



HIGHLIGHTS

- Political, security and humanitarian matters in focus on International Partners' visits
- Top humanitarian forum calls for increased support and humanitarian access to save lives
- UN Special Representative briefs Security Council on Somalia
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POLITICAL, SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN MATTERS IN FOCUS ON VISITS ACROSS SOMALIA

Along with various international partners, the UN continued its regular engagement with the leaders of Somalia's Federal Member States and others.

Over the past three months, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, visited South West State, Jubaland, Puntland and Galmudug, either alone or accompanied by officials from the international community and the UN system.

Topics high on the agenda included the humanitarian and security situations in each Federal Member State, as well as political developments, with the latter focusing on federal and state collaboration.

South West State

In September, Mr. Swan headed a delegation made up of representatives from several of

Somalia's international partners on a visit to South West State.

The UN official was accompanied by the Acting Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and Head of the African Union Transition Mission to Somalia (ATMIS), Fiona Lortan; Ethiopia's Ambassador to Somalia, Abdulfatah Hassan;

Sweden's Ambassador to Somalia, Per Lindgarde; the US Ambassador to Somalia, Larry Andre; the Team Leader of the European Union Delegation to Somalia, Jens Hoegel; Germany's Deputy Ambassador to Somalia, Sascha Kienzle; and, from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Head of Mission in Somalia, Abdi Ibrahim.

They met with South West State's President Abdiiaz Hassan Mohamed 'Laftagareen' and members of his cabinet and advisors.

"On the political front, we welcomed the South West State Administration's continued efforts to strengthen local

governance, and we are encouraged by the just-concluded formation of a District Council in Huddur. We hope that this sets an example for other such district council endeavours," Mr. Swan said in media remarks at the Presidential Palace in Baidoa.

"We stressed the importance of ensuring that people are accorded the space to express themselves freely, including freedom of assembly, organisation, and media, as the people of South West State debate key issues on the public agenda," he added.

With millions of people affected by Somalia's ongoing drought, he also addressed the issue of humanitarian assistance.

"Somalia's international partners are seriously concerned about the difficult humanitarian situation affecting South West State's residents and those who have arrived from elsewhere due to displacement caused by the drought," Mr. Swan said. "We are wholeheartedly committed to continuing to support South West State as it faces this immense challenge."

Jubaland

It was a similar situation during his visit to Jubaland, Somalia's southernmost Federal Member State, also in September.

"This visit is one of several we are making to the Federal Member States to focus attention on the prolonged drought, which is the worst in four decades and has devastated and ravaged many parts of the country. Here, in Jubaland, the drought has led to emergency levels of food insecurity," the Special Representative said when addressing the press in the state's interim capital, Kismayo, after meeting with the Federal Member State's President Ahmed Mohamed Islam 'Madobe.'

"Beyond the issue of the drought response," he added, "the United Nations stands ready to support the Jubaland administration in the formation of district councils, and in advancing reconciliation within Jubaland state. We urge, in this regard, due representation of women, youth and minority communities in governance and leadership."

On the visit, the UN Special Representative was accompanied by officials from various UN agencies working in Somalia. They included the Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), Jocelyn Mason; the Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Etienne Peterschmitt; the Country Representative of the UN Population Fund

(UNFPA), Edward Adeniyi Ojuolape; and the Deputy Country Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), Laura Turner.

Puntland

The visit to Puntland in September, in Somalia's north, involved Mr. Swan and representatives from some of the country's international partners.

The delegation's other members were the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Ambassador Francisco Madeira; the European Union Ambassador to Somalia, Tiina Intelmann; and Sweden's Ambassador to Somalia, Per Lindgarde.

In Garowe, Mr. Swan discussed support for humanitarian, security and development efforts. Addressing the media, at a joint press conference with Puntland's President Said Abdullahi Deni, the Special Representative underlined the UN's readiness to support Puntland's democratisation efforts following local elections in 2021 and commended the government and people's commitment to direct local elections.

Galmudug

In July, the UN Special Representative visited the capital city of Galmudug, Dhusamareb, where he met with the Federal Member State's President Ahmed Abdi Kariye.

