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Transcript

Puntland and Somalia: The Year Ahead

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HE Abdirahman Mohamud Farole:

Excellencies, event organizers, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is an honour for me to address you today here at this prestigious institution. My last speech at Chatham House, in July 2009, covered a range of topics, including the political history of Somalia, the failure of the past centralized governments to deliver the required public goods to citizens across the country, and therefore the urgent need to restructure the Third Republic, and our efforts to fight against the scourge of terrorism and piracy in Somalia.

Today I would like to talk about the political direction of Somalia and our efforts to end the transition, as the TFG mandate expires on 20 August 2012. I want also to address the devastating humanitarian situation in Somalia and our own contributions aimed at ameliorating this growing crisis. In addition to that, I would like to touch on the threat of al Shabaab terror group and piracy to our security and also its impact on regional and global stability. I will be delivering a keynote speech dedicated to piracy tomorrow at the Combating Piracy Week Conference.

Political direction

Since the collapse of 1991, we have taken initiatives aimed at rebuilding trust among Somalis to forge a sense of unity and shared responsibility. Puntland played a leading role in the formation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. With the first President of Puntland being elected as the first TFG President, we have invested substantial resources and manpower to ensure the success of the TFG since its inception. On 29 August 2011, Puntland State signed a Cooperation Agreement with the TFG that builds on and strengthens earlier agreements and encourages cooperation and integration among state and federal institutions.

The UN-backed Roadmap plan, in effect from August 2011 until August 2012, is a joint remarkable effort by the Somali stakeholders and international community to give the Somalis a chance to sort out differences and unite behind a common purpose. The government of Puntland actively participated in the Somali National Consultative Conference, held in Mogadishu 4 – 6 September 2011. Our government is committed to the implementation of the agreed-upon Roadmap process. As Puntland constitutes the role model state for Somali federalism, it has been agreed that Puntland will host the Somali constitutional process.

We believe that overcoming the prolonged crises and statelessness in Somalia requires a vision for the common purpose of building a democratic, stable, united and federal Somalia, at peace with itself and with its neighbours. I can say confidently that Puntland will continue to play a positive role in making efforts of re-uniting the fragmented Somali nation-state. We will promote a comprehensive reconciliation process and spare no effort to safeguard adherence to the milestones and timelines, as stipulated in the Roadmap. Completion of the Federal Constitution, parliamentary reforms and return to constituencies are top priorities in this regard.

It is our consistent position that the remaining federal states in south-central Somalia are formed, in accordance with the requirements of the 2004 Transitional Federal Charter. A charter-complaint federal state, as Puntland, must comprise of the voluntary merger of at least two or more regions out of the 18 administrative regions that existed before the collapse of 1991. A Federal Constitution for Somalia can only be ratified by charter-complaint federal states, as the Constitution provides power and resource sharing between federal and state authorities.

The timely implementation of the Roadmap will lead towards the end of the transitional phase in August 2012 and a newly reformed Federal Parliament shall elect a new government. That future government in Somalia will certainly enjoy legitimacy and will need the necessary national and international recognition and support to achieve a lasting peace in Somalia.

Humanitarian disaster and response

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all the countries that hosted the Somali exodus for more than two decades for humanitarian purposes. History will remind our children of this remarkable gesture of humanity. Currently, many nations and international organizations have taken part in ongoing efforts to deliver humanitarian and emergency aid to help alleviate the drought and famine conditions in Somalia. This is a great tragedy, and a reminder that Somalia was not in a position to prevent or alleviate the occurrence of that humanitarian disaster alone.

In Puntland, we have experienced a number of challenges, including occurrence of droughts and the security and socio-economic impact of hosting Internally Displaced People (IDPs). The impact of the present famine in southern Somalia would have been far more acute, if Puntland did not host over 400,000 IDPs from the affected regions. The challenge of the recurrent droughts in Puntland is due to the scarcity of rain, land degradation and the

limited availability of adequate water resources for pastoralist communities, who form the backbone of our economy. We have experienced a severe drought during the 2010-2011 seasons, which caused loss of the bulk of Puntland livestock. With little assistance, we managed to alleviate the drought impact from reaching acute levels of famine witnessed in southern Somalia. Our government's efforts concentrated mainly in water trucking to remote villages and repairing of water boreholes, thanks in part to the assistance provided by UNICEF and the United Arab Emirates, among others.

