sectors. As the Council will recall, resolution 2670 (2022) agreed to the Federal Government's request to delay the drawdown of 2,000 ATMIS troops to June of this year. In doing so, it was also anticipated that ATMIS partners would financially support a delay of the drawdown. Regrettably, resolution 2670 (2022) does not provide the funding modalities required to support the six-month extension, and key partners, including the European Union, have indicated no new funding.

I remain deeply concerned by the shortfall in the funding available for ATMIS and the Somali security forces. With no resolution on who and what mechanism will fund the current drawdown delay, there is an urgency to address the funding issue of ATMIS. Moreover, we believe that issue must be addressed within the broader context of the funding for African Union peace support operations. In that regard, I welcome the Secretary-General's most recent call to the Security Council at the most recent African Union summit, stating that African Union missions must be afforded access to assessed contributions. The Security Council meeting to be held next month under the presidency of the Government of Mozambique to discuss the security transition in Somalia could institute a breakthrough moment on funding and provide the Council, the African Union and the key partners an opportunity to address ATMIS's outstanding funding requirements.

Somalia continues to experience an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. In response to that, and as part of the wider support provided by international partners, the African Union Permanent Representative Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally

Displaced Persons visited Somalia in December 2022 to show solidarity with Somalia and assess the humanitarian situation. That delegation met with the Government and humanitarian partners, visited internally displaced persons camps in Mogadishu and Baidoa and extended a solidarity gesture to the Federal Government of Somalia in support of the humanitarian drought response. ATMIS also facilitated the delivery of humanitarian supplies, including through the provision of escort and security to the World Food Programme to deliver 142 metric tons of assorted food commodities in hard-to-reach areas in Hirshabelle and South-West states in 2023.

As the Council is aware, I took over the leadership of ATMIS in November 2022, with extensive experience in peace support operations, both with the United Nations and the African Union, and I am proud to be able to work with a team of truly dedicated and talented people who do not take for granted the opportunity to help rebuild Somalia. Under my leadership, ATMIS shall remain a reliable partner and a dependable ally. I therefore renew my commitment to the timely and effective implementation of the mandated tasks as assigned by the Council. To that end, ATMIS will continue to require a strong civilian component with a clear sense of purpose. With the support of the African Union Commission, I plan to begin the recruitment of national staff to enhance the effectiveness of ATMIS.

In conclusion, I would once again like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to brief the Council and renew the African Union's commitment to achieving peace, stability and development for Somalia and its people, in line with the aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063.

The President: I thank Mr. Souef for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bahous.

Ms. Bahous: The last time I was in this Chamber was five months ago (see S/PV.9158) to present the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/740) on women and peace and security. The Council members may recall that my main message that day was that we are sliding backwards rather than making progress, and that global trend is playing out in Somalia too. As we have just heard, the projections in Somalia are dire. In the past few weeks alone nearly 200,000 people have been displaced from Laascaanood, and more than 60,000, mainly women and children, have fled to neighbouring Ethiopia. The ongoing drought is

expected to render half the population food-insecure by mid-2023 and put the country at increased risk of famine. The previous famine declared in Somalia in 2011 killed a quarter of a million people. That situation exacerbates gender-based violence.

In their deliberations and decisions on Somalia over the past few years, Council members have raised the importance of both the 30 per cent quota for women and new legislation on sexual violence. The two issues have been a top priority for the United Nations in Somalia and at Headquarters, including the two visits by the Deputy Secretary-General. Women's political participation and leadership are prerequisites for more inclusive societies and for finding solutions to achieve lasting peace and sustainable development. Yet the quota in Somalia has not been met. Women's representation has declined, sexual violence has increased and the sexual offences bill adopted unanimously by the Cabinet of Ministers five years ago has still not been adopted by Parliament. Instead, its opponents are pushing for alternative legislation that would legalize child marriage, omit the age of consent, reduce the types of admissible evidence and take away the rights of survivors.

In the 2016 elections, women's representation jumped from 14 to 24 per cent, and a commitment was made to reach 30 per cent in the following elections. Instead, the total number of women in the two Chambers has declined from 80 to 67. Every Somali woman from civil society who has been invited to brief the Council in the past few years has warned that that would happen, has explained why and has provided details of the mechanisms that should be put in place for the 30 per cent quota to be met. Apart from a partial reduction in candidates' fees, those ideas have not been implemented.

The decline in women's representation is not limited to the results of the last election. Only 13 per cent of the current Cabinet members are women, despite advocacy efforts in the talks during the Government's formation. In the 2021 elections in Somaliland, after the rejection of a proposal for a 22 per cent quota, no women were elected to the 82-seat House of Representatives. In the South-West state Assembly, the representation of women also declined, from 22 to 15 per cent. In Puntland and Hirshabelle, women's representation rates remain in the single digits. Conversely, the rates of sexual violence have seen an alarming increase since 2020. That year they doubled compared to 2019, and they have continued to rise as the worst drought in many decades is having

a devastating impact on all Somalis, with women and girls disproportionately affected. CARE International recently documented a 200 per cent increase in gender-based violence cases among people displaced by the drought compared to previous years. In our own recent assessment on the impact of the drought, we found that women take on increased economic burdens, skip meals, find themselves separated from or abandoned by their husbands and are more vulnerable to sexual assault, as they travel longer distances to fetch water and firewood.

Yet much of that goes unpunished. Our own data indicates that 80 per cent of cases of sexual and gender-based violence do not reach the judiciary, and, when they do, they often meet with male judges in a system where fewer than 1 per cent of judges are women. And still we hear that women and girls are not prioritized in aid distribution and that local women's organizations rarely get any funding. As donors and the United Nations worry about aid diversion and corruption, I would like to ask where the women are in camp management. Globally, we are sliding backwards on that score too. From 2020 to 2021, there was a drop in the participation of women in leadership and management structures in camps for refugees and internally displaced persons. But that cruel violence against women and girls in Somalia is also very much linked to the conflict, both with Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State, and to inter-clan disputes. Al-Shabaab continues to abduct women and girls, force families to give them their daughters in marriage and occupy hospitals and maternity wards.

Somali women are strong and resilient, but they are paying the ultimate price for defending their rights. Al-Shabaab has conducted many attacks to disrupt parliamentary elections. The deadliest targeted a bright young woman — Amina Mohamed Abdi — who had won a seat in Parliament at a very young age, in defiance of her own clan's elders, and who was campaigning once again. Almost 50 people died in that attack, only 11 months ago. A few months earlier, Al-Shabaab killed Hibaq Abukar, an adviser on women's affairs in the Office of the Prime Minister. Its members target women activists and women working in local and national politics. In recent months, Sadia Yasin Haji Samatar, the first woman to occupy the position of First Deputy Speaker of Parliament, received death threats for speaking up in support of legislation that was favourable to women's rights. In addition, women's civil-society organizations are facing threats that attempt to control the agency and voices of women.