"We had the opportunity to discuss Somalia's successful completion of the electoral processes – including the House of the People and Presidential elections – and the important tasks that now lie ahead for the Federal Government and Federal Member States, including state-building, reconciliation and peacebuilding processes, improving security and, of course, preventing famine," Mr. Swan said to the media after meeting the president. "Looking ahead, the president has assured of his commitment to work with the new federal administration and ensure that key national priorities are achieved."

In his remarks, Mr. Swan highlighted that they had also discussed the security situation in Galmudug, in particular recent Al-Shabaab attacks in its Mudug region. He also acknowledged the efforts of security forces against the terrorist group, and noted President Kariye's commitment to resolving other localized conflicts in the Federal Member State.



UN EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH SOMALI VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

Marking the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism on 21 August, the United Nations in Somalia honoured the many Somalis who have been affected by such violence and urged that they and their families be provided both immediate and longer-term support.

"The United Nations stands in solidarity with all Somali victims and survivors of terrorism as they heal from their trauma, along with their families and communities," the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, said in a press statement.

"Somalia has made commendable progress on its path to peace and stability, and

amid that progress, the voices of survivors must be heard and acknowledged, and their rights upheld – the past weekend's terrorist violence [19 August terrorist attack on Hayat hotel] in Mogadishu is a stark reminder of just how vital this is," he added.

The UN General Assembly established the International Day of Remembrance of and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism in 2017 to honour and support the victims and survivors of terrorism and to promote and protect the full enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.



UN CONDEMNS HAYAT HOTEL ATTACK

In August, the UN in Somalia strongly condemned the Al-Shabaab attack on the Hayat Hotel in the capital, Mogadishu, and extended its condolences to the victims' families. It also wished a speedy recovery for the injured, and expressed its solidarity with all Somalis in their fight against terrorism. Subsequently, the UN Secretary-General also strongly condemned the attack and reiterated the solidarity of the United Nations with the Government and the people of Somalia in their fight against terrorism and their march towards peace.



TOP HUMANITARIAN FORUM CALLS FOR INCREASED SUPPORT AND HUMANITARIAN ACCESS TO SAVE LIVES

Somalia is at a “tipping point,” with hundreds of thousands of people at immediate risk of famine, the heads of the UN’s highest-level humanitarian coordination forum warned in September.

In a statement, the principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) called for increased support and humanitarian access to save lives.

Famine is already unfolding in the Baidoa and Burhakaba districts of south-central Somalia, and they said the situation will likely last until March if aid is not significantly and immediately scaled up.

‘Unacceptable’ hunger crisis

Meanwhile, millions more Somalis face extreme levels of acute hunger. Women, particularly pregnant and lactating women, as well as children under five, are among the most vulnerable, and require urgent assistance now to avoid a worst-case scenario.

“Starvation and death are likely already occurring. During the 2011 famine, about 50 per cent of the more than 250,000 people who died, did so before the official declaration. At least half were children,” they said.

The IASC brings together the heads of 18 organizations, namely key UN agencies and their partners, to better prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises.

The warning comes as some 20.5 million people across the Horn of Africa are in the grip of what its chiefs called “a dire and entirely avoidable hunger crisis,” adding “this is unacceptable.”

They said famine declarations should not be the only trigger for meaningful action.

However, even though local authorities, governments, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been issuing alerts about catastrophic hunger for more than a year, they said these alerts have largely been overlooked.

‘Explosion in needs’

Furthermore, despite global commitments to anticipating crises, funding has not reached the scale needed.

Although a rapid scale-up of humanitarian assistance since early in the year has undoubtedly saved many lives, the “explosion in needs” is quickly outpacing resources.

“Together, we have averted famine before. We can and must do so again,” they said.

“In a world of staggering wealth, it is unacceptable that people are dying of hunger. We must take action now.”

Facilitate access

The statement called for all sides to facilitate immediate and safe access for humanitarian operations.

