



HIGHLIGHTS

- Top UN official meets Federal Member State leaders in Galmudug and South West State
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- At launch of Somalia Centennial Vision 2060, UN commends Somali progress and plans
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TOP UN OFFICIAL MEETS FEDERAL MEMBER STATE LEADERS IN GALMUDUG AND SOUTH WEST STATE

UN Special Representative James Swan engaged with Federal Member State leaders in Galmudug and South West State, reaffirming the world body's commitment to supporting local and national priorities.

In April, Mr. Swan visited Dhusamareb and Baidoa, where he held talks with Galmudug's President Ahmed Abdi Karie 'Qoor Qoor' and South West State's President Abdiaziz Hassan Mohamed 'Laftagareen.'

In Dhusamareb, discussions with President Qoor Qoor focused on a range of issues of state and national importance, including the need for national unity, inclusive political dialogue, the security environment, and the ongoing humanitarian situation.

With more than 600,000 people in Galmudug in need of humanitarian assistance, Mr. Swan noted that, in the face of reduced donor funding, Somali leaders, internation-

al donors, and the United Nations must work together to prioritise support for the most vulnerable.

"On the national side, with Somalia requiring decisive action on a range of security and political matters, I emphasised the importance of unity and inclusive dialogue among the country's political and community leaders," said Mr. Swan during his visit.

In Baidoa, the UN Special Representative's discussions with President Laftagareen covered a range of local and national topics, including state-building, security, and humanitarian needs.

The UN official also highlighted the importance of upcoming electoral processes, noting that preparations for voter registration and local council elections were underway with the National Independent Electoral Commission.

"In that regard, I recalled the importance of an open political environment to permit the successful conduct of elections at all levels," Mr. Swan stated.

On the humanitarian front, Mr. Swan reaffirmed the United Nations' collaboration

with South West State authorities and humanitarian partners to address urgent needs. He also commended the joint efforts of the Somali National Army and South West State forces in recovering territory from Al-Shabaab.

"These efforts are testament to the courage and tenacity of the Somali forces battling Al-Shabaab," Mr. Swan said.



ON MINE ACTION DAY, UN REAFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR A SAFE AND SECURE SOMALIA

Marking the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action in April, the United Nations reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Somalia in the fight against explosive hazards for a safe and secure future for all Somalis.

"Landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have disproportionately affected civilian populations. Today, we honour those who have lost their lives to these deadly devices, and reaffirm our commitment to working alongside the Somali government and our partners to reduce this lethal threat," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

"Together, we are developing the capacity of the Somali security forces to mitigate the threats posed by landmines, explosive

remnants of war and IEDs," he added.

Across Somalia, IEDs continue to pose a significant threat to peace and security, with 597 devices resulting in more than 1,400 casualties last year.

The United Nations has long supported and continues to support Somali security institutions in mitigating the risks associated with IEDs and explosive remnants of war. Significant progress has been made in building national capacities through training and the provision of specialized equipment – in February this year, the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) handed over an assortment of life-saving equipment to counter IED threats.

The United Nations also works closely with the Federal Government of Somalia and

its partners to address the humanitarian needs of those impacted by explosive hazards and to promote national ownership of mine action efforts.

The theme of this year's observance – 'Safe Futures Start Here, Ban Stigma, Take Action' – calls for global action to reduce the stigma faced by survivors of explosive ordnances.

In 2005, the UN General Assembly declared that 4 April of each year shall be observed as the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action to raise awareness of the need for continued efforts to foster the establishment and development of national mine-action capacities in countries where mines and explosive remnants of war constitute a serious threat to civilian populations, or an impediment to social and economic development.



AT LAUNCH OF SOMALIA CENTENNIAL VISION 2060, UN COMMENDS SOMALI PROGRESS AND PLANS

At the launch of the Somalia Centennial Vision 2060 (CV2060) in June, one of the top United Nations officials in Africa commended the country for the progress it has made so far and underlined the world body's support for its future plans.

"We are convening today against the backdrop of a deeply uncertain world marked by climate volatility, geopolitical conflict and economic instability. And Africa in particular acutely feels these shocks. But what do nations do when faced with adversity?" the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Africa (ECA), Claver Gatete, asked the gathering in the Somali capital.

"Some wait. Others forge ahead," he continued. "Today, Somalia has chosen the latter approach – through its Centennial Vision 2060, the country is reclaiming its voice, rewriting its story and reinventing its future with collective resolve."

Mr. Gatete was one of many international community representatives attending the launch in the Somali capital. From the world body, attendees also included the UN Resident Coordinator for Somalia, George Conway, who also serves as a Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Horn of Africa country.

"This Vision is therefore more than a policy document: it is a declaration of confidence, resilience and ambition by the Somali people," Mr. Gatete said. "We call upon all partners – regional, continental and global – to join forces with Somalia in realizing this bold vision."

From the Somali side, attendees included President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, as well as a host of ministers and other government officials.

CV2060 ties into the country's ongoing process of rebuilding its institutions and economy after more than two decades of conflict and instability.

