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**INFORMATION NOTE
ON THE SITUATION IN SOMALIA**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report provides an update on the situation in Somalia since the 105th meeting of Council, held on 18 January 2008. At that meeting, Council decided to extend the mandate of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for an additional period of six months, and outlined a number of steps to be taken by the various stakeholders in order to further reconciliation, improve security and facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance, enhance regional cohesion in support of the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs) and strengthen the latter's capacity, as well as contribute to the early deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation that would take over from AMISOM and support the long term stabilization and reconstruction of Somalia [PSC/PR/Comm(CV)].

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

2. At its 105th meeting, Council emphasized the need for the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to urgently devise concrete ways to fully implement the outcome of the National Reconciliation Congress (NRC), which took place in Mogadishu in July/August 2007, and adopt a broader inclusive approach to reach out to all Somali stakeholders who reject violence, both within and outside Somalia, in line with the Transitional Federal Charter (TFC).

3. It is encouraging to note that the period under review witnessed sustained efforts to promote an all-inclusive political process and deepen reconciliation, in line with the recommendations of the NRC and the programme of work of the TFG, which, together with the Cabinet appointed by Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein 'Adde', was endorsed by the Transitional Federal Parliament (TFP) on 10 January 2008. This programme aims at furthering reconciliation, promoting peace and security, strengthening the Somali institutions and ensuring accountability in Government revenue collection, as well as at implementing key transitional tasks relating to the Constitution and electoral issues. Less than two weeks after its endorsement by the TFP, the new Cabinet relocated to Mogadishu, as a sign of its commitment to make every effort to stabilize the county and move forward its agenda, including on the issue of reconciliation.

4. On 23 January 2008, the outgoing Commissioner for Peace and Security, together with the Special Representative of the Chairperson of the Commission (SRCC) for Somalia, travelled to Mogadishu for discussions with the Somali authorities. On that occasion, the Prime Minister re-affirmed his determination to reach out to all opposition groups and deepen the reconciliation process.

5. On 22 February 2008, the SRCC held talks in Mogadishu successively with the TFG Prime Minister and President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed. He seized the opportunity to, once again, reiterate the need for an all-inclusive political process, and urged the

Somali authorities to adopt an open policy stance on the issue of dialogue with the opposition. While both Somali leaders re-affirmed the commitment of the TFG to reconciliation, President Abdullahi Yusuf also stressed that those opposing all forms of dialogue and wanting to transform Somalia into a fundamentalist Islamic state should be excluded and isolated .

6. From 11 to 13 March 2008, in Cairo, Egypt, and as part of the efforts to support dialogue between the TFG and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS), diplomats from some of the AU partners met with representatives of the ARS. While putting forward some preconditions to any dialogue with the TFG, the ARS delegation indicated that its objective was not to bring down the TFG. It also expressed its commitment to the promotion of good relations with all of Somalia's neighbours, based on international law. A week later, in Nairobi, the SRCC met with a member of the ARS Executive Committee, who reiterated the readiness of his movement to dialogue with the TFG.

7. On 23 March 2008, AMISOM facilitated, at its headquarters in Mogadishu, a meeting between Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein and Mr. Mohammed Hassan Haad, Chairman of the Hawiye Tradition and Unity Council. The meeting was part of the efforts aimed at putting an end to the violent activities of the armed elements opposed to the TFG in and around Mogadishu. Both the Prime Minister and Mr. Haad expressed satisfaction at the outcome of the meeting, which they saw as a first step towards genuine reconciliation. The Hawiye Council is reported to enjoy significant local support and, as such, has an important role to play in any effort to achieve tangible result towards reconciliation.

8. In early April 2008, in Nairobi, a delegation of the ARS led by Sheikh Sheriff Hassan, Chairman of the Alliance, and comprising Sheikh Sheriff Aden, former Speaker of the TFP, and Professor Ibrahim Addow (who was the leader of the Union of Islamic Courts - UIC - team to the then Arab League-facilitated Khartoum negotiations), met with several members of the international community, including representatives of the United Nations, the League of Arab States and the AU. During the meeting with the AU representatives, the ARS leadership expressed its readiness to start discussions with the TFG, and welcomed any role that the AU could play in this respect. More generally, all those who met with the ARS team were encouraged by their disposition towards dialogue, including the softening of their position on the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia as a pre-condition for engaging the TFG.

