

**SRSG Dr. Augustine P. Mahiga's speech to
Stand-Alone Interactive Dialogue on Somalia**

Geneva, 29 September 2010

Mr. President,

It is a privilege for me to be invited to attend this Stand-Alone Interactive Dialogue on human rights in Somalia, an issue, in my view, of cardinal concern and, significance. For this reason, it should be at the core of all our actions. I congratulate the Africa Group for this special initiative. It provides a unique opportunity to reflect together on how all of us – Somalis, UN and other members of the international community – can work together to improve people's lives, so that they can begin to enjoy the basic rights to which they are entitled. In the case of Somalia, these include basic survival – and, especially the strengthening and protection of the rights of the most vulnerable groups.

The challenges to human rights in Somalia are most evident in areas devastated by conflict or under the control of extremist groups. However, in some regions of the country where there is more stability, there are many opportunities to strengthen awareness and protection of human rights. The Human Rights Unit of the UN Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) has visited Puntland and Somaliland several times this year, most recently accompanying the Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, to build up a network of contacts and identify support needs. They are encouraged by the enthusiasm of authorities and civil society alike to work together towards a common goal of improving respect for human rights in those areas. The arrival of new human rights officers before the end of the year should allow a more sustained programme of practical and concrete actions by UNPOS in collaboration with our counterparts.

In this regard, I want to emphasise that UNPOS is very much committed to fully integrating human rights into its work, including through the incorporation of staff funded by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights into its Human Rights Unit, as an integral part of programme activities. The recent visit of the Deputy High Commissioner was an excellent example of this collaboration.

Mr. President,

It should be noted that without peace in South Central Somalia it will be difficult to envisage profound and lasting changes in the precarious human rights situation there, especially with regard to the right to life, and even basic human rights such as the right to food, shelter, education and health. It is imperative therefore that all efforts are made to bring about a peaceful solution to this endless conflict. Indeed, the advancement of the Somali peace process has been the subject of international high

level deliberations in New York and Madrid in the last five days. I am also very much aware of the need to include a human rights approach to all our strategies, and to redouble our efforts to minimise this daily loss of life and injury to those not involved in hostilities, and to prevent the recruitment and use of children. The UN, African Union and AMISOM are engaged in dialogue on the obligation to protect civilians and how to best do it in the fragile and volatile environment in which AMISOM operates. But most importantly, how to protect civilians from the targeted and ideologically motivated ruthless attacks by the insurgent groups operating in Mogadishu and South/Central Somalia.

Protecting the right to life of the Somali people should continue to be one of our pressing priorities: not just through ending the conflict, but through life support by providing adequate food, shelter, water, sanitation and education wherever those in need may be. I remain deeply concerned at the sharp drop in funding for humanitarian aid which is impacting negatively on the right to health, nutrition and education, not just in South Central Somalia but in Somaliland and Puntland as well. According to a report published recently, Somalia is the worst place in the world for a child to be and for mothers to have children. Access to education is one of the lowest in the world, and levels of child malnutrition among the highest. Maternal mortality rates remain shockingly high even in areas not affected by conflict. As my UNHCR colleagues will ascertain, on a per capita scale, Somalia has the highest number of refugees, internally displaced persons and people in need of humanitarian assistance. I am sure that my colleague the Resident Coordinator will talk more about these issues but as we look at how to better achieve the Millennium Development Goals for Somalia, we need concerted efforts – with donor assistance. In our aid and development programmes for the Somali people, we should focus on the poorest and the most marginalised.

Mr. President,

Part of that must be building and strengthening institutions and the legal framework to better protect human rights. The Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights rightly said in her recent statement that addressing impunity and violence should be a cornerstone of the foundation of building peace in Somalia. Justice cannot be achieved overnight, but we need to look at appropriate first steps to address impunity as required by the Djibouti Agreement. At the same time, adequate resources should be allocated to rebuild the judicial system, so that it too can play its role in bringing to justice the perpetrators of abuse and dispensing justice, as well as ensuring the rule of law. Capacity-building and resources are needed not just to reform the police and military, but also to create an independent judiciary. Resources are equally needed to provide a modicum of basic human rights to millions of Somalis.

Mr. President,

It is not enough to train police, military, judicial bodies in human rights: the leaders of these institutions must integrate human rights principles into their own policies and performance. Without such leadership, changing the behaviour of those so used to existing in a world of violence and impunity will be difficult.

At the same time, I am encouraged that the draft constitution, which will be put for consultation to the Somali people in this transition period, contains strong provisions on human rights. The draft also provides for the establishment of an independent human rights commission. Somaliland already has a nascent commission, and Puntland is envisaging setting up such a body. International support to setting up truly independent human rights institutions in accordance with appropriate international standards will be critical to ensuring their effectiveness.

I would like to pay tribute to Somali human rights defenders: - members of human rights organisations, human rights monitors, journalists and others dedicated to working for the rights of others. Their accounts of the risks and constraints they face every day in carrying out such courageous work make chilling reading. Some have lost their lives, others have had to flee. We the international community need to do much more to support them, including when they need to find sanctuary far from their homes and families.

I would like to draw special attention to the role of women in conflict resolution. In October, the tenth anniversary of SC Resolution 1325 – regarding women, peace and security – will be celebrated. It will be an opportunity to put Somali women's concerns at the centre of international attention, concerns such as representation, participation, discrimination, lack of protection including from GBV. Some progress has been made – for instance there was strong women's representation in the IFCC and constitution-making process, and a gender audit of the draft constitution has been carried out in September. There are many initiatives related to strengthening women's representation and protection, but we can do a lot more through better coordination and collaboration to strengthen and streamline the impact of the actions, including within the UN in collaboration with government authorities and civil society.

As I indicated at the beginning, this is a unique opportunity to focus on how we can support the rights of the Somali people. I would like to inform this forum that, as Somalia is moving towards the end of the transition, UNPOS is encouraging the TFG to reach out to civil society groups and grass root community organisations, including women's and human rights groups. UNPOS will seek to mainstream human rights issues in the ensuing discussions on the political transition and future political arrangements. I intend to propose to the High Level Committee set up by the Djibouti Agreement the formation of a Human Rights Working Group to address

human rights issues and to prepare Somalia for the Universal Periodic Review process.

Respecting human rights is about respecting individual human beings. In the midst of conflict, human beings get forgotten; they become part of the statistics of war and harm, of all that is wrong. This special session must refocus on Somalis as human beings with a hopeful future, and what can be done to protect their lives, dignity and rights to basic services. I look forward to a successful outcome to this special session, with an appropriate resolution to facilitate the building of human rights institutions in a country where such institutions have never existed.

Thank you.