Despite the prevalence of sexual violence committed with high levels of impunity and targeted attacks on women in public life in Somalia, since 2014 none of the listings of the Somalia sanctions regime have mentioned sexual violence or women's rights, including for the three Al-Shabaab individuals added in 2021. They continue to be gender-blind.

The Security Council has repeatedly called for women's meaningful participation. But we need members to demand it and to be more specific about what they mean and what they expect. That includes participation not only in elections, but also in the stabilization agenda that is a key current priority for the Federal Government and federal member states of Somalia. It includes participation in the civil service, the constitutional review, reform of the justice and security sectors and all efforts related to peacebuilding, State-building, preventing violent extremism, early warning, transitional justice and humanitarian aid. Only when women are included in all areas of public life will we have a chance at peace and at ensuring that we support the rebuilding of a society that is resilient to future shocks. By doing that, the Council will be amplifying the voices in Somalia fighting for those goals. That includes the Government, as those are the goals of the first national action plan to implement resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, adopted by the Government six months ago and supported by UN-Women and the local action plans that we are working on for five federal member states and Banaadir district.

Most important, we must continue to protect the space for the members of independent civil society, who are on the front lines of the fight, risking everything they have. Their patriotism should be celebrated, and especially should be supported, both politically and financially, in any way that the Council can. The Council has the opportunity to take decisive action and to stand with the women and girls of Somalia at this critical juncture. I urge the Security Council to seize this opportunity.

The President: I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Dame Barbara Woodward (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking the Deputy Special Representative, the African Union Special Representative and the Executive Director of UN-Women for their very informative briefings. I would like to make three points.

First, the United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the developments in Laascaanood. Alongside partners, we have supported ceasefire negotiations among the parties and issued statements calling for restraint on all sides, dialogue, the protection of civilians and unfettered humanitarian access. We encourage Council members to do likewise.

The problems in Laascaanood remind us that we need to support Somalia in making progress on the fundamental questions of power and resource-sharing, including finalizing the Constitution. Those are vital building blocks for long-term State-building and security.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has demonstrated commitment through the Somali National Consultative Council, bringing federal member state leaders to the table to answer such questions. We should encourage and support Somalia's leadership in translating agreements into tangible outcomes and locking in incremental progress. That requires technical groundwork in advance of the meetings, and consultative mechanisms afterwards, to produce credible governance models. In order to be sustainable, such efforts must also include the full, equal and meaningful participation of women so as to embed their inclusion in future political processes. We must underline the importance of all federal member state leaders engaging constructively.

Secondly, as we heard, the humanitarian crisis is entrenched and is deteriorating. The fact that a famine was averted in 2022 is not grounds for complacency. With drought forecast to continue in 2023 and more than 227,000 people estimated to have been displaced in January alone, we must continue to work together to fund life-saving assistance, lift access restrictions and ensure that aid reaches those who most need it.

As we heard, women and girls comprise 80 per cent of those displaced by drought, and displaced populations are especially vulnerable to sexual violence. The United Kingdom's joint programme with the United Nations Population Fund responds to incidents of gender-based violence among newly displaced populations, reaching up to 34,800 women.

Finally, we commend the progress made by the Somali security forces in the fight against Al-Shabaab since President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's election. There is indeed cause for optimism in the months ahead. We urge the United Nations to ensure an effective

benchmark assessment process for the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, and we look forward to returning to this subject in March ahead of our deliberations in June.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Deputy Special Representative Gbeho, Special Representative Souef and Executive Director Bahous for their briefings. We welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of Somalia in today's meeting.

The political transition and counter-terrorism operations in Somalia have recently witnessed some progress. However, the situation remains complex and dire. Somalia's security situation is failing to fundamentally improve, and its humanitarian crisis is worrisome. The international community should continue to step up its attention to, and its efforts on, the Somalia issue. In connection with the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/109), I would like to highlight the following points.

First, the Somali political process faces significant challenges. The Federal Government and its federal member states held several meetings of the National Consultative Council. The parties have significant differences on key issues, such as the allocation of powers and the federal system. China calls on all parties to act effectively in the long-term interests of the country and its people, resolve disputes through dialogue and negotiation and create conditions for a political transition. In Laascaanood, the security forces of Somaliland continue to clash with local militias, causing many civilian casualties. We urge all parties to the conflict to immediately adopt a ceasefire and ensure the security of the people.

Secondly, terrorist attacks are a serious threat to people's security and regional stability. We noted that the Somali security forces have increased their counter-terrorism efforts. Countries outside the region have also been conducting military operations in Somalia. History shows that external military forces alone cannot realize lasting peace and security in the country. Ultimately, an improvement of Somalia's security capacity-building is required so that the country can resolutely demonstrate its primary responsibility in fighting terrorism and maintaining stability. Until Somalia completes its Transition Plan, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) still plays an irreplaceable role. China trusts that the Somali Government will continue to actively work with ATMIS and win the hearts and

minds of the people in the areas in which it has regained control. Major donors should provide sustainable and predictable funding to enable ATMIS to discharge its mandate.

Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, together with Somalia, recently held a regional security summit on combating terrorist forces. China supports countries of the region in their efforts to deepen cooperation on counter-terrorism and maintain common security.

Thirdly, Somalia is experiencing an unprecedented drought. More than 8 million people are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, while more than 1.3 million people are displaced. China calls on the international community to increase its humanitarian support to Somalia, honour existing commitments and ensure the timely provision of humanitarian funds. At the same time, the Somali Government should do more, including by reducing bureaucratic restrictions on humanitarian work and improving humanitarian access, so as to achieve a solid basis for meeting the security and development needs of its people.

A recent report by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs points out that counter-terrorism operations in Somalia may have negative impacts on the humanitarian situation. Issues such as forced recruitment, indiscriminate attacks and the destruction of infrastructure particularly require our close attention. China calls for the relevant military operations to take the protection of the civilians seriously, in particular the security of vulnerable people, such as women and children, and work to eliminate their negative impacts.

Mr. Agyeman (Ghana) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Gabon, Mozambique and Ghana.

We express our appreciation to Ms. Anita Kiki Gbeho, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Acting Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, His Excellency Mr. Mohamed El-Amine Souef, African Union (AU) Special Representative and Head of the African Union Transitional Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), and Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, for their comprehensive briefings. We also welcome the participation of our brother the Permanent Representative of Somalia in this meeting.

(*spoke in English*)

The members of the A3 welcome the significant progress being made by the Federal Government of Somalia in pursuing its key national priorities, particularly its six pillars for the period spanning 2022 to 2026. We particularly welcome the holding of the meetings of the National Consultative Council, presided over by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, aimed at advancing cooperation between the Federal Government and the federal member states, the efforts to accelerate the pace of negotiations with Somaliland, the strengthening of ties between federal and regional institutions of Government and efforts to ensure political stability.

