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AMISOM

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Mr Chairman,

Before giving my remarks, I would like to say that AMISOM fully support the appeal by the Ugandan Minister of Defense, His Excellency, Dr Chrispus Kiyonga to provide more assistance to the African Union Mission for Somalia.

Mr Chairman,

I am here representing the African Union Special Representative for Somalia, Ambassador Nicholas Bwakira who is not able to attend due to unforeseen circumstances.

It is a great pleasure and an honour to be here. The holding of this hearing, the presence of the President of Puntland, His Excellency Abdirahman Farole, the Ugandan Minister of Defense, His Excellency Chrispus Kiyonga, the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative for Somalia, Ambassador Ahmedou Oul Abdallah and the full room once again demonstrates the U.S and international community's commitment and determination to stabilizing Somalia.

As you know, the security situation in Somalia has significantly deteriorated since the insurgents backed by foreign fighters or Muhajir (emigrant in Arabic) launched an offensive against the Somali Transitional Federal Government led by H.E, President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. The current conflict in Somalia is economic and political with religious dimensions.

The conflict is economic because some individuals who have benefited from the 20 years of chaos are opposed to law and order as they would have to handover stolen property, pay taxes or endure government restrictions. These individuals also known as Moneylords, although ideologically opposed to the Wahabists, have been funding the insurgents just to oppose the Government.

Secondly, the conflict is political with various groups and clans vying for power. The situation is further complicated by the continued meddling of external actors in Somali affairs.

Finally, the conflict is religious because it opposes two Islamic schools of thoughts (Madhab). On the one hand, you have the Sha'afi school of thought which the Somalis have followed for hundreds of years and learned to harmonize with Somali traditions and way of life. On the other, there is the Wahabist or Salafi school of thought that the Sha'afi considers as "Bidaa" or heretic. Groups such as Al- Shabaab have espoused Wahabism and mixed an already extremist school of thought with the Arab Badwiyiin way of life which practices an extreme form of Islam sometimes involving beheadings, arm amputations for theft etc. This is completely new and shocking to the majority of Somalis. It is unfortunate that some would use the religious zeal of sincere Somalis to prosecute what amounts to terrorism in the promotion of their agendas.

Mr Chairman,

The situation in Somalia is grave and the African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM) and the Government of National Unity (GNU) need your assistance to confront an enemy who has no borders.

The Current Situation

A week ago, the GNU controlled 14 out of the 16 districts of Mogadishu. As of June 24, the GNU controls about nine districts while the Insurgents control the districts of Yaaqshid, Dayniile and Hiliwa. The districts of Karaan, Shibis and Hodan are in dispute while the districts of Waberi and Hamar- Weyne have been infiltrated by the insurgents. The insurgents continue to hold meetings to see how they can unite their forces for a final push against the GNU and AMISOM. On June 23, Al Shabaab and foreign fighters held a meeting at the former perfume factory in Mogadishu. The next day, Al Shabaab and Hizbul Islaam met in the town of Afgooye.

Mr Chairman,

Government forces and pro-government militias are mainly battling an offensive by the Hizbul Islaam (Party of God) coalition led by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and Al-Muharakat - Al Shabaab Mujahideen led by Ahmed Godane. Al Shabaab is a group linked to international jihadist as witnessed on the battlefield in Mogadishu where foreign fighters were spotted fighting shoulder to shoulder with Al Shabaab combatants.

The Hizbul Islaam was created in February of 2009. It is a coalition of the former ARS-Asmara led by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, the Akwan and Raas Kaamboni militias under the command of Sheikh Hassan Turki, the small Anole led by the Harti-Darod Abu Yusuf Abdirahman, Jabhatul Islaamiya (JABISO) and recently Ethiopian rebels from the United Western Somali Liberation Front (UWSLF) led by Mohamed Arab Hiire. Hizbul Islaam currently enjoys the support of some businessman. There is also evidence that Sheikh Aweys has consistently received support from an external country since his return to Somalia last May. Hizbul Islaam however remains weak because of its controversial leader and because it is perceived as a temporary alliance of individuals bent on continuing the mayhem unless they are in power.

The Al Shabaab militia are highly decentralized and they use insurgency, terror and propaganda to recruit and to exert control over conquered territory. These extremists are not strong but they have a good understanding of “Brand Management” and the international media has bought into it. The core of the group of the Khawarich is composed of 1500 hundred men. The majority are young unemployed men easily impressed by small amounts of money and the myth of Khawarich. These extremists also rely on some local clans to assert their authority despite their claims that they are above Clanism.