Today, Somalia has chosen the latter approach – through its Centennial Vision 2060, the country is reclaiming its voice

Guiding development

The president announced in January 2023 that Somalia would develop CV2060 as the foundation for the country's future development path. It would guide all future development planning frameworks for building essential national institutions for recovery and reconstruction as the country dealt with weak institutional capacity, fragile security and complex politics – all of which have constrained economic recovery and reconstruction.

"Its main objective is to formulate a shared long-term strategy and commitment to fundamentally transform Somalia into a middle-income country with a capable

state with the ability to effectively serve its people by 2060," the National Economic Council (NEC), states.

According to the NEC, among the most pressing economic and social challenges are: a lack of enabling environment in the form of prevalent state fragility and continued insecurity in some areas and poor infrastructure limiting economic activity; the prevalent food insecurity and environmental degradation; poor economic and social indicators, high unemployment, and internal displacement and outward migration.

African examples

In his remarks, Mr. Gatete pointed to the example set by "another African renewal story" – that of his home country, Rwanda.

He cited the 1994 genocide against ethnic Tutsis there that led to the loss of more than one million lives, along with the destruction of most of the country's social infrastructure.

"Even before the genocide, infrastructure was rudimentary, access to quality education and health was limited, and economic productivity was stifled by a huge informal sector and aid dependency," Mr. Gatete said. "Thereafter, the government embarked on a long journey to rebuild the country from emergency phase to reconstruction and reconciliation to sustainable development."

"And in less than three decades," he added, "the country transformed itself into one of Africa's most compelling examples



of post-conflict development, driven by shared vision, discipline and inclusive leadership – it is important to stress that Rwanda's success did not come from chance. It was the product of long-term strategic planning, institutional reform and an unshakeable commitment to people-centred development. Somalia, too, possesses that same potential. So why not Somalia? And why not now?"

The senior UN official highlighted how Rwanda's Vision 2020, launched in the year 2000, had also provided a strategic framework for rebuilding. One of its key characteristics was that ownership and inclusivity were central, and implementation hinging on structured seven-year strategic plans, backed by evaluations and performance contracts.

"Within a short time, measurable progress had been recorded in governance, health, education and infrastructure," Mr. Gatete added.

He also pointed to other African countries – Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritius – which have demonstrated that it is possible to overcome challenges and achieve meaningful development.

"The common thread in these examples is vision matched with discipline in execution. Thankfully, Somalia is not starting from zero, so I have no doubt that the country

can also carve a similarly ambitious course and succeed," Mr. Gatete said.

"This Vision is therefore more than a policy document: it is a declaration of confidence, resilience and ambition by the Somali people. As such, the ECA reaffirms its steadfast commitment to accompany Somalia on this journey. We will continue to share knowledge, amplify success stories, and deliver results that improve lives – with sustained collaboration, political will and solidarity, Vision 2060 will not just be imagined; it will be realized," he added.

ECA support

ECA's past support for Somalia includes assistance with its National Africa Continental Free Trade Area Strategy, the reinforcement of public-private partnership frameworks, and the building of inclusive data ecosystems for effective, evidence-based policymaking.

Covering the African continent, ECA is one of five regional commissions which operate as economic laboratories, shaping policies that navigate development challenges specific to their regions. They analyze regional trends, identify policy strengths, and bring diverse stakeholders together – including governments, financial institutions, and businesses.



ON WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY, UN HIGHLIGHTS KEY ROLE OF SOMALI MEDIA

On the occasion of World Press Freedom Day in May, the United Nations in Somalia underlined the importance of public access to information and ensuring journalist safety.

"Independent and pluralistic media are central to good governance, as media freedom and access to information empower citizens to contribute to national development and to hold public institutions to account," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

"In view of the key role of independent media as Somalia rebuilds and develops, journalists must be able to carry out their vital work safely and free from harassment and intimidation," Mr. Swan added.

The UN General Assembly proclaimed World Press Freedom Day in 1993, with 3 May designated for the observance to mark the anniversary of the Windhoek Declaration, a landmark statement on the link between the freedom to seek, impart and receive information and the public good.

The Day acts as a reminder to governments of the need to respect their commitment to press freedom, as well as celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom, assess the state of press freedom throughout the world, defend the media from attacks on their independence, and pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty.





WOMEN'S GROWING ROLE IN MARITIME HIGHLIGHTED ON INTERNATIONAL DAY

The important role that women play in developing Somalia's sea-based industries and the need for their greater participation was highlighted in May at an event to mark the International Day for Women in Maritime.

"Today reminds us that progress must be inclusive and gender-responsive. This year's theme (An Ocean of Opportunities for Women) reminds us that a nation cannot rise if half of its population, half of its talent, is excluded," said Nasrin Khan, the Head of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions Group at the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS).



"To all the Somali women in Maritime, your leadership, vision and courage are shaping Somalia's future and inspiring the region," she added. "You are not just part of the maritime story, you are leading it."

In February 2023, the Federal Government of Somalia, with support of the United Nations, launched the Women in the Maritime Sector (WiMS) National Action Plan, which aims to enhance and empower Somali women in the maritime sector by increasing opportunities.