We acknowledge the progress made on the chapter of cooperation between the Federal Government of Somalia and federal member states, as well as the generation of forces and the handover of forward operating bases within the context of the security transition and the operationalization of the Somali security forces and the Somali National Army (SNA).

We applaud President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's leadership in fostering an atmosphere more amenable to peaceful coexistence throughout the country by the significant initiatives he has undertaken to advance inclusive political dialogue. The Somali President's numerous visits to front-line locations in the country to provide his personal support for continuing reconciliation efforts are highly commendable.

We advocate the full and effective participation of women in Somalia's peacebuilding efforts. The participation of Somali women at key decision-making levels is vital for good governance and long-term peace within the broader development spectrum. In this regard, we applaud the launch on 5 September 2022, of the Somali National Action Plan for the implementation of the Somali Women's Charter and resolution 1325 (2000), requiring parties to a conflict to ensure that women's rights are respected, that their participation in peace talks and post-conflict reconstruction is encouraged, and that females are safeguarded from sexual violence during and after armed conflict. We are confident that these measures will empower Somali women to make meaningful contributions to preventing and responding to violent extremism, climate change, humanitarian crises and other threats to national security.

On the security front, we note that Al-Shabaab, like other terrorist groups active in the Sahel, West Africa

and Southern Africa, continues to be a transnational threat. It is therefore imperative that additional efforts and resources are deployed to counter its ability to conduct operations in Somalia and other parts of the region. In this regard, we commend the Government of the Federal Republic of Somalia for demonstrating a firm determination to eliminate the footprint of Al-Shabaab and applaud the people of Somali for rallying boldly behind their Government in the ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab.

As confirmed by the briefing we have just received, the sustained operations by Somali Security Forces and ATMIS have resulted in the liberation of several regions of Somalia from Al-Shabaab, notably Hirshabelle and Galmudug. Also, the liberation of the port town of Harardhere, a key financial hub for Al-Shabaab, has been critical to the efforts to degrade the financial infrastructure of the terrorist organization and to the success of the ongoing battle against the terrorist group.

The significant progress being made could not have been accomplished without the support of key allies. In this regard, we take note of the various forms of support offered by partners that have enabled the Somali Government to take the fight to Al-Shabaab.

While commending the Somali Government for the progress made in the security sector, it is important to point out that Somalia still faces significant challenges. Much more work remains to be done. Al-Shabaab continues to maintain the ability to outwit the security forces, allowing it the potential to launch lethal attacks against security personnel, civilians and Government officials.

We also note the need to improve the relations between the Federal Government and some federal member states, as well as between some opposition elements and several federal member states. Talks over Somaliland's status have also made little progress, and critical State-building tasks and funding gaps for implementation of the Somalia Transition Plan (STP) and the ATMIS mandate continue to be a significant obstacle.

Against the backdrop of the extended timelines for Phase 1 of the ATMIS Concept of Operations (CONOPS) established by resolution 2670 (2022), the A3 supports the call by ATMIS on the Security Council and international partners to assist in addressing the additional deficit created by the delayed drawdown of ATMIS, in addition to the Mission's other financing

gap and the Somali Government's quest to obtain both lethal and non-lethal support to equip the newly-generated SNA units and improve on their operational capabilities, particularly as preparations are in process for the complete withdrawal of ATMIS by December 2024. In this regard, we welcome the African Union/United Nations joint roadshow to raise resources for ATMIS and encourage the efforts deployed in this regard by both organizations.

We also support the African Union initiative to accelerate the implementation of the STP. However, we wish to caution that the sector-by-sector approach in terms of assessing the performance of the ATMIS CONOPS, as indicated in resolution 2670 (2022), should be conducted carefully and with the participation of all relevant stakeholders in a manner that avoids compromising the security gains achieved thus far.

Again, we take note of the return of the 3,500 Eritrean-trained SNA troops as well as those forces currently undergoing training in anticipation of the eventual departure of ATMIS. We are confident that these actions strengthen the capabilities of the Somali National Army and help to advance the campaign against Al-Shabaab for the benefit of the overall security of the country.

We continue to be alarmed by the humanitarian situation in Somalia brought on by a protracted drought following five consecutive years of failed rains, which has been aggravated by the effects of decades of conflict, mass displacement and a fragile economic situation that is driving some Somalis to the edge of starvation. As noted in the briefings today, almost 1.3 million people have been internally displaced as a result of the longest and most severe drought in Somalia's recent history, and an estimated 6.4 million Somalis will likely experience severe food insecurity in the first quarter of this year. Since mid-2021, more than 3.5 million animals have already perished, decreasing children's access to milk and contributing to their nutritional inadequacies due to the absence of the lost livestock.

In the light of the growing number of Somali civilians in critical need of humanitarian assistance, we renew our call for humanitarian donors to respond urgently to the humanitarian call. We further emphasize the necessity to assist the country in tackling the fundamental cause of the recurrent and continuous humanitarian disaster created by climate change. Somalia has been one of the smallest contributors to the climate crisis, yet it faces the most severe consequences

of climate change. Its conditions demonstrate the link between climate change and security in Africa and require the support of major economies in addressing the country's vulnerabilities to the vagaries of climate.

We acknowledge the importance of the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of Somalia and its neighbours — namely, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya — held on 1 February 2023 in Mogadishu. To completely free Somalia of the influence of Al-Shabaab and to facilitate the drawdown of ATMIS troops and the gradual transfer of security responsibilities to the Somali security forces, we support the recommendations outlined at that important Summit, including the agreement reached to make a final push for joint operations in areas still under the control of Al-Shabaab.

As a security transition predicated on the departure of ATMIS by the end of 2024 rapidly approaches, we urge the Security Council to rethink the comprehensive removal of the arms embargo on Somalia, which is essential in the fight against Al-Shabaab and vital to the country's peace and stability. The A3 calls on the international community to support Somalia in building her capacity in terms of training, logistics, mine clearance and human rights compliance. With the scheduled departure of African Union troops, it is imperative that the Somali defence and security forces be able to fulfil their sovereign duty to secure their territory.

In conclusion, we wish to recall the provision of resolution 2670 (2022) relating to the decision to convene a formal meeting on the transition in Somalia no later than 31 March with the participation of Somalia, the African Union, the European Union and ATMIS as well as troop-contributing countries. We believe that such a meeting could provide a unique platform for discussing ways and means of aligning priorities between the ATMIS CONOPS and the Somalia Transition Plan.

Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique reaffirm their support and commitment to Somalia's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity. We further encourage the Council and all key partners to take this into account as we seek to deliver long-term peace and stability for Somalia. We urge the Federal Government to lead the Somalia Transition Plan and direct all essential partnerships.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates): I thank Deputy Special Representative Gbeho, Special

Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission for Somalia Souef and UN-Women Executive Director Bahous for their comprehensive briefings. We also welcome Somalia's participation in this meeting.