It is not a panacea to provide humanitarian and emergency aid every time a disaster occurs. A long-term plan needs to be instituted to address the preventable underlying causes, in order to avoid future tragedies of this scale. Being in a country whose livelihood and economy is based on livestock, it is vital to address the scarcity of water in the first instance by undertaking a large-scale sustainable program of drilling boreholes, preventing land degradation and over-grazing, and introducing range management pilot projects. These programs need sustainable assistance, which is far more cost-effective than rushing relief aid whenever a disaster occurs.

Additionally, strengthening governance institutions in Somalia is important. I repeatedly inter-link governance with humanitarian conditions in Somalia because I believe that it is the lack of governance that exasperates drought and famine conditions.

Security challenges

The insecurity in Somalia is the effect of a prolonged military rule, emergence of armed opposition factions against the regime, followed by 20 years of civil war and organized crimes. Terrorism, clan violence, arms and human smuggling, and piracy are all products of a greater tragedy in Somalia.

Since its inception in 1998, Puntland has enjoyed stability and functional public institutions have led to flourishing private sector prosperity. But the chronic violence of southern Somalia has had a spillover effect to other parts of Somalia, particularly Puntland, where terrorist groups have committed targeted killings and bombings of prominent members of society.

We strongly condemn all acts of terrorism aimed to disrupt peaceful and stable areas in Somalia and the wider region. Again, we strongly condemn Al Shabaab terrorists who carried out the truck bombing on 4 October 2011 in Mogadishu, targeting Somali students recently awarded scholarships to study in Turkey. A similar attack targeted a graduation ceremony for Somali medical

students held at Shamo Hotel in Mogadishu in December 2009. These inhuman and merciless attacks demonstrate the terrorists' cruel intention to murder the best and brightest in society. Once again, we hereby send our sincere condolences to the victims' families and to the Somali nation as a whole.

No part of Somalia is immune from this terrorist threat, but we will never be discouraged to sustain our hard-earned peace and stability in Puntland. Our government is committed to consolidating security, advancing socio-economic development, and administering peace and justice across Puntland. The people of Puntland are aware of the terrorist's plan and propaganda to hide shamefully behind the clan name, aiming to trigger social unrest and stir anarchy.

Puntland security institutions are gaining strength with our own resources. In reality, Puntland constitutes a buffer zone for regional security and stability and the state geographically constitutes an important and strategic partner for the international security arrangement, and is therefore deserving of security strengthening support.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the wider international community for assisting Somalia in the fight against terrorism.

Finally, I would like to talk briefly about the piracy menace, as I will talk in detail about piracy at the conference tomorrow. Piracy crime is not unique to Puntland or to Somalia. There are other parts of the world where piracy does exist. The piracy problem came to surface in Somalia after the state collapse of 1991 and the disappearance of Somali coastal defense. This gave an opportunity to illegal fishing foreign trawlers, which ignited armed resistance by Somali fishermen and then escalated into today's full-scale piracy attacks.

The pirates have taken advantage of Puntland's geographic vulnerability to become the pirate hunting area, as the state is located at the crossroads of international waterways. Our government's commitment to the anti-piracy effort is very clear. Over 240 pirates are now in Puntland prisons; most of the pirates are convicted and sentenced, while others await the judicial process. Puntland has planned to establish a Maritime Police Force, for which we sought support for almost three years. Thanks to the United Arab Emirates, we received support to establish a Maritime Police Force mandated to fight pirates and protect marine resources. But it is unfortunate that politically motivated elements have sought to create obstacles against the establishment of our anti-piracy force.

Puntland government strongly opposes ransom payments, as this is the primary factor fuelling the spread of piracy. We again urge the UN Security Council to extend the mandate of the international warships operating off the coast of Somalia to attack pirates organizing along the coast, in cooperation with Somali security institutions. Secondly, defeating piracy cannot be limited to military means alone. Puntland launched community engagement programs to rehabilitate pirates and prevent piracy recruitment. This program needs international support, as we have proven that it works.

We need to explore alternative livelihoods for coastal communities affected by piracy and illegal fishing, such as vocational training schools, job opportunities for youth, and reviving fishing industry activities disrupted by piracy and illegal fishing. This combined model of community engagement programs, economic and military means presents a workable plan. We believe assistance and a working partnership between Puntland institutions and the international community will be an efficient option to finally defeat piracy.

Thank you all for your time and attention.