9. The visit of the ARS delegation to Nairobi followed an appeal by the TFG Prime Minister to all Somalis to resort to dialogue to resolve the crisis in their country and a subsequent invitation by the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General (SRSG). At this juncture, it is important to highlight that, immediately after the ARS expressed willingness to enter into dialogue with the TFG in response to Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein's appeal, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, who many believe to be the mind behind the insurgency, issued his own statement opposing such a dialogue. The fact, therefore, that the leadership of the ARS has publicly expressed its readiness to embark on a dialogue with the TFG can be considered as a rebuke to the hardliners.

10. On 16 April 2008, on the occasion of the United Nations Security Council high-level meeting convened under the South African presidency to discuss issues pertaining to the relationship between the United Nations and regional organizations, in particular the African Union, in the maintenance of international peace and security, President Abdullahi Yusuf formally re-stated his commitment to peace and reconciliation in Somalia, adding that “(his) only purpose in leading Somalia in this critical period of (its) history is to bring peace and normalcy back to (his) country” and that he is “willing to do whatever it takes to promote peace and stability”.

11. The AU, working closely with the United Nations and other members of the international community, will spare no effort to encourage and support all steps aimed at promoting dialogue and reconciliation among the Somali stakeholders. It should be pointed out that the TFG is still retaining slots on the Cabinet for opposition’s nominees. Should the opposition groups decide to join the Government, they would be in a position to contribute to the implementation of the pending tasks of the remaining 18 months of the transition period, including the preparation for the national census, referendum and the general elections.

12. In the meantime, and at the invitation of the AU Commission, the International Contact Group on Somalia (ICG) met in Addis Ababa on 28 January 2008. The meeting was given a detailed briefing by Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein on the efforts made by his Cabinet for reconciliation and dialogue. In the communiqué issued following its deliberations, the ICG emphasized the need for all Somalis to remain focused on the process leading to national elections next year, and welcomed the commitment of the Prime Minister to political dialogue and the transitional process. It urged all Somali stakeholders to distance themselves from extremist elements. Furthermore, the meeting agreed on a proposal aimed at enhancing the functioning of the ICG, including the creation of ‘cluster groups’ to cover humanitarian response, security and stability, political outreach, and the facilitation of key TFG concerns.

13. On its part, the Security Council, in resolution 1801(2008) adopted on 20 February 2008, urged the TFIs and all parties in Somalia to respect the conclusions of the NRC and to sustain an equally inclusive ongoing political process thereafter. The Security Council welcomed the efforts of the TFG towards producing a plan for implementing the NRC conclusions, including the completion of the constitutional process, and reiterated the need for agreement on a comprehensive and lasting cessation of hostilities and a roadmap of the critical path for the remainder of the transitional process, including free and democratic elections in 2009, as set out in Somalia’s TFC.

III. SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

14. During the reporting period, the security situation in Somalia has continued to be of great concern. In Mogadishu, incidents are recorded almost daily. These include hit and run attacks by armed elements belonging mainly to the al Shabaab – an Islamist militant movement which has been designated by the USA as a terrorist organisation – against the TFG and Ethiopian forces; targeted killings of individuals seen as moderates advocating for dialogue, and of TFG officials – in the month of March alone, 10 prominent Government officials have been killed; grenade attacks carried out against

civilians; use of roadside bombs and mines, as well as the ambushing of TFG and Ethiopian military convoys; and mortar attacks against Government infrastructures, such as Villa Somalia, which houses the presidency, Ministries and police stations. Instances of hijacking of aid workers and other individuals have also occurred. More generally, the limited capacity of the TFG in terms of law enforcement has made it possible for a host of criminal activities to thrive, thus further compounding the overall security situation.

15. The situation is also precarious outside Mogadishu. The insurgents have continued to spread their activities in the countryside, with the objective of dislodging the TFG administration. A number of incidents were registered in the Hiran, Middle and Lower Juba, Shebelle and Bay regions. The armed elements opposed to the TFG have been able to capture temporarily key towns, seizing equipment and freeing prisoners. Furthermore, mention should also be made of the persisting tension between the semi-autonomous region of Puntland and the self-declared Republic of Somaliland over the disputed Sool and Sanaag regions.

16. In response to the prevailing situation, the TFG forces, with the help of the Ethiopian army, carry out regular search and cordon operations and other counter-insurgency measures aimed at routing out the armed elements from their hideouts. While some gains have been made, the overall situation remains difficult, especially in view of the many constraints facing the TFG army and security forces, which range from the lack of an effective command and control structure, insufficient training and inadequate capacity to the non-payment of salaries. This state of affairs has impacted negatively on the morale of the Somali forces and has, in some instances, led to looting by Government soldiers or to desertions. Hence the need for increased support to the TFG forces both in terms of training and capacity development and payment of salaries, in line with the appeal made by Council at its January 2008 meeting.