Over the past six decades, Somalia has endured profound challenges, from conflict to climate shocks, piracy, poverty and famine. And yet, against overwhelming odds, the Somali people have cast aside the narrative of a failed State and have, instead, charted their own course towards peace and stability. While challenges remain, in recent months, since President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's election, Somalia's leadership has demonstrated its commitment and ability to keep the country on an upward trajectory and should be commended.

As we meet today, Somalia is at a critical inflection point, which represents a unique opportunity to end the cycle of conflict in a country that has been on the Security Council's agenda for over 30 years. This year could augur well for Somalia — if the Council and the international community seize the moment.

Building peace is more than preventing war. It is also about establishing an architecture that supports the country as it rebuilds itself. The international community needs to follow suit by helping to consolidate the sustainable peace Somalia deserves and is striving to achieve.

With that in mind, I would like to focus on three elements.

First, there is a need to support the ambitious frameworks put forward by Somalia since the elections towards more inclusive political, security, justice and economic reforms. We are encouraged by Somalia's efforts to foster national unity, in particular by strengthening relations and coordination with federal member states. Stable governance will require Somali stakeholders to stay resolutely committed to resolving differences through dialogue. In the context of the recent incidents in Laascaanood, we welcome the ceasefire and reiterate the importance of restraint.

Secondly, Somalia's most significant security challenge continues to be terrorism. For a decade and a half, Somalia has fought against the spread of Al-Shabaab's extremist ideology and violence. With the support of the United Nations, the African Union and other partners, Somalia continues to strengthen its capacity to counter terrorism. The United Arab

Emirates remains committed to assisting in whatever way it can in those efforts.

However, the international community must recognize that, as its methods grow more sophisticated and more lethal, Al-Shabaab's reach and influence pose an existential threat to Somalia and to international peace and security. Over the past four months, Al-Shabaab killed more than 500 people, including civilians and international peacekeepers, and it continues to subject women and girls to sexual violence as a tactic of domination. As we heard from Executive Director Bahous, the brutalization of women in territory controlled by Al-Shabaab continues unabated. That is reprehensible, and it shows the importance of addressing the impact of extremist ideologies on the lives of women and girls. Our approach as a Council must never be described as gender-blind.

Much more needs to be done to assist the Somali Government's efforts to combat Al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups.

At the national level, that entails strengthening national counter-terrorism capabilities, such as effectively securing the areas formerly controlled by Al-Shabaab, as well as ensuring the inclusive delivery of public services. That is critical to curtailing Al-Shabaab's influence and preventing a vacuum that it could exploit.

At the regional level, leaders have demonstrated that they are rising to the challenge, including most recently at the Mogadishu summit, and the Council should step up and support that cooperation. In addition, the partnership with the AU and the work of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia remain a key multiplier in bolstering Somalia's security and stability.

And finally, at the international level, the Council needs to rethink its counter-terrorism approaches. The current two-track system, which essentially applies the Council's counter-terrorism framework only when addressing those who are listed by the Council as Da'esh or Al-Qaida affiliates, has to be redesigned. The Council's tools to combat terrorism must be brought to bear in a consistent and predictable manner. Bridging that gap will help Somalia and other countries around the world counter terrorism more effectively on their soil.

However, counter-terrorism strategies will not be enough on their own. The consolidation of stability will

be viable only if paired with sustainable development and improved economic prospects for Somalia.

The country is experiencing the longest and most severe drought in recent history. The Secretary-General's report (S/2023/109) highlights how Somalia is on the brink of famine. The United Arab Emirates is gravely concerned about the fate of more than 20 million people currently experiencing food insecurity and almost 2 million children facing acute malnutrition. Scaling up humanitarian assistance will be the test of the international community's commitment to Somalia. Assistance needs to be gender-responsive, sensitive to Somalia's complex challenges and should encompass both immediate relief efforts and longer-term support for development and resilience.

The United Arab Emirates remains steadfast and unwavering in its support for the people of Somalia and takes note of the position put forward by Ghana, on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council, in that regard. My country aligns itself with that position.

Mrs. Thomas-Greenfield (United States of America): Let me thank Deputy Special Representative Gbeho, Special Representative Souef and Executive Director Bahous for their briefings and their insightful presentations today. I would also like to welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Somalia at today's meeting.

Last month I had the opportunity to visit Somalia to review the humanitarian stability and security situation. I want to thank Ms. Gbeho and Special Representative Souef for their support during my mission, as I met with both of them there.

Let me start with security and some good news. Thanks to the bravery of Somalia security forces and citizens, since last summer, over 70 towns in Hirshabelle and Galmudug have been liberated from Al-Shabaab's brutal rule. Unfortunately, lives were lost in the process. We mourn the Somali people killed in the struggle to free their country from terrorism. One such victim was Danab Deputy Commander Major Hassan Mohamed Osman. His sacrifice and that of others like him reinforces the commitment of the United States to support Somali-led efforts to defeat Al-Shabaab and provide security to the people of Somalia.

We therefore welcome the recent commitment by Somalia and its neighbours to expand operations against Al-Shabaab further into southern Somalia, and

we strongly support and call on other international partners to help meet Somalia's force-generation needs. Stability, which is of course directly tied to security, remains a challenge in Somalia. Delivering timely and balanced stabilization interventions to newly liberated territory is imperative to bring security and relief to the Somali people in those areas. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSAM) has a critical role to support the Federal Government of Somalia's planning and coordination of stabilization efforts in response to operations. We appreciate UNSAM's efforts to continue highlighting the need for long-term approaches to security and good governance based on security sector reform and the rule of law. Those efforts will pave the way for lasting peace and security in Somalia.

We still support the Federal Government's stated goal of ending the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) by the end of 2024. We expect that drawdown plans will be coordinated with Somali officials in line with Somali-defined security priorities on the ground. But ATMIS has played a key role in the ongoing Somali-led operations against Al-Shabaab. In the meantime, we therefore urge ATMIS to continue to provide the necessary support, in close collaboration with our Somali partners.

The United States also welcomes progress towards federalism and political reconciliation. We congratulated the Federal Government and those federal member states that have come to agreement on the national security architecture and a national justice sector framework. We similarly welcomed the agreement reached on parliamentary and presidential elections in South-West state. However, we are still gravely concerned about the violence in Laascaanood, particularly the indiscriminate shelling of civilians. We call for an immediate de-escalation of violence, the protection of civilians, unimpeded humanitarian access and for tensions to be resolved peacefully through dialogue.

Finally, I want to talk about the drought and the potential for famine again in Somalia. Famine is the ultimate failure of the international community. In a world abundant with food, entire communities should never have to starve to death. The Council cannot sit here and accept that failure.

Since 2022, the United States has provided more than \$2.5 billion of life-saving assistance to the Horn of Africa. Some \$1.3 billion of that went directly to

Somalia. Our funding last year accounted for more than 80 per cent of the World Food Programme's emergency operations in the region. We delayed the onset of famine, but it was only a delay.