The partners also appealed for donors to provide immediate, flexible funding so that humanitarian agencies on the ground, particularly local and international NGOs, can rapidly scale up and prevent more deaths, protect livelihoods, and avert a deepening catastrophe.

Getting aid to rural communities before they are forced to abandon their homes in search of food is critical, they added.

‘A final warning’

The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths – who also chairs the

IASC – wrapped up a visit to Somalia in early September, his first to the country.

“I have been shocked to my core these past few days by the level of pain and suffering we see so many Somalis enduring,” he told journalists while in the capital, Mogadishu.

Mr. Griffiths described Baidoa as the “epicentre of the humanitarian crisis,” where children are so malnourished that they can barely speak, and said that in Banadir, near Mogadishu, medical teams are struggling to keep up with the rush of emaciated children who seek treatment.

“None of the children that I saw at the stabilization centre in Banadir hospital could smile,” recalled Mr. Griffiths. “Very few could cry. And as we discovered when we left, we had the good fortune to hear a child cry, and we were told that when a child cries, there is a chance of survival. Children who don’t cry are the ones we need to worry about.”

The UN relief chief warned that one and a half million children across Somalia risk acute malnutrition by October. He called for humanitarian organizations to be given immediate and safe access to all people in need, and for more funding to tackle the crisis.

“Famine is at the door,” he said, “and today we are receiving a final warning.”





UN SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON SOMALIA

In September, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan, briefed the Security Council at its regular meeting on the country. Below is the transcript of his remarks:

Mister President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to brief you on the situation in Somalia.

With the conclusion of the contentious electoral process in May, the political climate in Somalia is now more conducive to addressing key national priorities. To capitalise on this opportunity, federal and state authorities must collaborate closely to achieve progress on the new government's goals, including improving governance and justice, effectively countering Al-Shabaab, and responding urgently to the worsening humanitarian crisis. The United Nations is committed to supporting Somalis in achieving their national priorities.

I last briefed this Council just after the 15 May election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as the new President of Somalia. Since then, Parliament in June unanimously endorsed his nominee for Prime Minister, Hamza Abdi Barre, and in August confirmed his cabinet.

The new Government moved swiftly to present a four-year work programme, laying out goals and activities across six pillars. These include: security, justice, reconciliation, economic development, social development and foreign relations.

In parallel, Parliament completed the process of forming its committees, to include the joint Oversight Committee charged with steering the constitutional review process through parliament. The United Nations and other international partners are supporting Parliament to advance key legislative priorities.

Unfortunately, women remain under-represented in cabinet positions and parliamentary committees. Just 13 per cent of cabinet members are women, and 21 per cent of parliamentary committee members. I call again for Somali leaders to take further measures to ensure women's meaningful participation across institutions of government, as well as the inclusion of youth and historically marginalised groups.

Mister President,

President Hassan Sheikh has repeatedly highlighted the importance of improving relations between the central government and federal member states to advance national priorities. Among his first, commendable actions in office was to meet with Federal Member State (FMS) leaders in the National Consultative Council (NCC) and then visit several state capitals. I urge that this outreach to the FMSes continue and that the NCC meet again very soon. The UN is working with the Government in support of this important meeting.

Since taking office, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has also made multiple foreign visits to neighbouring countries and other important bilateral partners. I welcome his initiative to ensure close ties with all – even those countries with which relations were previously strained. I urge that this continue – particularly with regional neighbours.

Mister President,

The new Somali administration has identified security as its top national priority. This comes at a time when Al-Shabaab has demonstrated increased boldness. Al-Shabaab recent activities include targeted assassinations, complex attacks such as that on the Hayat Hotel in August, and large-scale military actions along the border with Ethiopia.



“The ongoing humanitarian crisis has especially contributed to the vulnerability of displaced women and children.”

I condemn these repeated terrorist attacks, extend my deep condolences to the families of those killed by Al-Shabaab, and wish a speedy recovery to the wounded. I commend the courage and tenacity of Somali Security Forces and the forces of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) who at great cost in lives continue to fight to defend the population against Al-Shabaab.