The most radical group of the Al Shabaab is the Kismayo group. On June 12, the group pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden. It has threatened the government of Kenya on numerous occasions. The Kismayo group is believed to be hosting the headquarters of Al-Shabaab, and there is strong evidence that the Kismayo group has direct links with groups operating in Yemen and Pakistan’s Swat Valley region which have assisted in the smuggling of foreign fighters into Somalia.

The foreign fighters continue to flock to Somalia and are estimated somewhere between 200-1000. According to some of our sources, the foreigners hail from South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Comoros, Pakistan and Afghanistan, to name a few. They serve as comptrollers and trainers to the insurgents. In the capital Mogadishu they had established their bases in the Yaaqshid district and later on moved to the Hodan district. They train insurgents fighters in the Boni forest on the border between Kenya and Somalia and have been spotted in the cities of Baidoa, Merka, and Kismayo. Interestingly, they do not trust the Somalis insurgents, but the Khawarich serve their purpose which is to maintain Somalia in a state of chaos.

Mr Chairman,

The situation is not entirely bleak. First, the GNU continues to reach out to different groups and organizations to join forces and confront the Khawarich/Bedaa in different regions. For example, the GNU led by Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Sharmake signed an agreement of cooperation on June 21 with the respected Sunni religious organization, Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaa. Secondly, many African nations are stepping up and are determined to assist the GNU to build its capacity and to confront extremists. Thirdly, divisions are rife within the insurgency. On June 23, the Khawarich assassinated a close associate of Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys in the town of Afgooye. Since his return from exile on May 24, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys has been courting the Al Shabaab without success. In fact, the two groups were close to a confrontation on several occasions if Sheikh Hassan Turki had not intervened from Kismayo to ease tensions. It would not be surprising if we start seeing confrontations between the Hizbul Islaam and the Khawarich in the coming days.

Finally, the Somali people are tired of the Warlords, Moneylords, Islamists extremists and anyone bent on keeping them in a state of anarchy. The majority of the Somalis want to help but the GNU still lacks the capacity to mobilize them or to convince them that this is not another government condemned to fail.

Mr Chairman,

The GNU is doing its best with the limited resources that it has and the numerous challenges that it has inherited. Despite an overall good strategy to counter the insurgents, the GNU continues to suffer from a lack of capacity to coordinate its efforts and most importantly, a lack of funds to pay the salaries of the soldiers, and the costs to train and equip them. The GNU is also deprived of humanitarian assistance that would help galvanize the population behind the government's efforts.

Conclusion

At this time of crisis, AMISOM is providing the GNU with vital support, working hand in hand with the United Nations Political Office for Somalia and the United Nations Support Office for AMISOM, as well as the wider international community. The international community has in recent months expressed strong support for the GNU and AMISOM. In the Donor Conference in Brussels, many countries and organizations pledged funds in excess of the 213 million requested for Somalia.

Furthermore, the United Nations Security Council requested the United Nations Secretary General in Resolution 1863 (2009) "to provide a United Nations logistical support package for AMISOM". The United Nations Support office for AMISOM was established in April, and while the new office is still in the process of building up its operations, it is already providing AMISOM much needed support. However, the GNU and AMISOM resources are limited and we need the continued engagement by the United States.

I would like to raise here four specific issues we would need your urgent support on:

1. To date, only Burundi and Uganda have agreed to contribute troops to AMISOM and it still only has roughly the 4350 of the authorized 8,000 troops on the ground in Somalia. More troops are urgently needed to help us support the GNU and guarantee that the insurgents trying to overthrow the legitimate government will not succeed. We need your continued efforts in encouraging potential Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) to contribute more troops.
2. The GNU and AMISOM need better force equipment. The current equipment of the TCC is insufficient and of poor quality.
3. Our troops need more experience in order to respond to the fast changing realities on the ground. They would benefit from the deployment of international advisers.
4. Finally, the funds pledged by the donors in Brussels are only slowly trickling in. We would appreciate your encouragement to ensure that the funds are rapidly disbursed.

Mr Chairman,

Without quick measures, we will not be able to overcome our enemy who is well equipped and supported by foreign fighters. Further territorial gains by the insurgents would have far reaching negative consequences that could take years to reverse.

I thank you.