



Transcript

The Crisis in Somalia

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Chair: David Stephen, UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Somalia (1997-2001) and Guinea-Bissau (2002-2004)

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Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah:

Thank you very much for allowing me to speak at this prestigious institution. I would like to thank my good friend David Stephen for agreeing to chair this event. I have experience of working with him in West Africa and I remember when he was Special Representative for Guinea-Bissau. It was a very difficult position – the President used to call him at two or three in the morning on security matters and he also gave him his memoirs which he had written in Portuguese! I am happy to see many friends here, and I am glad that they have come to show their interest and concern for Somalia. I am pleased to see many Somalis here: some who were with me in Djibouti. They are Somali people but they are also British citizens and that is a point we will discuss later. So, welcome, thank you. I am happy to be here.

The last time I made a presentation it was on Cameroon and Nigeria and the UN's assistance in determining the border between Cameroon and Nigeria for the first time between 1960 and 2000. Now we are seeing this issue in the case of Somalia. Many people in this room have a Somali background and many are diplomats or academics who know Somalia better than me. I must profess that I am not a specialist on Somalia, and would not be able discuss with you the intricacies of clan, sub-clan and sub-sub-clan. However, I hope that I am not wrong in stating that most of the problems are related to leadership. The elite – be they political, intellectual, or business – are taking the population, the agenda and everything hostage in Somalia.

Getting back to the issue itself and how I see the overall situation in Somalia. My understanding of what Somalia has achieved comes from the Djibouti agreement. The overall situation and context is well-known but I would like to avoid making Somalia another case study; wasting time, energy and thousands of dollars on the study of the situation. In this kind of situation what is important is not making a study for the sake of studying, but finding the way out – a solution. When I arrived in Nairobi – which is unfortunately where we work on Somalia - most of the studies being carried out were on clan and sub-clan and background of the conflict. This was not helpful.

For me, the real problems are deeply rooted in a long conflict with the related problem of violence. I know some people claim this violence to be organised, but I am not sure that it is necessarily as well organised as what they suggest. I see more anarchy than organised violence. There are probably three million refugees, most of who have fled to North America, Europe, the United Kingdom and the Middle East. There are between half a million and a million IDPs (internally displaced persons) living in terrible conditions without access to infrastructure - hospitals, schools, and housing. I knew Mogadishu before

the war. It was a beautiful city, built in the Italian style. Now it is destroyed. The essential infrastructure is destroyed. While people are fighting, Somalia has become a dumping ground for solid waste, chemical waste and probably nuclear waste. There has been massive looting of wealth, especially in the fishing industry. There is no central government to address these problems and Somalis have no time to address their own problems, because they are fighting. This leads me to ask my Somali partners and colleagues, 'if you win, *what* country are you going to run?' A large place where everything is dumped, and where there is little value? The winner-takes-all attitude of the conflict has had a devastating effect on this great country.

Leadership... it is very important to address this issue. Leadership does not only mean political leadership, it also includes military leadership, intellectual leadership, and the business community. Whatever their affiliations may be my impression is that the agenda has been taken hostage by these elites. How do we address peace? Somalis are very sharp and bright businessmen; you see it in Middle East and in many other African countries. Even despite the situation now, the fundamentals of the Somali economy are better than all of their neighbours. It may be surprising to find out that GDP by percentage in Somalia is better than in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda and Burundi. Import-export figures from the World Bank and the Economist Intelligence Unit put Somalia above twenty to twenty-five African countries. These are I suppose credible figures.

What is needed is a minimum peace between Somali and Somali. The fundamentals for peace are good. My first meeting in Somalia to discuss a way out was not with politicians or with militias but with businessmen; first in Dubai, and then in Nairobi. Somalis carry the responsibility for peace and this responsibility rests greatest with the leadership. However, the international community is also partly to blame for having consistently neglected and punished Somalia because of their behaviour in the early 1990s. When journalists come to report and are killed it doesn't help the situation. But I think we should put an end to this continued punishment. Somalia has paid for its misbehaviour. The time has come to pardon, forgive, and give amnesty. We cannot keep neglecting this country and Somalia must not continue to neglect itself.

Now to the topic of external interference, a matter about which Somalis are very sensitive to. Any patriot is indeed sensitive about external interference in their country. We try to tell Somalis that they are right; there is no reason for a foreign country to be in Somalia. However, all civil conflicts in Africa are civil only in principal. If you take Mozambique, there was interference from South

Africa and others. If you take Liberia in West Africa, there was interference from Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. If you take Sierra Leone, it is the same. Congo is a huge country; yet you have interference from Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. The best way to avoid interference is to put your act together, to unite. You will not have Ethiopia, you will not have Eritrea, you will not have Kenya, and you will not have Djibouti if you stand together. This is not just a justification for any internal interference but it is the best way to avoid international or external interference.