Somalia's efforts toward force generation, integration and coordination are necessary both to achieve military gains and to address citizens' protection concerns. Effective Somali forces are key to the planned transition from ATMIS. I reiterate the need for the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States to collaborate closely to counter Al-Shabaab, guided by Somalia's regional and international human rights commitments.

The implementation of security transition tasks mandated by Council resolution 2628 is advancing, including the request for the FGS, African Union, European Union, and United Nations to identify relevant, clear and realistic benchmarks for progress. UNSOS continues to provide mandated logistical support to ATMIS and, using Trust Fund contributions, to authorised Somali Security Forces. I remain deeply concerned by the shortfall in funding available for ATMIS salary stipends and for the Somali Security Forces Trust Fund and

urge additional donor contributions as a matter of urgency.

Mister President,

Somalia is facing a humanitarian catastrophe with some 7.8 million Somalis – nearly half of the country's estimated population – impacted by the worst drought in at least four decades, exacerbated by climate factors. With four consecutive failed rainy seasons, areas of the country face the risk of famine.

Thanks to generous donor support, humanitarian organisations have since January quadrupled the number of those reached with assistance to 5.3 million people. But with ever-escalating needs and a fifth failed rainy season projected, a further scale-up of humanitarian assistance is critical. I call on all parties in Somalia to facilitate humanitarian access. I call on all of Somalia's friends to increase urgently the needed funding.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis has especially contributed to the vulnerability of displaced women and children, who historically have

faced discrimination and exclusion from services. I urge the Somali authorities to increase prevention measures for the risk of sexual violence particularly against women and girls, including by strengthening security at water points and at food distribution sites.

Turning to the longer-term development agenda, Somalia has taken significant steps in the debt relief process. In June, the Board of the International Monetary Fund approved pending reviews, leading to the release of \$350 million in much-needed development funding. Similarly, other donors have resumed pending budgetary support to ease the financial pressure and to sustain the required reform efforts to complete the debt relief process.

Before concluding, Mister President, let me reiterate the commitment of the United Nations to continue supporting the Government and the Somali people in achieving their national goals. In this context, the Strategic Review of UNSOM is well advanced. The Review team visited Somalia in August and held extensive consultations with government officials and other stakeholders, ensuring that Somali views will inform its forthcoming report and recommendations to the Council.

Thank you very much.

I call on all parties in Somalia to facilitate humanitarian access.

I call on all of Somalia's friends to increase urgently the needed funding.”





IDIL AWIL ELMI

“I’D LIKE TO SEE FUTURE GENERATIONS

FREE FROM MENTAL PROBLEMS”

Somalia’s population stands at around an estimated 16.8 million people – however, to cater to their mental health needs there are just 82 professionals throughout the entire country.

Idil Awil Elmi is one of them.

With the country rebuilding after decades of civil war, and still dealing with the impact of Al-Shabaab violence and ongoing humanitarian crises, she and her counterparts have their work cut out.



The challenges are such that, for example, in the Somali language there is no specific word for ‘depression’ and there is still plenty of social stigma associated with mental health.

“Now more than ever, Somalis need mental health support. As a resilient society, Somalis have endured the effects of protracted conflict, and one health emergency after another,” the UN World Health Organization’s Representative to Somalia, Dr. Mamunur Rahman Malik, has said in the past.

Providing that support is a challenge which Ms. Elmi, a clinical psychologist, has been tackling for more than a decade, and relishes.

Father’s advice

Ms. Elmi was born in 1984 in the Somali capital of Mogadishu, which meant she was a young girl when the civil war erupted in the 1990s and devastated so much of the country, both in terms of physical damage but also in terms of Somalis’ mental well-being.

Obtaining an education was no easy feat amidst the conflict, but Ms. Elmi persisted. She began at the Imam Shafi’l Primary School and then completed her high schooling in 2004 at the Mogadishu Boarding School. Throughout her initial schooling, she was unsure of what vocation to pursue.

Her father’s advice proved conclusive in

this respect. He noted that there were few psychologists working in the country and, knowing his daughter’s skills with people, he encouraged her to pursue this career.