On my recent trip to Mogadishu, I announced that the United States would provide another \$40 million to Somalia. That funding will address extreme food gaps and combat the outbreak of deadly diseases. But starting this April, the risk of famine will return. According to the United Nations own figures, without contributions from other donors, critical food and nutrition assistance, supporting 4.6 million people in Somalia, will end in April. We all just heard the call of Ms. Gbeho.

I was clear in Somalia, and I will be clear with all members in the Chamber. The United States cannot continue to do that alone. This is a collective responsibility. I call on the international community, especially countries in the region and countries with the means to give more, to heed the call of humanity.

Amid this crisis, it has been devastating to watch some traditional donors cut their humanitarian budgets. We cannot slash or even merely sustain our aid budgets. We must increase our funding in the year ahead. We must turn this famine postponement into a cancellation. And that will require more countries to contribute and give more, both bilaterally and multilaterally. I therefore appeal to all my colleagues around the table on this issue today. Let us be ambitious. Let us fight this famine and let us do it together. Let us save lives.

Before ending, let me note our continued focus on the situation in Türkiye and Syria, where they have experienced another earthquake less than 24 hours ago. Let me also express my condolences on the devastation and loss of more lives.

Mr. Olmedo (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank briefers for their briefings and would like to make three points.

First of all, we encourage the Somali Government to continue its efforts to implement political reform and fight against Al-Shabaab. Cooperation between the Federal Government of Somalia and the member states is encouraging and must continue. Institutions must be strengthened, and the Constitution finalized, via an inclusive process that gives women and young people their rightful place.

France welcomes the Somali Government's determination to fight against Al-Shabaab, and we reiterate our firm condemnation of the terrorist attacks perpetrated by that group. Efforts towards stabilization, disarmament and reconciliation must be increased in areas that were recovered from Al-Shabaab. Strengthening the national security architecture will also help to build lasting peace.

As others are, France is concerned about the violence in Laascaanood, in the Sool region. De-escalation must be urgently initiated, civilians protected and safe and unfettered humanitarian access guaranteed. Only through dialogue will tensions be resolved.

Secondly, the international community must rally to provide assistance to the most vulnerable Somali people. The humanitarian situation is deteriorating, and the risk of famine remains. Women and children are the primary victims. We call upon international partners to support the humanitarian response plan, which requires \$2.6 billion this year.

France is making a tangible contribution. In December last year, a World Food Programme vessel was able to deliver 25,000 tons of wheat, provided by Ukraine to the Somali people. It was France that financed that effort with €14 million.

Efforts to protect human rights, in particular the rights of women and children, must continue. As stated by the Executive Director of UN-Women, the plight of women in Somalia remains very difficult. We commend the launch of the national action plan for the implementation of resolution 1325 (2000). However, we remain concerned about the increase in sexual and gender-based violence.

Lastly, and this is my third point, Somali troops must continue to grow stronger. The Somali Government and the contingents of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) must be resolutely committed to the security transition in order to meet the goals of resolution 2628 (2022). That is the prerequisite for the Somali people to take charge of their own medium-term security and enable the complete withdrawal of ATMIS by 31 December 2024. Until then, we encourage the efforts of Somalia, the African Union and ATMIS to ensure the successful drawdown of 2,000 soldiers from the Mission by 30 June 2023, in accordance with resolution 2670 (2022).

This year, once again, the European Union remains the largest ATMIS contributor. In parallel, it

contributes to the strengthening of Somali troops with its European Union Training Mission Somalia and financial instruments, including the European Peace Facility. However, other partners must also commit to standing with us in support of Somalia.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I would also like to thank the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM); Special Representative Mohamed El-Amine Souef and Executive Director Bahous for their comprehensive briefings. We also welcome the Permanent Representative of Somalia to today's meeting.

We are encouraged by the political and security momentum in Somalia, but, with regard to the humanitarian response, more needs to be done. We welcome the progress made on the implementation of Federal Government priorities, and the holding of regular meetings of the National Consultative Council has contributed to it. We welcome the agreement on the distribution of powers between the Federal Government and the federal member states. However, that process should be pushed further to include all federal member states. The limited cooperation announced by Puntland is indeed concerning, as are the bloody tensions in Laascaanood. De-escalation and dialogue are the only way forward, and including all stakeholders, mainly women and youth, is a must.

We are following the developments in the fight against Al-Shabaab. While we commend Government-led offensive operations against the terrorist group, we are alarmed by the ability of Al-Shabaab to carry out high-impact attacks against Government security forces and civilian targets in urban centres across the country.

It is crucial for military operations to be combined with socioeconomic measures. We cannot afford to risk losing State control of the newly liberated areas because the population's essential needs are not met. In that vein, support for the implementation of the updated national stabilization strategy is key to securing the areas recovered from Al-Shabaab. In addition to that, the adoption of the new counter-terrorism strategy is a positive step in eroding the ability of Al-Shabaab to impose taxation, recruitment and territorial control.

Somalia needs the support of the international community, along with its neighbours, who share the same challenges. The summit convened on 1 February in Mogadishu proved the regional dimension of the

threat caused by Al-Shabaab and the need for common efforts to counter terrorism.

We are deeply disturbed by the devastating impact of the drought on women and children, who make up more than 80 per cent of Somalia's displaced population and are frequent victims of human rights violations and conflict-related sexual violence. The increase in sexual and gender-based violence is deeply concerning. We urge the Federal Government to investigate without delay all reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence and to hold the perpetrators to account. As we are all aware, planning, directing or committing acts of sexual and gender-based violence are stand-alone listing criteria under the Somalia sanctions regime. We in the Security Council should make greater use of that provision and use targeted sanctions as a way to punish the perpetrators of such crimes. We welcome the launch of the Somali action plan to implement the Somali Women's Charter and the national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000), and urge for their genuine implementation.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate our support for UNSOM and thank the international partners of Somalia who have contributed to peacebuilding and have supported the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and the Somali authorities in gradually taking over their security responsibilities, a challenging process that will require constructive efforts from all sides until the full security takeover is completed. We also commend ATMIS for its sacrifices and call for its continued support and collaboration with Somali forces in order to meet the expectations for the Somalia Transition Plan.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Gbeho, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Souef, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, and Ms. Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, for their briefings. I also would like to welcome the representative of Somalia.

We welcome your call on Council members to pay special attention to the women and peace and security agenda in our deliberations today, Madam President. As a Somali proverb says, "the best bed to sleep on is peace." However, if peace is for the benefit of all, it is also the responsibility of one and all. Just as they are elsewhere, women are essential creators of sustainable peace in Somalia, and their important contributions

will therefore serve as a common thread for the three points I wish to share.