The international community may have neglected Somalia because of their position vis-à-vis human rights. However, there is continued support for humanitarian access and assistance. Access to Somalia is not easy because of the violence, but assistance has been in large number and the figures requiring assistance are huge. Humanitarian assistance each year costs in the vicinity of 800 million to one billion dollars. This may partly have to do with food prices getting higher, but even compared to two years ago external humanitarian assistance has grown substantially. No African country gets that amount of money in bilateral aid. So, yes, there is assistance but we also need to question the usefulness of that assistance. It is useful because it helps the victim, the displaced and the oppressed but it costs much less than a peacekeeping operation. However, it costs much more than the assistance given to Ghana, or probably that given to Tanzania. No African country I know of gets as much in bilateral assistance or resources.

There was no call made by the Somali leadership to the international community to restore justice. Somali people are being oppressed by their own leaders. There is no responsibility to protect nor are there measures to tackle impunity justice and reconciliation. Do we need a truth commission? Do we have to go to the International Criminal Court? Well we must address impunity in order to avoid a repeat of the current violence. Illegal fishing, dumping of solid chemical and hospital waste are all issues that need to be addressed by the Somali leadership. Yet, my Somali friends have no time to concern themselves with their own problems because they are constantly fighting. We have to help them take into account the massive destruction their country is going through.

Thinking about where we have come to in the international community today, Somalis have to be accountable to the protection of human rights. The misbehaviour by some elements against the peace process is maybe inevitable. Yet we have the imbalance of violence in Somalia, while we continue to live peaceful lives in Canada, the UK, Scandinavia and the US. A female member of parliament Djibouti said, 'we have violence, and some

people behind the violence live peacefully with their families abroad'. The problem still has to be addressed by us all.

We have to support the Djibouti agreement; people who don't support it cannot say they are being excluded from the process. They cannot have it both ways. We are not in a Club Méditerranée circuit where you go to discuss but do not implement. NGOs are concerned about Somalia because they cannot go there, but human rights activists and others cannot ignore what is going on. They cannot ignore the crimes that are being committed against the environment on the border of Somalia and Kenya – where we see massive destruction of the environment, drug trafficking, and irregular migration. These issues have to be addressed with long term activity: I would be very happy if the UK were to provide some support, particularly on the problems of illegal dumping and irregular fishing.

The Djibouti Agreement

The latest development happened in Djibouti. Some of my colleagues attended and have done a very good job. They have been patient and have made enormous intellectual and psychological progress in order to reach an agreement. Why should this agreement, the fifteenth of its kind, work? I think this is a legitimate question for us to ask. I think it will work for a number of reasons:

Firstly, I have been in touch with the Somali leadership since mid-January and I have been looking at the previous agreements. The last one was in Kenya where I think they had 3,000 participants. Negotiations have been ongoing for a long time, I think two years. There is no reason to believe that 3,000 people can agree on something, especially if they are taught that you have two years to work with. It cannot work; it should not work.

I have met with Somalis from the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and from the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). I have told them that we have to work together using some common parameters. You cannot be represented in talks by a large number; you have to trust five to seven of your colleagues with the capacity to speak on your behalf.. Contrary to all the advice I was given, the Somali government and opposition accepted in advance to meet in Djibouti for five working days, to meet on time, represented by a limited number and also to finish on time. The second phase of talks was agreed for the 31st of May. We agreed that seven of the first phase plus fifteen more would meet in Djibouti. By pure coincidence, the Security Council was visiting the region at the time. We arranged a very productive meeting with them and the Somali government, opposition and

civil society organizations and after nine days, the Somalis reached this agreement, which is broad in principle but needs more details.

I think the leaders have proven that we should not continue to be cynical about a solution in Somalia. We have reason to be sceptical, and Somalis themselves are sceptical, but we cannot be pessimists. Peace is so important, especially in a country that is so devastated. We have to give every chance we can to Somalis. This is especially true because people are tired, the regime is at risk and the trouble in Somalia may become a global problem if not properly addressed.

What has happened is that a commitment has been given from two groups. The first is the ARS, a group which considers itself, and is considered by many as a legitimate opposition. They have been in power in Mogadishu since June December 2006. The second is TFG, who are legally recognised and supported by the Arab League, African Union, European Union and United Nations. A combination of the two groups gives legitimacy and legality to both. I am not saying that one was the only legitimate and the other was the only legal; it appears to be a good combination of legality and legitimacy.

As with all agreements, there are elements of opposition within a group, but I think that this is normal. In all the conflicts I have seen - in West Africa, Central Africa and even in former Yugoslavia - you don't have a total agreement supported by all people at the same time. I think other people will join and the problem is to figure out how they will join. I believe that any group that does join this peace agreement is making life easier - for Somalia, for himself or herself and for his or her family and friends. At the opening of a third phase I said, 'those who would like to have a pardon should also pardon their country and make it possible to forgive them'.