“As a teenager, you sometimes struggle to find your way. My father suggested I study psychology, and he was right,” she says.

Ms. Elmi took her father’s guidance to heart.

In 2005, she went to Sudan to undertake undergraduate studies at the Ahfad University for Women, in Omdurman, from where she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in psychology in 2010. She then returned to Somalia and worked as a part-time lecturer at institutions in Mogadishu, including Benadir University, Jazeera University and the Modern University for Science and Technology.





“The first thing I did when I returned to Somalia from Sudan was to think about where to apply the knowledge I had acquired. Psychology is my passion, and the positions at the three universities helped me spread it to the students,” she says.

The mother-of-three complemented her work with an online master’s degree in psychology from Unicaf University from which she graduated in 2020. Last year, she joined Dr. Osman Fiqi Hospital in Mogadishu as a counsellor.

“I started working at the hospital to help my people and serve them in a different capacity than at the universities,” Ms. Elmi notes.



New initiative

Throughout her 11 years of teaching and working, Ms. Elmi noticed that the years of conflict had taken a toll on the mental wellbeing of her compatriots, either directly or indirectly.

“Every tragic event affects those who survive and the families of the victims, causing anxiety and stress,” Ms. Elmi says. She sought to do more, beyond the workplace and the classroom.

In 2021, the 38-year-old started an initiative called ‘Please smile!’ centred on monthly meetings with groups of young women and men dealing with mental health issues. It aims to help them find contentment in day-to-day life, build a sense of community, and fight the stigma associated with mental disorders in Somalia, many of which are linked to the travails the country and its people have endured on their path to peace and stability.

Trying to change negative narratives often caused by traumatic events, the monthly gatherings are founded



“The meetings focus on young people and students in schools and universities who suffer the impact of unsafe environments even before they are born.”

on the tenets of positive psychology, which is the scientific study of the factors that enable individuals and communities to flourish, according to the University of Pennsylvania’s Positive Psychology Center.

“Suffering and well-being are both part of the human condition and psychology should care about each. Human strengths, excellence, and flourishing are just as authentic as human distress. People want to cultivate the best version of themselves and live a meaningful life. They want to grow their capacities for love and compassion, creativity and curiosity, work and resilience, and integrity and wisdom,” the Center states on its website.

During the meetings, participants share their emotions and experiences in a safe environment and practice mindfulness.

“The meetings focus on young people and students in schools and universities who suffer the impact of unsafe environments even before they are born. I encountered people who had forgotten the feeling of happiness, as well as many students who were rushing through life in pursuit of high marks, a degree, or a job, and had forgotten to live in the moment and pursue contentment,” Ms. Elmi says.

Inherited trauma

With ‘Please smile!’ the clinical psychologist has a special focus on trying to break the passing on of trauma from one generation to another, a particular problem in Somalia given the years of conflict coupled with the country’s growing youth population.

“In the long term, I’d like to see future generations free from mental problems, but right now, the most important aspect of my approach is to assist people in finding contentment and letting go of all negative ideas and experiences, or at the very least lightening and balancing their lives,” she observes.

The meetings’ participants have primarily been youth who have received previous psychological counselling.



As one of the participants in the meetings, Faduma Ali Abdi, puts it, “The meetings helped me to not be a guest of my happiness.”

“For me, it was a valuable session as I understood more about managing stress and remaining calm in difficult times,” says Mohamed Dahir Ali, who attended a meeting earlier this year.

Held each month at different venues, such as schools, universities and hospitals, the ‘Please smile!’ initiative has drawn some 150 attendees. Ms. Elmi hopes to be able to introduce similar sessions in the country’s Federal Member States in the future.

“Parents are constantly contacting me and requesting that their child be enrolled at the academy, which makes me happy.”

Social stigma

Ms. Elmi takes pride in the fact that there is growing acceptance of the importance of mental health among Somalis. Asides

from her father, when she first embarked on her career, some friends advised working in the sector as they believed that there was no scope for it in Somalia.

