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Transcript

Somaliland's Prospects

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HE Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud Silanyo:

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished colleagues and friends,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you here as the representative of my people and our country, Somaliland. I am most grateful to Chatham House and the Royal Institute for International Affairs for extending this kind invitation to us. It is symbolic of the longstanding interest and commitment to constructive dialogue and positive engagement on the important issues affecting the Somali people that the Royal Institute for International Affairs and its members have illustrated over many years and decades.

I am also aware of your recent work on the livestock trade in the Horn of Africa as well as your recent examination of the problems of insurgency, terrorism and economic hardship in the region. These are areas of fundamental importance for Somaliland and the region more widely. At the same time, I know that your interest in our corner of the world is only a small part of the larger work done by Chatham House in its catalytic role in encouraging international debate about our continent, Africa.

I would also like to take this opportunity to salute the Somaliland Diaspora living in the United Kingdom, without whose unflinching support, encouragement and commitment to the cause of their people, Somaliland would be a thoroughly different place. I am delighted to see some members of that community represented here today.

I should also like to express my profound gratitude to the British Government, including Prime Minister David Cameron, Minister for Africa, Mr Henry Bellingham and members of the Somaliland All Party Parliamentary Group led by Alun Michael MP for their consistent support and continuing engagement on the key issues of concern for the people of Somaliland. We in Somaliland have always been keenly appreciative of the special friendship between our two nations deeply rooted in history, and a commitment to democracy, human rights and freedom. My Government and I look forward to further strengthening those links, and collaborating on issues of mutual interest for the benefit of our countries and our people.

My message to you today is one of hope, in an otherwise often bleak region of the Horn of Africa. We in Somaliland are no longer content to be Africa's best-kept secret but have launched upon the unstoppable trajectory towards becoming a full functioning and responsible member of the international community of states, in keeping with our rights and obligations under

international law. I shall take the opportunity today to talk to you briefly about recent developments, as well as issues of importance for our country.

Elections

Following in the footsteps of the first Presidential election in 2003 and the Parliamentary elections of 2005, the Presidential elections on 26 June 2010 marked almost 20 years since Somaliland reclaimed its sovereignty, and 50 years since the end of the British Protectorate.

Despite security threats aimed to discourage and stifle the will of the electorate, over a million people queued from early dawn, in the blistering summer heat, determined to peacefully cast their ballot and vote. Many of these voters were women and the youth. International observers determined the results of the elections to be free and fair. My popular mandate derives from this process of which I'm very proud and humbled. With the ensuing peaceful transition and handover, Somaliland once again, set itself apart from many countries in Africa and distinguished itself in a corner of the world often synonymous with instability, lack of security and absence of rule of law.

We believe that the success of our elections has demonstrated Somaliland's commitment to the 'democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance', which are enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the African Union. I am immensely proud of the achievements of my people born out of struggle for survival and recognition in the face of isolation and hardship. I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the people of Somaliland, and ask them to remain steadfast in their commitment to peace, democracy and the rule of law.

I also want to express my profound gratitude to our growing number of friends in the international community, including Great Britain, who stood by us throughout our struggles and whom we will continue to draw on for support, wise counsel and friendship in the days, months and years ahead.

Local Elections

One consequence of the delayed Presidential elections is that local elections have also been pushed back. However, the Government will press ahead with these as a matter of priority. We are determined that all Government, including at the local level should be accountable to the people. We are talking to the National Electoral Commission, political parties and donors

about the timeframe for holding the local elections and expect to finalize arrangements very soon.

Development

My Administration has ambitious development plans. There is an urgent need to tackle poverty, enhance institutional governance capacity and increase access to basic services including, health and education. We will need support in this endeavour.

Having previously suffered from years of neglect by Mogadishu, and compounded by the conflict that followed, as well the somewhat uncertain approach of the international community, Somaliland had a difficult past. However, a tremendous amount has been achieved in the past 20 years.

Under my administration, we will seek to find new opportunities building on the achievements of the past 2 decades - to promote the social and economic welfare of our people.

While we are very grateful to the international community for the humanitarian support which they provided, we would like to see more emphasis on development to ensure a successful transition from humanitarian assistance to recovery. The peace dividend must be manifest in concrete results for the people of Somaliland.

We look forward to closer cooperation with the United Nations and international organizations, as well as strengthened bilateral links with donor community who have positively signalled their commitment in this regard.

Trade and investment

Development assistance alone will not do enough to lift Somaliland out of poverty. Investment and economic diversification will be key. Since the Kulmiye administration came to power, it has made a concerted effort to raise revenue and broaden its sources. As a result, the last quarter saw a 24% increase in revenue.

If sustained, the Government will be able to spend more of our own money on economic and social development.

My Government also recognizes the need to boost Somaliland's exports and diversify its markets. Provided that the issue of veterinary certificates can be overcome, we do not believe that it is fanciful to think of exporting our lamb –

which is excellent, by the way – to the European Union. The lifting of the ban on the export of livestock from the Rift Valley by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was an important and welcome development, but the ban demonstrated the need for Somaliland to have other outlets for its trade.