First, the full, equal and meaningful participation of women is essential to advancing Somalia's national priorities. It is particularly important to safeguard the participation of female candidates running for political office, as well as elected female representatives, so that they can contribute to political processes at every level, free from threats or reprisals. In that regard, the national action plan on women and peace and security and the action plan for the implementation of the Somali Women's Charter are key instruments, and we encourage their full implementation. Switzerland has long been committed to active engagement with Somali society as a whole and in all its diversity, as well as to strengthening local governance. That means that the voices of women, as well as those of young people and minority groups, must be heard without hindrance and integrated into decision-making processes and public life. That approach is important for the constitutional review, the power-sharing discussion and for reconciliation between the Federal Government and the federal member states. We welcome the regular meetings of the National Consultative Council in that regard and encourage continued constructive dialogue.

Secondly, we remain concerned about human rights violations and abuses, including sexual and gender-based violence. It is vital to ensure women's rights and a safe and respectful environment that can enable women to fully participate in peacebuilding in Somalia. We encourage the authorities to continue their efforts to combat and prevent those violations. We also encourage Parliament to pass the 2018 sexual offences bill without delay.

Respect for international law must be at the heart of the responses to insecurity throughout the country. We deplore the continued attacks by Al-Shabaab and other armed groups and acknowledge the efforts of the Government and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia to address them. As they do that, we call on all actors to respect international law, including human rights and international humanitarian law, in order to ensure the protection of civilians, particularly in areas under military operations. We are also concerned about the current outbreak of violence in Laascaanood, which has resulted in massive displacement, with women and children being the worst affected. Respect for international humanitarian law is imperative to ensure timely, safe and unhindered humanitarian access.

Thirdly, Somalia is on the brink of famine. Climate change is clearly a major factor. Women are often the first to face it, and are disproportionately affected. The humanitarian response in Somalia should therefore be designed and implemented with the active participation of women, while also remaining sensitive to climate effects and risks. We are currently seeing that in the shape of the region's most severe drought in four decades, which is further increasing food insecurity. The risks include violence due to increased competition for natural resources, heightened tensions within communities and the forced displacement that may result. We must continue to support the Government in its response to the humanitarian situation.

Somalia's national priorities indicate a strong commitment and clear direction towards a prosperous future in which the country can become "at peace with itself". Women will undoubtedly be at the heart of that commitment. We commend the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), which is playing a crucial role. Switzerland will continue to support Somalia, its people and UNSOM in their peacebuilding efforts. We count on a united Security Council to do the same.

Mr. De Almeida Filho (Brazil): I thank Ms. Gbeho, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Souef, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia, and Ms. Bahous, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women, for their informative briefings. I also welcome Ambassador Osman and the Somali delegation to this meeting. I would like to express our appreciation for the work of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and to thank the troop- and police-contributing countries that enable ATMIS and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) to do their work. Let me also thank Ambassador Swan for his leadership of UNSOM.

We are worried about the figures in the Secretary-General's report (S/2023/109) indicating that Somalia recorded a significant increase in civilian casualties in 2022. The high lethality of some of the attacks perpetrated by Al-Shabaab during the reporting period is also extremely concerning. Nevertheless, I would like to underscore that we are pleased with the progress that has been made in the fight against Al-Shabaab, especially through the dislodging of the group from several areas in various Somali states. We commend the

Federal Government of Somalia, the federal member states and all the relevant partners that are working together to address that threat.

For those achievements to have a lasting effect, it will be essential to design and implement sound peacebuilding initiatives. Brazil has repeatedly emphasized the Peacebuilding Commission's unique position in the United Nations system, as it could play a bigger role in Somalia. The Peacebuilding Fund also finances invaluable projects in the country. We commend the implementation of the national security architecture and encourage Somalia to redouble its efforts on that front. And we note with appreciation how reconciliation initiatives have been integral to the recovered territories.

Brazil stands ready to keep its engagement in the ATMIS reconfiguration and the security transition that is taking place across Somali institutions. We hope that the Federal Government of Somalia and the federal member states keep to the recent pattern of regular National Consultative Council meetings. Above all, we encourage the sustained dialogue among Somalia's leaders to address the most pressing national priorities.

The serious humanitarian situation in Somalia demands attention from the Council. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Somali Red Crescent Society and all humanitarian agencies that provide vital assistance in Somalia have issued clear warnings on that crisis in the past months. With the projections of more than 8 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in 2023, we should work towards scaling up assistance in an improved and sustained way in order to prevent famine.

Forced displacement has hit Somali women and children the hardest. Therefore, we should also address the protection gaps and inequalities that the current humanitarian crisis aggravated. Chiefly among those responses is the implementation of gender-inclusive humanitarian efforts. Such assistance would enable a safer environment for the women and children who suffer disproportionately from the current tragic situation. We therefore endorse the appeal made by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia on the matter. Somali women deserve bolder assistance from the international community and humanitarian partners to lead the way not only in overcoming the current crisis, but also in rebuilding their communities afterwards.

Mr. Ishikane (Japan): I thank Deputy Special Representative Gbeho, Special Representative Souef and Executive Director Bahous of UN-Women for their briefings and contributions.

Peace and stability in Somalia is essential for a stable and prosperous Horn of Africa and can contribute to a vibrant maritime economy, expanding from the Gulf of Aden to the Indian Ocean. Under the leadership of the newly elected federal President, Somalia has seen fresh momentum for its State-building efforts, despite the lingering challenges it continues to face. In that regard, Japan emphasizes the vital role played by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia and commends their tireless efforts.

In furtherance of the aspirations of the people of Somalia and the successful fulfilment of the mandates of the three missions deployed in Somalia, Japan believes that the following points are essential.

First, Somalia needs stronger partnerships and support from the international community, particularly from its neighbours. The summit of Somalia's neighbouring States held in Mogadishu on 1 February demonstrated renewed regional solidarity against common threats. Japan welcomes the leaders' articulation of their strong will to foster coordination by establishing mechanisms for operations and border security. The sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and unity of Somalia is paramount and cannot be achieved with porous borders. Regional cooperation to prevent the cross-border movement of terrorists, illegal weapons and ammunition must be expanded.

Secondly, institution-building is vital across all sectors. We commend the recent operational advancements of the Somali National Army, with the help of community defence forces. Their operations have led to the further liberation of certain Al-Shabaab strongholds. In order to hold onto those newly liberated areas and deliver sufficient security and basic services, it is crucial to build institutions and capacities at the local and community levels. That has to be done through close cooperation between the Federal Government and federal member states, with the support of international community. Japan, for its part, has contributed to the capacity development of central and local government officials by providing training programmes. Local institutions and security forces must be able to garner

the trust and confidence of people on the ground. Such efforts will create conditions in which the presence of ATMIS is no longer required.

Thirdly, it is essential to protect the most vulnerable and address multifaceted threats to human security in a holistic manner. Unabated clashes and violence continue to displace a large number of women and children, who are exposed to the risk of falling victim to child recruitment and sexual violence. Those challenges add to the already acute humanitarian situation caused and exacerbated by severe droughts and other climate impacts. An approach from a women and peace and security perspective is critically important in overcoming the difficulties Somalia faces. The humanitarian-development-peace nexus should be the key to our approach. In order to build community resilience, we should further integrate our assistance on that nexus with regard to food security, medical care, youth empowerment and more.