“Many people here may believe that psychological counselling is unimportant, but that is not true. I can personally attest to it,” she says.

“Our youth are ready for change and need to gain a better understanding of their lives” she adds. “Sure, challenges are constantly present, and the majority of them stem from a person’s culture and beliefs, such as the belief that psychology is not real science.”

The mother of three can speak from personal experience – she practises what she preaches. Due to the traumatic nature of the experiences she deals with, she too receives psychological counselling.

“I sometimes meet people who tell me terrifying stories. Some of the stories make me anxious, and I feel overwhelmed. Then, I look for a counsellor myself. I listen to what is going through my mind and relax,” Ms. Elmi says.

Mental health

In February 2022, the International Journal of Mental Health Systems published a study of the mental health situation in Somalia. It indicated a dire need to prioritise

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the prevention and treatment of mental disorders in the country.

According to data on Somalia from the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Mental Health Atlas 2020, of the total estimated 82 mental health professionals in the country, only four are psychiatrists. It also shows that the area is in need of data and research, while programmes such as suicide prevention or anti-stigma and discrimination are non-existent.

On Mental Health Day last year, observed annually on 10 October, the WHO and the Federal Government of Somalia’s Ministry of Health issued a joint statement in which they flagged that they had been working together to develop a mental health strategy for 2019-2022 with the latter finalizing a mental health policy.



A WEEK ON THE ROAD TO SOOL AND SANAAG

“The trip is to reconnect with our partners, particularly the local governments, as well as civil society and human rights activists...”

**Sia Mawalla,
UN Human Rights Officer**

Sia Mawalla, a UN human rights officer, travelled more than 1,600 kilometers by road to Sool and Sanaag to meet the regions' people and better understand their human rights needs.

Located at the northern tip of the Horn of Africa, Sool and Sanaag are two regions known for their striking landscapes and rich, untapped natural resources.

They are home to some 600,000 people, whom the United Nations tries to support in a range of areas of development, including human rights. In this respect, insecurity, violent clashes between different clans, gender-based violence, arbitrary arrests and detention, and challenges to the right to freedom of expression are some of the more pressing concerns.

But getting to Sool and Sanaag is no straightforward journey – going by road from the Somaliland capital of Hargeisa involves a round-trip of more than 1,600 kilometres by road.

And that's exactly what a UN team did recently as part of its regular outreach efforts.

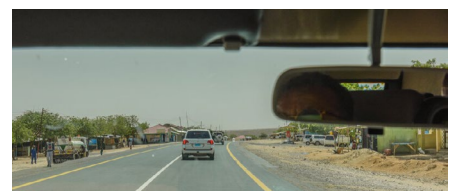
While insecurity can make travel challenging, when an opportunity arises, UN officials in



Somaliland don't hesitate to embark on such field trips to better understand and support the people they serve.

Headed by a UN human rights officer based in Hargeisa and in a convoy of five vehicles, the team spent a week traversing the two regions' roadways, amidst some stunning scenery, to meet with partners, local authorities and civil society representatives.

FRIDAY – Leaving Hargeisa: The members of the UN team are up bright and early. They need to – they have an 11-hour journey ahead of them to their first stop, the south-eastern town of Oog in the Sool region.



The drive from Hargeisa to Oog is not a straightforward one, with the team needing to follow the winding, asphalted road route. The team first heads north to the Somaliland coast along the Gulf of Aden, stopping for lunch in Berbera, the capital of Somaliland's Sahil region, before twisting back inland to Burao in the Togdheer region and over mountainous terrain going south-east to reach Oog just after 9:00 p.m. that night.



The town of Oog serves as a stop-point on the way to the two regions' capitals: Ceerigaabo in Sanaag and Laascaanood in Sool. It's also a break for the team to stretch their legs, grab a bite and rest for the night before continuing their journey.



Despite the long hours of driving, with all-too-brief pitstops, the goal of the road trip is clear in the mind of team leader Sia Mawalla, a UN human rights officer based in Hargeisa.