17. Piracy off the coast of Somalia continues to be a major problem, threatening both the delivery of humanitarian supplies - over 80% of the assistance to Somalia by the World Food Programme (WFP) is delivered by sea - and other maritime activities. It is against this background, and in response to the appeal made by the United Nations Security Council in its resolution 1772 (2007) of 20 August 2007, that from November 2007 to January 2008, the French Navy escorted ships carrying WFP humanitarian supplies from the Kenyan port of Mombassa to seaports in Somalia. The Danish Navy took over the responsibility of that operation during the months of February and March, before handing it over to the Dutch Navy in early April. The WFP has welcomed the naval escorts, which have enhanced the predictability and reliability of the WFP aid deliveries, as well as reduced their transportation costs. In the decision adopted at its 105th meeting, Council encouraged Member States that are in a position to do so to contribute to the protection of ships delivering WFP assistance to Somalia. While expressing its appreciation to above-mentioned UN members for their support, the Commission wishes to echo the call made by Council to the African countries.

18. Over the last few days, a number of incidents have occurred in the Somali waters, which bear testimony to the seriousness of the situation. On 11 April 2008, a group of more than a dozen Somali pirates stormed a French luxury yacht which was sailing back to the Mediterranean sea from the Seychelles and held its 30-crew

members hostage. Later on, the yacht was released, and 6 of the pirates are now in custody. On 20 April, a Spanish fishing boat, with its 26-crew members, was seized off the coast of Somalia. Finally, a Dubai-flagged ship was seized on 21 April, before being subsequently released, thanks to the intervention of Puntland security forces.

19. In his statement to the Security Council on 16 April 2008, President Abdullahi Yusuf highlighted the threat posed by acts of piracy off the coast of Somalia. He called on the international community to take action to combat this scourge until such a time as Somalia can effectively ensure the security of its territorial waters.

20. The period under review also witnessed attacks against AMISOM. Towards the end of January 2008, armed elements fired four mortars at the position of the Ugandan contingent located at the Mogadishu airport. Two civilians were killed, while three AMISOM soldiers and six other civilians were wounded. On 8 April 2008, a suicide attack was carried out against the Burundian contingent at the gate where the latter supplies water to civilians. Three Burundian soldiers were wounded, with one dying later on at the AMISOM field hospital; three civilians were also wounded and are undergoing treatment at the AMISOM hospital. The same day, seven mortar bombs were fired at a checkpoint of the AMISOM Ugandan contingent where civilians who had come for treatment were being dropped off. Fortunately, no casualty was registered. These attacks should be situated in the context of the threats made by one of the al Shabaab leaders against AMISOM, on the ground that the Mission is supporting the TFG.

21. According to the United Nations, the humanitarian situation in Somalia is deteriorating faster than expected. The attacks and fighting taking place in Mogadishu and elsewhere in the country and the general lawlessness have taken a heavy toll on the civilian population, with many killed and a bigger number seriously injured. The UN agencies have revised upwards the number of people in state of humanitarian emergency from 315,000 to 425,000, while that of newly displaced people has increased from 705,000 to 745,000, the most affected areas being Galgaduud, Mudug and Hiran regions. In addition to the insecurity, other factors have contributed to this situation, notably an unusually harsh dry season from January to March and increasing high rates of inflation. Furthermore, attacks against humanitarian workers and agencies are reported to be on the increase, including carjacking and convoy ambushes. In a move that testifies the growing difficulties facing the humanitarian agencies, "Médecins Sans Frontières" (MSF) recently announced that it was putting an end to its operations in Kismayo, in the Lower Juba, where three of its staff were killed on 28 January 2008.

22. In spite of the very challenging environment in which they are operating, the UN agencies and NGOs continue to make sustained efforts to respond to the needs of displaced and vulnerable groups. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the distribution of food aid to over 1.2 million beneficiaries, the completion of the 2nd round of the National Immunization Days, which targeted over 1.8 million children under the age of 5, and water tracking in the drought-stricken areas. On its part, AMISOM continues to provide limited humanitarian support to the civilian population, including medical services, such as treatment for common illness, surgery, gunshot wounds, pregnant women and children, and provision of water to communities located near its Headquarters.