Let me conclude by assuring the Council that Japan continues to play its part, including as Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Al-Shabaab, in promoting peace and stability in Somalia and the broader region.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank the Deputy Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, Ms. Anita Kiki Gbeho; the Head of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, Mr. Mohamed El-Amine Souef; and the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, for their briefings.

We are closely following the situation as it develops in the Federal Republic of Somalia, where the internal security situation remains difficult, the level of terrorist threat remains high and the deep territorial and clan fragmentation of society persists. The conclusion last year of the protracted electoral cycle created good preconditions for restoring State institutions, gradually promoting national reconciliation and improving the security situation in the country. We anticipate that all participants in the Somali political process, including the leadership of the states of Puntland and Somaliland, will continue working together to establish a stable model for a federal structure. At the same time, we continue to believe in the need to preserve the territorial integrity and unity of Somalia.

We consistently support the efforts of Mogadishu to stabilize the internal political situation. We note

that the work of the National Consultative Council has intensified, within the framework of which the Federal Government and states have reached important agreements on cooperation for the implementation of key national priorities. We welcome the signing of an agreement between the Federal Government and the Somali state authorities on the division of power.

Meanwhile, we note the overall dire humanitarian situation throughout Somali territory. A significant part of the population remains on the brink of famine, which is expected to reach its peak in April and June this year if the necessary level of humanitarian assistance cannot be provided.

The security situation in the country also remains of great concern. The extremist group Al-Shabaab continues to attack Government facilities, military units, international organizations and civilians in urban areas, especially in the capital and the Lower Shabelle region. On 23 January, militants fired on a helicopter belonging to the Russian joint-stock company UTair-Helicopter Services, which is involved in providing airlift services to the United Nations humanitarian mission in Somalia.

We are aware that the Somali National Army, supported by local militias, conducted a series of successful offensive operations in the states of Galmudug and Hirshabelle, which resulted in the liberation of several towns from Al-Shabaab. The federal authorities also facilitated a resolution of the situation in South-West state. However, we are seriously concerned by the confrontation that broke out in the disputed region of Sool between Somaliland and Puntland. We hope that that conflict situation will be resolved as soon as possible.

In that context, we attach great importance to the work of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, which plays a key role in combating terrorism and ensuring domestic security. We consider its presence a critical factor in deterring extremist and other illegal activities in Somalia and a prerequisite for making progress in strengthening its statehood.

We view positively the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia. We note the efforts made by Somalia's neighbours to provide assistance in combating terrorism and welcomed the regional summit in Mogadishu on 1 February, which brought together the leaders of Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia

and saw the signing of a number of agreements with a view to bolstering joint action against the Al-Shabaab extremist group.

At this point, as a priority, we need to focus on increasing the effectiveness of Somalia's federal enforcement bodies so they can ensure effective control of the situation themselves. By the time ATMIS concludes its work, the Somali people should be able to assume full responsibility for ensuring security throughout Somalia's territory.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Ms. Gbeho, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), Mr. Souef, Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission for Somalia and Head of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia, and Ms. Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, for their briefings.

We recognize the commitment undertaken by the Federal Government of Somalia, with the support of the United Nations system in general and UNSOM in particular, to continuing to ensure the country's reconstruction with a view to achieving a lasting peace. It is therefore crucial to have a policy of openness that enables the enhancement of those efforts while ensuring transparency and trust. In that context, we call for that work to continue and for strengthening it in the following areas.

First, on the political front, we hope that the National Consultative Council will continue to work on the national plan and the electoral processes. Inclusive democracy has been shown to be key in overcoming conflicts, building institutions, and implementing policies aimed at ensuring economic well-being, social development and public safety. As a signatory to the Shared Commitments initiative for the Security Council's agenda on women and peace and security, Ecuador acknowledges the political will that the Government of Somalia has demonstrated in acting to promote the political and social participation of women, including through the Somali Women's Charter and the country's national action plan on resolution 1325 (2000). We encourage Somalia to strengthen those strategies in order to ensure greater and more equitable participation by women in Parliament and governmental institutions.

Secondly, regarding security, we regret that Al-Shabaab continues to perpetrate attacks causing

death and suffering. We condemn those heinous acts and hope they will not go unpunished. Al-Shabaab must be held accountable for its use of violence and for its violations and abuses of human rights. The outcomes of the summit of Heads of State and Government of Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia held on 1 February are encouraging. They affirm the need to support regional efforts and the critical importance of regional unity in confronting threats such as those posed by Al-Shabaab. We therefore urge that those joint efforts continue.

Thirdly, the protection of civilians is an issue of the utmost concern for my delegation. Based on what we have heard today, about half of Somalia's population is in need of humanitarian assistance. Famine and the predicted droughts have led to rising levels of food insecurity and chronic malnutrition for 1.8 million children under the age of five. We are also seeing forced displacement and its consequences, in addition to an increase in all types of violence. We therefore have no choice but to unite our voices in support of the most vulnerable. It is vital to ensure the implementation of the 2018 sexual offences law, which incorporates policies for preventing sexual violence against women and girls and protecting them from it, in addition to underscoring the importance of accountability in the transition to national reconciliation and peace.

We condemn the looting and destruction of humanitarian goods, as well as attacks and threats against humanitarian personnel. Somalia is in need of essential goods and supplies to ensure the survival of its civil society. The international community cannot remain inactive in the face of that situation and must assist the efforts of Somalis and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia. Ecuador commends the substantial cooperation between UNSOM and the Government of Somalia on issues such as reducing and eradicating female genital mutilation, child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, democratizing access to sexual and reproductive health services, promoting a culture of prevention with regard to sexual violence against women and girls and producing gender-disaggregated data to provide specific information on the number of women and girls who are victims of sexual violence in order to develop public policy.

Lastly, we recognize the Government of Somalia's efforts within the framework of resolution 2628 (2022) and call for joint action to be taken by regional, subregional and international organizations and within

the United Nations system to alleviate the crisis. We also welcome the presence of the Permanent Representative of Somalia in the Chamber today.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Malta.

I thank Ms. Gbeho, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Acting Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, Special Representative Souef and Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director Bahous for their briefings. We welcome the participation of the Permanent Representative of Somalia in today's meeting.

I also want to express our deep disappointment that the current conditions were not conducive to the safe participation of a civil-society representative to brief the Security Council on women and peace and security issues. We remain firm in our belief that the voice of civil society needs to be heard, and we need to do more to enable the safe participation of civil-society briefers without fear of reprisals, harassment or abuse. For those reasons, we are circulating as a document of the Security Council the statement that would have been delivered on behalf of the Somali Gender Equity Movement, a non-partisan sociopolitical global movement made up of 9,000 diverse Somali women inside the country and in the diaspora who have united to advocate for gender equity in Somalia.