Somaliland also needs better roads and telecommunications. The Berbera Corridor, including the port of Berbera itself, is of vital importance to our future economic prosperity as well as being important to our landlocked neighbour, Ethiopia. The Government is seeking foreign direct investment in infrastructure, and is prepared to make investing in Somaliland more attractive to foreign companies. Such improvements will be powerful drivers of economic growth and much needed revenue. Smaller scale projects at the community level will be equally important. Here, I believe that the Somali Diaspora has an important part to play in leveraging its considerable resources.

More widely, there is a clear need to promote Somaliland as a trade and investment, opportunity. That is part of the reason why I am here in the UK where we have just inaugurated the first Anglo-Somaliland Chamber of Commerce (on 23 November 2010). Over the course of the past week, I have met with many business leaders and potential investors who recognize the unique opportunities of investing in the emerging markets of Somaliland. I hope that you will spread the word that Somaliland is open for business!

Recognition

I make no secret of the fact that my Government's ultimate goal is full international recognition of Somaliland's independence as a sovereign State. We believe that such international recognition, long over due, will allow us to unlock more direct assistance, promote more trade and investment, maintain our security and further the social and economic well-being of our people.

Secession was not born out of a top down approach, but was the popular expression of the overwhelming majority of the Somaliland people who sought to exercise their international legal right to self-determination, similar to Kosovo, East Timor and elsewhere. Upon gaining its independence from Great Britain in 1960, the Republic of Somaliland was recognized by some 35 countries before the entering into a voluntary union with Somalia in the same year.

The dissolution of that union and the resumption of Somaliland's independence nearly 20 years ago was not based on territorial expansion as

its present borders are the same as those of 1960. This is particularly relevant to African Union principle of respect for borders existing on achievement of independence. We also wait with great interest on outcome of the upcoming referendum in the South Sudan early in the New Year.

Situation in Somalia

Despite our non-negotiable position on independence, Somaliland bears no ill-feeling towards our neighbour Somalia, as it's in nobody interest to see the conflict in the Somalia perpetuated, and wishes the administration of President Sharif, and other relevant parties in that country success in ending the long suffering of their people.

At the same time, my Government views with deep concern the continuing violence and instability in Somalia, which poses a direct threat to the Somaliland, the region and in the international community. The recent terrorist attacks, including in Kampala during the world cup, clearly illustrate the need for concerted international cooperation on security issues.

The use of Somalia as a base for operations by pirates – the consequence of the breakdown of central Government – has given the crisis in Somalia an international dimension that stretches far beyond its shores. I am heartened to see the successful conclusion recently of the Chandler's kidnapping after more than a year in captivity. For our part, we have successfully sought to prevent pirate operations on or near our own coast, and have taken concrete steps to combat that insidious threat. We will continue to strengthen our capacity as a security provider in our own region with international support, as necessary.

Clearly the search for a durable peace in Somalia - which has to date remain elusive - is paramount. Whilst the international community has invested immeasurable resources, time and commitment to the resolution of the Somalia crisis– these efforts have been constrained in part by the fact that they were often externally driven. In the case of Somaliland, a grassroots approach, utilizing the best aspects of the traditional conflict resolution at the community level provided the basis for dialogue and peace. It was neither quick nor easy but we believe that elements of that model could be successfully replicated in Somalia, as appropriate.

Integrating with the region

Somaliland is not an island: for good or ill it is affected by events in neighbouring countries. Far from wishing to turn our backs on our neighbours, my Government wants to improve its interaction with them and with regional organizations such as IGAD and the AU, to make sure that Somaliland's voice is heard, its interests are promoted, and the security of its people and neighbours assured.

Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya will be key partners in the region. In the same vein, we want closer links to the EU, the UN and its specialized agencies, and the League of Arab States. We also hope to secure stronger ties with individual donors, not least the United States, which recently announced its dual-track policy that will see direct aid and cooperation with Somaliland increased. I very much welcome this as a positive step in keeping the realities on the ground.

Relations with the UK

Before concluding, I would once again like to reiterate the special bond between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Somaliland. We will continue to look to Great Britain to be at the forefront of the Somaliland question, including in supporting our bid for formal representation at international forums, such as the United Nations.

I would like to thank the Government and British people for the humanitarian and development assistance, which they continue to generously provide during difficult times, and for the hospitality and sanctuary provided to the Somaliland community here. With the British government's support and assistance, including in the areas of security cooperation and economic investment, we continue to make positive strides in the development of our country, and will create conditions conducive for those displaced globally wishing to return voluntarily, with safety and dignity.

Conclusion

In sum, Somaliland has achieved democracy, peace and stability largely through its own efforts. As a new administration we have also met many of the benchmarks we set ourselves for our first 100 days. With the support of our people, we are determined to go to the next level and build a state on the foundations of the rule of law, democratic principles and good governance. With the help of the international community, and the support of our regional

partners, I am confident that Somaliland will take its rightful place amongst the community of states.

Thank you.