Important Articles in the Agreement

The main elements of the agreement can be seen in Articles eight and nine. Article eight calls for a joint security committee to help ensure a cessation of armed confrontation. My understanding is that this should be at national level, provincial level and at local level. Somalis need to talk to their constituencies to address their problems. This calls for resources, which means cars, radios, and telephones. There is no front line in this conflict, no liberation zone. Violence is everywhere.

Article nine calls for the establishment of a high level committee to address political cooperation between Somalis and also to address concerns over justice and reconciliation. The article calls for political cooperation at a high level. My understanding is that such a committee will consist of five to seven

Somali representatives from both sides, with chairmanship from a well respected Somali, and that this group should address national issues. The agreement will give Somalis another chance to get more familiar with the management of national issues. I am not saying it will be a parallel government, but something that helps address national issues and whose members should be seen as members of a leading group. This body should ideally be decentralised at the provincial and local level where it will also address important issues.

The committee will be good preparation for the political management of a future Somalia. It is very difficult to run a country or to be a candidate for running a country if you don't have the right skills. This was visible in Djibouti and is the case with many of the opposition who are from the younger generation.

These two articles could help prepare the follow-up for the cessation of armed confrontation and present and future management of major issues in Somalia. Take the example of economic issues. Why should the central bank be under the control of the minister of finance? It is good for the opposition to gain experience of the national central bank, where there is a problem of printing fake money; for them to know about import-export and also security. It is also good for the government to know what the opposition think.

Article seven is very interesting for Somalia because it calls for a UN presence, for Ethiopian withdrawal and ARS commitment to respect security. Article seven has three elements which are interlinked and related to ensure that there is no security vacuum due to the lack of trust between Somali parties. If there is trust between Somali parties – and this is why Article Nine is very important – people will work together and there may not even be a need for UN peacekeepers.

One problem that is never mentioned in Somalia is that young people have no hope to get a job or to earn a decent living. They are like their brothers in all African nations, except that they give themselves the opportunity to try to migrate to Yemen, the Canary Islands, West Africa, or Libya. Sixty-six percent of Africa's population consists of young people under thirty, the majority of whom seemingly have no hope for betterment. So again I implore all of us to help, give prestige, give money, and give possibility. We have to help people get jobs; if we can then we don't need any troops. But this is the long-term story.

The last element of the Agreement I consider relevant is Article eleven, which has two elements. The first is a call from Somalia to the international

community to help implement the agreement and the second is a call for the convening of an international conference for the reconciliation and development. Although Somalia doesn't have the strategic importance of Afghanistan or Iraq the country has been devastated and we are at least trying to rebuild and catch up with the likes of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda.

I am very happy by the response from a number of countries interested in hosting the conference later this year and I am here in this country because many civil servants past and present are very helpful in mobilising effort, attention and energy. They are helping my office to prepare this conference as something serious, organised in conjunction with the World Bank and IMF. The World Bank and IMF are very important to addressing Somalia's problems. Somali debt, in stock, is \$1.7 billion. If we add interest, it is \$3.7 billion. Because of the debt still owed to them, the Bretton Wood institutions do not even formally recognise Somalia. My office is trying to mobilise resources and attention to address Somali debt, and to help organize resources for the reconstruction of the country.

I have presented the main elements of the agreement. I think now the response must come from the international community. We have been telling Somalia, 'we don't trust you' and after fourteen failed agreements we had reason to. Now we have been given twenty-five percent; the beginning of an agreement. We should try to match what the Somalis have done with additional trust. We have an agreement which is initially supported by the two main parties. What we now have to do is to mobilise immediate resources for the follow-up of Articles eight and nine. Yesterday in Nairobi, my office along with representatives from the EU, US and Norway as well as the African Union and the Arab League, met with the Somali Prime Minister to begin this process.

We have to support the government in their first initiative, but we must also clearly say, 'this agreement is part of a process'. We have to support and involve all parties in what is remaining of the transition, and in the reform of security. It is very difficult to implement but it is important that it should work, and where there is a will on both sides it will work. The Security Council also has to be sure that engaging in Somalia and responding to their requests for international stabilisation force will work.

Before I stop I would once again like to reiterate that this agreement is not the first one but my hope is that it should be one of the last for a long time. There is a lot of work to be done. If you look at the concerns around justice and

reconciliation, this is something we cannot achieve now. We need a serious debate on impunity, justice, and reconciliation, but it will take six to eight months to start discussing what this process will look like in Somalia. Are they going to follow the example of South Africa, or Rwanda? Are they going to be like Guatemala, or Chile? Or are they going their own way?

It will take time to become established in Mogadishu. We need to find a way for the representatives of the international community to return. What we call the UN country team, my own office and some embassies should move from Nairobi to Mogadishu. This will be risky but it is difficult to work by telephone with people. To find a solution we have to be closer to Somalis, and to be closer to the victims. I started off by saying Somalia cannot have it both ways, and also we international community should not have it both ways. We cannot help Somalia by staying in Nairobi or New York or wherever. Thank you very much.

End.