23. Another issue of great concern is linked to the ever increasing number of Somalis trying to cross the Gulf of Aden towards Yemen in pursuit of better living conditions, including security. According to the United Nations, in the first quarter of this year, about 8,000 Somalis have arrived at the Yemeni coast. These movements to Yemen are all the more significant as the journey is particularly dangerous. In March, more than 100 people died while attempting to reach Yemen. In April, two incidents were reported by the local media, according to which dozens of people have died.

IV. DEPLOYMENT OF AMISOM AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS MANDATE

24. Following the extension by Council of the mandate of AMISOM, the UN Security Council, in its resolution 1801 (2008), decided to renew the authorization for AU Member States to maintain a mission in Somalia for a further period of six months. At the same time, the Security Council urged AU Member States to contribute to AMISOM and the UN members in general to provide financial resources, personnel, equipment and services for the full deployment of AMISOM.

25. During the period under review, no significant progress has been made regarding the deployment of AMISOM. As at 31 March, the strength of the Mission stood at 2,614 troops (two Ugandan battalions and one Burundian battalion), which is about 30 per cent of the authorized total of 8,000. The second battalion pledged by Burundi is ready to be deployed as soon as the required equipment and logistical support is secured. Needless to say that this situation is adversely affecting the operations of the Mission.

26. As part of the efforts to generate the needed troops for AMISOM, the Commission has been in consultation with Ghana and Nigeria, which both pledged to participate in the Mission. Ghana has now indicated that, due to its involvement in other peacekeeping operations, it will finally not be in a position to contribute troops to AMISOM. On its part, Nigeria, which pledged a battalion of 850, completed a one-week reconnaissance mission to Mogadishu in March. It is hoped that, following this reconnaissance mission, the deployment process of the Nigerian troops will be expedited. In spite of the appeal made by Council at its 105th meeting, no new pledge of troops has been recorded during the period under review. However, in an encouraging development, steps are underway for the initial deployment of the AMISOM police component.

27. In March, Major General Francis Okello took over the command of AMISOM from Major General L.B Karuhanga. The Commission wishes to seize this opportunity to express its appreciation to Major General Karuhanga for the excellent work done during his tenure of office, and to reiterate its gratitude to the Governments of Uganda and Burundi for their contribution to AMISOM and their commitment to the promotion of peace and reconciliation in Somalia. Furthermore, and in order to enable the SRCC to relocate to Mogadishu and thus make it possible for him to provide a more effective leadership for the Mission and maintain closer contacts with the Somali stakeholders, the Commission is in the process of signing a Memorandum of Understanding with UNOPS for the construction of the Mission's headquarters and associated logistics, including the procurement of a Level II hospital equipment.

28. As Council is aware, AMISOM is confronted with serious financial and logistical constraints. Apart from the logistical and technical support provided by AU partners and some Member States, the financial resources mobilized so far in support of the operation amount to about 50 millions dollars. The total budget for a fully deployed AMISOM, using United Nations standards, for a period of one year, amounts to US\$ 817,500,000. On 20 February 2008, and in pursuance of the request made by Council at its 105th meeting, the Chairperson of the Commission wrote to the UN Secretary-General for the UN to put in place a financial, logistical and technical support package for AMISOM, covering the various needs of the Mission. A response from the UN indicating how best it could further assist the Mission is expected shortly. In the meantime, the Commission would like to express its gratitude to all countries and institutions that have so far extended support to AMISOM.

29. In spite of the many constraints facing it, AMISOM has continued, within capability, to provide support to the TFG, notably by securing major infrastructure, like the seaport, airport, the State House, as well as the K4 junction. AMISOM also provides humanitarian assistance to populations in its immediate environment, including medical services and safe drinking water. In addition, AMISOM has established close contacts with key influential Somalis with the view to facilitating dialogue and reconciliation. Finally, AMISOM has increased its collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme, the TFG police and other stakeholders in an effort to contribute to the enhancement of the capacity of the Somali police.

V. UN SUPPORT TO SOMALIA AND POSSIBLE DEPLOYMENT OF A UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATION

30. Last January, and in pursuance of resolution 1772(2007) which mandated the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts in support of a roadmap for a comprehensive peace process and an end to conflict in Somalia, an integrated Task Force headed by the Department of Political Affairs undertook a strategic assessment mission to Somalia. The objective was to develop a coherent United Nations strategy for that country. The strategic assessment highlighted opportunities for a greater UN engagement and outlined the steps to be taken to this end. The findings of the mission and its recommendations are attached to the report on the situation in Somalia that the UN Secretary-General submitted to the Security Council on 14 March 2008.