"The trip is to reconnect with our partners, particularly the local governments, as well as civil society and human rights activists. And by reconnecting, I mean meeting them and finding out their greatest challenges, their opportunities, and how we can collaborate even better than how we have been collaborating so far. And in addition to that, we also want to have an idea of the human rights situation in the Sool region and the Sanaag region. What are the pertinent human rights issues?" Ms. Mawalla says.



"We especially want to meet and talk with marginalised and vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, minorities, internally displaced people (IDPs) and women," she adds. "We go anywhere we can reach the most vulnerable in local communities because they are the most impacted by human rights issues."

SATURDAY – Reaching Laascaanood: Once again, the UN team is up at the crack of dawn to hit the road and get to Laascaanood, the capital of the Sool region, some two hours away by road.

There, they have a full schedule of meetings.



It includes discussions with local government officials, regional representatives from the Somaliland National Human Rights Commission, the Somaliland National Displacement and Refugee Agency (NDRA), civil society groups and human rights activists.

"There are many human rights violations here, for instance, clan clashes, gender-based violence and murder. The government

seems to be too busy to tackle these challenges. There is a need to strengthen press freedom and capacity-building for police and law enforcement agencies. The police need modern facilities and massive capacity-building. The media needs to be enlightened more so that they relate to the issues affecting the region," Jamaa Abdiweli Ali, a civil society representative, tells the UN team.

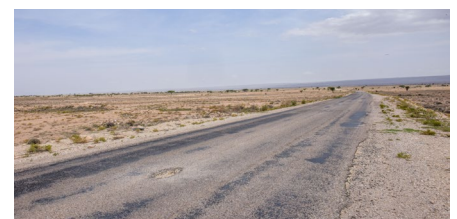


NDRA's Maryan Abdullahi Warsame adds to the teams' understanding of the challenges faced there.

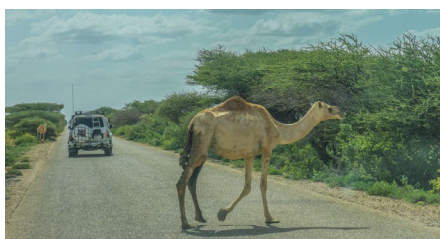


"We have many IDPs [internally displaced people] in the Sool region – we conducted a census in November 2021, in coordination with IOM [International Organization for Migration]. We have 47 camps with a population of 59,260, equivalent to 9,870 households... They do not have sanitation facilities nor decent housing. The place is also dangerous for women since it is not well-lit. Since the place doesn't have toilets, decent housing, water, electricity and jobs, these people here really need support immediately," she says.

Security is always a consideration on these road trips and the team retraces its path back to the town of Aynabo, also in the Sool region and some 100 kilometres away, where it has an early dinner and rests for the night.



SUNDAY – Leaving Aynabo: Once rested, the UN team leaves early for another long stretch on the road: seven hours of driving, first back to Laascaanood and then turning



north to make its way towards the capital of the Sanaag region, Ceerigaabo. Traffic is light, but the convoy drivers still need to be careful as there are camels to avoid!

For this leg of the journey, to begin with, the roads are asphalted, with a change to a bumpy mix of bitumen and dirt roads and then to approximately 268 kilometres of a newly-constructed road between Afmadow and Ceerigaabo. It involves driving all day and into the night, through some stark and striking scenery – but also involves stopping at camps for internally displaced people to hear from them about the challenges they face.

At one of the stops, at the Karashal IDP Camp in Sanaag's Garadag district, located close to 300 kilometres from Ceerigabo, camp resident Hodan Barre Yusuf tells the team about the living conditions she and others face each day.



"I have been living here for six years. We used to be nomadic pastoralists. Displaced people were brought here from Sool, Sanaag and other regions... the people here have a lot of needs like access to water, food and shelter. As you can see, we really need emergency aid support," she says.



The UN team takes note of what Ms. Yusuf and others tell them and then continue their drive.

At around 5:00 p.m, the team finally arrives in Ceerigaabo and crashes for the night. Its members have another full day of meetings ahead of them.



