

Communiqué from the UN Political Office for Somalia
on the occasion of International Women’s Day, 8 March 2011

We take this opportunity on International Women’s Day to address all Somalis—men and women, Government officials, members of Parliament, the business community and Civil Society—to ask that you place utmost consideration on the significant role of women in your society, culture, and politics, particularly at this moment in time as you prepare for the Constitution-making process.

This year’s theme is “Equal education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women.” Education is a contributing factor to peace and stability through its capability of expanding the potential for better livelihoods and increased civic responsibility. There must be, however, an enabling environment to facilitate this, which is why it is critical now to engage in fruitful consultations and reconciliation between groups and communities. The role of Somali women in that regard will remain central and critical.

Traditionally, the role of the Somali woman has been that of caretaker and, in many instances, the main or sole provider in the household. Though she is encumbered with these grave responsibilities, quite often she has been without a voice or a platform. Somalis must, therefore, recognize that without equal representation in the institutions of society, they are neglecting and denying themselves a vast part of their population, resource and cultural identity.

However, it goes without saying that the International Community must also continue in its commitment to supporting the Somalis in creating this enabling environment in which equal rights and fundamental freedoms can flourish.

There are several initiatives that the UN has undertaken in support of the cause and rights of women. UNPOS, for example, is supporting projects at the grassroots level by partnering with women’s organizations such as Save Somali Women and Children (SSWC) in South Central Somalia and the Gender and Development and Policy Institute in Somaliland towards the “Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325”. Both entities are actively advocating for women’s empowerment and advancement in promoting peace. It is incumbent among all Somalis and members of the International Community to lend requisite support to such initiatives.

In its Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security, the United Nations Security Council urges all parties to incorporate gender perspectives in peace and security efforts and calls attention to the important role of women in conflict resolution. In October 2010, the tenth anniversary of its adoption was celebrated. Advocating for the rights of women in Somalia, UNPOS also facilitated in September, a Gender Audit of the Consultative Draft Constitution which recognized the importance of including women in all national institutions, in both elected and appointed positions.

As Somalis, you have the opportunity to build a united and democratic society that accords respect to all Human Rights, including equality for women in all aspects of society as you embark on the reconstruction of your country. You have the advantage to learn from the experience and evolution of other post conflict societies. A peaceful society can only be sustained through according, protecting and respecting the rights of all of a nation's citizens. To that end, it is imperative that women must be active participants in and contributors to the political, social and economic life of a society.

To underestimate the magnitude of the Somali women's contribution is to deny your nation a sizable wealth of its resources. We urge all Somalis—men and women—to meet the challenges with which they are faced and capitalize on the opportunity to work together toward improving the lives of their people and ensuring that basic freedoms form the core of their Constitution.

Happy International Women's Day!