Somalia is on a path towards a holistic transformation, and the political reforms already achieved should continue to incentivize further progress. Progress in the constitutional review process to achieve an effective model of federalism for Somalia remains key. We are encouraged by the recent agreements on the allocation of powers and the establishment of technical committees to review and prepare recommendations on issues of national security and universal suffrage elections. On that note, Malta underlines the importance of inclusive, free and fair elections and a civic space that represents all stakeholders. The full, equal and meaningful participation of women is the backbone of every society. We welcome the launch of the Somali Women's Charter and Somalia's national action plan on women and peace and security and urge their full implementation. Only when all Somali women become an integral part of all policy- and decision-making will it be possible to establish a foundation for effective governance, sustainable peace and development.

On the security front, 2022 was the deadliest year we have seen, with a 153 per cent increase in civilian casualties. Al-Shabaab continues to exploit regional instability. Malta strongly condemns all offensives carried out by Al-Shabaab, especially those targeting civilians.

Malta remains supportive of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), which assists in the systematic harmonization of Somalia's security sector. Together with the European Union, a major donor to ATMIS, we also continue to support a gradual handover of security responsibilities to Somalia. We commend the African Union's continued commitment and appeal for the eventual completion of ATMIS by 2024.

Somalia remains subject to the heaviest impacts emanating from food insecurity, compounded by extreme droughts. Almost half of the Somali population suffers from severe food insecurity. We are deeply concerned about trends of severe malnutrition and the lack of hygiene, risking increases in diseases and further displacement.

We are alarmed by the way that those overlapping threats have left children out of school and, consequently, subject to exploitative and dangerous conditions. With up to 1,127 violations against children recorded, we call for swift justice and accountability, and we continue to support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Malta is deeply committed to combating all forms of violence, including conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. We are pleased to hear of a number of programmes developed for raising awareness on conflict-related sexual violence, including multi-stakeholder workshops to address any social or legal impediments to ensuring accountability. We urge the Somali authorities to investigate and prosecute all reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence, based on a survivor-centred approach. The perpetrators of such crimes must be held accountable. We also echo UNSOM's call for a more gender-inclusive humanitarian response, with a focus on displaced women and girls in areas heavily affected by drought.

In conclusion, Malta reiterates its continued support for Somalia. We commend the work carried out by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNSOM in partnership with regional actors and the international community. The

pursuit to restore lasting peace, security and stability in Somalia should remain our compass.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of Somalia.

Mr. Osman (Somalia): At the outset, I would like to congratulate and wish every success to the Maltese presidency of the Security Council for this month. I also want to thank the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission for Somalia, Mr. Mohamed El-Amine Souef, and Ms. Anita Kiki Gbeho, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), for their briefings. And I thank Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women.

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud of the Federal Republic of Somalia has further solidified his vision of underscoring a whole-of-Government approach that places equal effort on upholding State-building through an inclusive political settlement and long-term reconciliation process. The past few months have witnessed the achievement of many of the articulated priorities of the Federal Government of Somalia. On the political front, regular national consultative meetings were held by the President to deepen federalism and enhance cooperation on State-building priorities. The successful conclusion of the reconciliation conference in the capital of South-West state, Baidoa, from 17 January to 5 February, is a true testament to the Government's inclusive engagement with all stakeholders to resolve outstanding issues and build on and implement the agreements and outcomes of the sessions of the National Consultative Council.

Somalia hosted neighbouring countries' Heads of State from Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya at a historic front-line State summit in Mogadishu last month at which they agreed to fully strengthen bilateral security cooperation and the final push in regional effort to defeat international terrorists in Somalia. That is both timely and sensible and is the only way to sustainably deliver peace and security to our region and the continent, in general, given the fact that we face a common threat. Somalia is truly grateful to all its international partners that are standing with us in solidarity in the fight against international terrorism at home.

The Somali Government is making demonstrable headway in its new comprehensive strategy of fighting

Al-Shabaab militarily and ideologically. We have decided that enough is enough and that the international terrorist group Al-Khawarij must be comprehensively defeated once and for all. The Somali Government convened a conference bringing together more than 300 religious scholars and clerics in Mogadishu in January. The clerics and scholars, who had come from across the regions of Somalia and the diaspora, declared their support for the Government's war against Al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups and ideologically challenged their violent extremist ideologies. Our people have answered our Government's call to stand with us in the fight to liberate territories controlled by the terrorist groups. And they are now organically organizing and fighting together with Somali National Army and other security forces to make Somalia safer for their own future.

Since the previous reporting period, our national armed forces have intensified their offensive operations against terrorist groups in the states of Hirshabelle and Galmudug and has dislodged them from many towns and villages. Despite constraints in logistical and financial resources, the Somali security forces began to conduct clearance and target operations in South-West state and Jubbaland states. So far, all recent operations have been successful in all Somali national armed forces operation areas where critical main supply routes and population centres have been liberated. Although the implementation of the Somalia Transition Plan for security is a resource-intensive exercise, it is worth noting that the Federal Government of Somalia has indeed successfully achieved at least 90 per cent of the priorities and objectives outlined in the previous report that was submitted to the Council in October 2022. Nonetheless, the activities of the Somalia Transition Plan will not succeed unless the long-standing arms embargo on Somalia is fully lifted and articulated international support is made available and restructured with proper alignment to the realities on the ground, including investment in quick-impact projects in the recently liberated areas.

Somalia averted the looming famine last year. We thank donors and humanitarian agencies for heeding the call of the Government in addressing the humanitarian needs of the local population. In that regard, we stress the importance of the nexus between humanitarian

and development assistance, which is crucial to the work involving the Federal Government of Somalia's long-term strategies to invest in and support systemic transformation across long-term cycles. Furthermore, we stress utilizing country systems, which is an important component in building our State capacity to maintain security, foster economic stability and growth and deliver services. Bypassing country systems creates additional transaction costs for our Government and may distract attention from the systems that govern the use of domestic resources, undermining State accountability.

In northern Somalia, we remain appalled by and condemn the aggression against the people of Laascaanood, which has caused immeasurable human suffering and loss of life and large-scale civilian displacement. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamed has called for an immediate end to hostilities and negotiating a lasting ceasefire. The Federal Government of Somalia stands ready to create the conditions for the start of an inclusive Somali-owned national dialogue to resolve the conflict and thereby create the foundation for peace and stability throughout the country. The Federal Government of Somalia underlines its duty to protect the Somali population and the responsibility to continue to provide substantial ongoing humanitarian support to those affected by the conflict in Laascaanood, in particular women and children. We call on our international partners to provide immediate assistance in the form of safe, rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access and enabling the delivery of humanitarian aid to the population of Laascaanood and the Sool region.

What is happening in Laascaanood today is a crime against humanity, and it is against the values of the Somali people. In that regard, there can be no impunity for such crimes involving indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Furthermore, the Federal Government of Somalia is committed to investigate and hold the perpetrators accountable.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.