MONDAY – A day in Ceerigaabo: After a night's rest and a hearty breakfast, the team is up early for its meetings of the day: the first encounter is with the governor of Sanaag region and the mayor of Ceerigaabo.



Soon after this meeting, the team heads to the regional offices of the Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Family, where it meets with representatives of civil society organisations working on human rights issues in Sanaag.

"While minorities do have an opportunity to go to primary schools in the Sanaag region when it comes to secondary education or even higher education, they are not able



to access the right to education because they do not have the economic means to support their children in pursuing higher education," Ms. Mawalla says after meeting local representatives of the minority Gabooye clan.



Among the civil society organisations the team meets, there is also one representing persons with disabilities. The troubling challenges they face are made very clear in their meeting.



"We have cases of women with disabilities who were sexually assaulted, with others sexually exploited due to their vulnerability. These are the types of abuse women with disabilities go through," the group representative, Siciid Cabdi Abokor, tells the UN team.



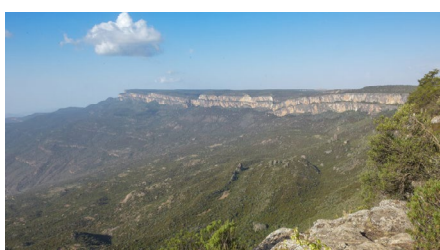
"When we try to get justice for the victims and survivors, our efforts are undermined by the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms within the community, which involve clan elders from both sides mediating the disputes, with some cases ending up with the rape survivor being ordered to marry her rapist," he adds.

By necessity, schedules on these road trips need to be flexible as plans for meetings



can change unexpectedly. So it happens later in the day with the afternoon's meetings pushed back to the following day.

This leaves the UN team with a few spare hours before nightfall – they make the most of these with a quick drive to the Daallo National Park, which offers spectacular views of unspoiled wilderness, a dense forest on a limestone and gypsum escarpment.



TUESDAY – Leaving Ceerigaabo: After more meetings with representatives of the minority Gabooye community in the morning, the UN team gears up for the long drive back to Hargeisa.



The team re-traces its route, driving southwards back to Afmadow, but then turns westwards towards Burao, the capital of Somaliland's Togdheer region, where it spends the night.

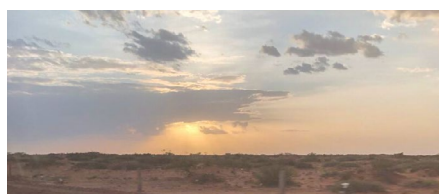


The drive is eight-hours long but to break up the monotony the team enjoys the views and also pauses at roadside stops for a favourite treat: camel-milk tea.

When they finally arrive in Burao, they're greeted by a spectacular sunset.



WEDNESDAY – Return to Hargeisa: The UN team is now on the last stretch of its journey: a seven-hour drive from Burao to Hargeisa.



Keen to finally return and end the hours of driving, the team stops for a quick lunch break in Berbera, and then drive on to Hargeisa where the team members get some well-earned rest, satisfied that the past seven days have been productive, if tiring.



"This week-long mission to the Sool and Sanaag regions has been very useful. We have been able to reconnect with local governments, we have reconnected with some of the civil society organisations we work with and with human rights activists," Ms. Mawalla says, upon her return to the UN compound.



"They showed us some of their work, they explained some of their issues. Having these face-to-face meetings really helps us understand what our partners really require from us," Ms. Mawalla adds.

THURSDAY – In the office: While the road trip is over, the UN team's work is far from over. At the UN office in Hargeisa the next day, Ms. Mawalla and her colleagues start consolidating their findings and plan for the next steps in how to support the people of Sool and Sanaag.



"From the human rights side of things, the mission has enabled us to reconnect with our partners and the local government, thereby strengthening our network. In addition, following requests from our partners, we shall conduct capacity building activities in the two regions, focusing on monitoring and reporting of human rights, particularly those issues that are prevalent in these regions, with a focus on marginalised and vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, women, minorities and IDPs," says Ms. Mawalla.