31. As indicated in the Commission's report to the 105th meeting of Council, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations led an inter-departmental fact-finding mission to the region from 7 to 25 January 2008, to consult with stakeholders, including the AU, and assess the security situation, with a view to updating existing contingency plans and to provide recommendations for further support the United Nations could provide to AMISOM. This mission was undertaken in pursuance of United Nations Security Council resolution 1772(2007) and its Presidential Statement of 19 December 2007. The fact-finding mission developed the following four scenarios leading up to the deployment of a possible United Nations peacekeeping operation, which are also appended to the above-mentioned report of the Secretary-General;

- (i) the first scenario corresponds to the prevailing situation in which the TFG pursues its efforts aimed at engaging the opposition, the security situation remains fragile, and no noticeable increase occurs regarding AMISOM strength. In this context, the plan would be to facilitate United Nations political and programmatic (humanitarian, recovery and development) support to Somalia, through a substantial relocation of UN staff from Nairobi to Somalia;
- (ii) under the second scenario, political dialogue would have been initiated, with the support of 60 to 70 percent of the Somali actors, and adequate security arrangements made to facilitate a stronger UN presence in Mogadishu. In this case, the strategy would be to relocate UNOPS headquarters to Mogadishu to strengthen United Nations political support to the peace process;
- (iii) the third scenario envisages the implementation of a code of conduct on the use of arms among the major factions and agreement on a gradual withdrawal of Ethiopian forces. This will make it possible to deploy an impartial stabilisation force to allow the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, prevent a security vacuum, and provide impetus to the political dialogue. An estimated 8,000 troops would be required, together with police officers;
- (iv) finally, the fourth scenario assumes that political and security agreements are consolidated, including a clear statement of support for the deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation, and Ethiopian forces have withdrawn. Under this scenario, a United Nations peacekeeping operation would be deployed, with a military component of up to 27,000 and a possible police component of up to 1,500 police officers.

32. In his observations, the United Nations Secretary-General encouraged those Member States with the capabilities to take the initiative in the deployment of an international stabilization force to permit the withdrawal of foreign forces and prevent a vacuum thereafter. He further indicated that, in the meantime, contingency planning for an integrated peacekeeping operation should be continually updated so that the UN is prepared for deployment as soon as the conditions permit; this according to the fact-finding mission, is regrettably not yet the case. At the same time, he stressed that an increased presence of UN personnel on the ground would assist the parties in the political process; in this respect, he has tasked the relevant UN Departments to assess the feasibility of, and develop credible options to enable the relocation of UNOPS and the country team headquarters from Nairobi to Mogadishu.

33. In his letter of 20 February 2008 to the UN Secretary-General, the outgoing Chairperson of the Commission echoed the call made by Council for the early deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation. He reiterated this call during the Security Council high-level meeting of 16 April. This point was also stressed by President Abdullahi Yusuf in his statement to the Security Council. Furthermore, he also seized the opportunity to urge the Security Council to review and lift the arms embargo imposed on Somalia since 1992, as well as help Somalia in the establishment of security forces.

VI. OBSERVATIONS

34. While the security and humanitarian situation remains of great concern and has not improved since the last report to Council, it is nonetheless encouraging to note the steps taken by the TFG to promote dialogue with the opposition and the fact that some groups now seem to be prepared to respond positively to these moves. Equally encouraging is the appointment of a streamlined and technocratic cabinet whose agenda places particular emphasis on reconciliation, accountability and the implementation of the pending tasks of the transitional period. There is need to encourage the TFG and all the Somali stakeholders to vigorously pursue their efforts towards genuine reconciliation and lasting peace, and provide all the support required to that end.

35. While the Somali stakeholders have a key role to play and should assume the primary responsibility for the promotion of peace and reconciliation in their country, it goes without saying that they can only succeed if the international community fully back their efforts. The AU and its partners must act decisively to seize the opportunity that exists today to bring to a definite end the conflict that has plagued Somalia for nearly two decades now.

36. In this respect, the steps outlined by Council at its 105th meeting remain of particular relevance, as they relate, amongst others, to the need for the mobilization of greater support for AMISOM (generation of troops, financial, logistical and technical support); the early deployment of a UN peacekeeping operation; the enhancement of the capacity of the TFIs, including that of it's the Somali defense and security forces; the promotion of stronger regional cohesion in support of the peace process; the provision of humanitarian support to the needy population and the guarantee of the security and safety of the humanitarian workers; the adoption by the Security Council of measures against all those who seek to prevent or block a peaceful political process, threaten the TFIs or AMISOM by force or take action that undermine stability in Somalia or in the region.

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