In her remarks, Ms. Khan also reiterated the commitment of the United Nations – specifically UNTMIS, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) – to collaborate with the Federal Government of Somalia and international partners in fostering legal reform, security, and capacity-building for the maritime sector.

The UN official was speaking at an observance event in Mogadishu, which was attended by a range of government officials. They included the Minister of Fisheries and Blue Economy, Ahmed Hassan Aden; State Minister of Ports and Marine Transport, Mohamed Abdulkadir, the Deputy Minister of Ports and Marine

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Transport, Fartun Abdukadir; the Deputy Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Hussein Ali Haji, and the Deputy Minister of Family and Human Rights Development, Hanaan Bare.

Also attending were representatives from international partners, the private sector, academia, and civil society organizations, along with officials and experts from UNTMIS and UNODC's Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP), both of which supported the observance. The GMCP is funded by the Government of Denmark.

New initiative

Jointly organised by the Minister of Fisheries and Blue Economy (MFB) and the Ministry of Ports and Marine Transport, in

collaboration with the Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, the event also featured the launch of a new initiative focused on empowering women through education and job creation within the maritime field.

"The government has made it its mission to develop and to extend support to women in the maritime sector by ensuring they get all the help that they need in terms of technical support to develop women in maritime because it has been recognised that women are the backbone of development in Somalia," Minister Aden said in his remarks to the gathering.

"The Ministry of Ports and Maritime Affairs pledges to break down the barriers that prevent women from participating in maritime activities, as well as to combat any discrimination, and will work to create jobs and leadership opportunities for Somali women," said Deputy Minister Fartun.

"The voices, talents, and aspirations of Somali women must be recognised and included in our national maritime strategy. We believe that sustainable development and gender equity go hand in hand," said Deputy Minister Hanaan.

Awards

The gathering also recognised Somali women's contributions with the presentation of the Women in Maritime Awards to 23 individuals and one youth organisation.

Among the honourees was Salma Abdizak Mohamud, the founder of Seacare Somalia, an organisation dedicated to preserving Somali beaches.

"One of the proudest moments in my life was when we were organising the beach clean-up campaigns. A lot of people came together to clean with us, to empower



and encourage our movement. That was really an important moment in my career in founding Seacare Somalia. It makes me feel happier each day and helps me to continue with the impactful work I am doing for my nation," said Ms. Mohamud.

Another recipient, Ikran Mohamed Abdullahi, the head of the MFBE's human capital development department, said, "I urge women not to be discouraged and not to lose hope... women can benefit a lot in the maritime sector because it has a huge financial potential, but they will need to learn the various maritime skills."

UN and women in maritime

Somalia has the longest coastline in mainland Africa, stretching more than 3,333 kilometres along the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden, and is widely considered to have an enormous economic potential. Despite this potential, there is a significant shortage of marine expertise due to poor educational and institutional capability. Furthermore, gender inequality

prevails, depriving Somali women and girls of essential rights and opportunities such as access to marine education and economic participation.

The International Day for Women in Maritime is celebrated annually around the world on 18 May.

Established by IMO in 2021, the occasion aims to highlight the achievements and contributions of women in the maritime industry, which has historically been male-dominated. The day seeks to address that imbalance through recognition and support of women's contributions. In Somalia, UNTMIS and UNODC have been working alongside the government and partners to support the WiMS initiative since its launch. The initiative has created a space for Somali women to lead, contribute, and innovate through tailored capacity-building, policy engagement, and awareness campaigns across various federal and regional institutions.

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INDEPENDENT EXPERT URGES GOVERNMENT TO “SEIZE THIS OPPORTUNITY” ON HUMAN RIGHTS

During her visit to Somalia in May, the Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia called on the Somali authorities to step up their efforts on a range of human rights issues for the good of all Somalis.

“As we consider the UN and AU transition in Somalia, I call upon the government of Somalia to seize this opportunity to accelerate its work on the constitutional review and adoption processes, establishing legislative and institutional frameworks to guarantee the rights of all Somalis going forward,” said the Independent Expert, Isha Dyfan.

“At the same time, strengthen its policy and institutions to properly deal with its fragile security, political and humanitarian realities,” she added. “Moreover, addressing the negative impact of climate change and the current funding crisis on the populations – in particular ensuring access to basic social services such as water supply, food, health care delivery and education for all children – is essential.”

The transitions referred to involve the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), which is

due to hand over all of its responsibilities to other parts of the UN system and government partners by October 2026, and the recent establishment of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).

The Independent Expert made the comments in a press conference in Mogadishu at the end of her latest visit to Somalia. Ms. Dyfan’s remarks were part of preliminary observations ahead of her presentation of a full report to the United Nations Human Rights Council and General Assembly later this year.

She had previously visited Somalia in May 2024.

Her latest visit saw her spend seven days in the Somali capital, where she had a wide-ranging series of meetings with representatives of the Federal Government of Somalia, civil society, the media, the African Union Stabilization Support Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), the international community and various UN agencies, funds and programmes.

“My mandate requires me to monitor and report on the situation of human rights in Somalia with a view to making

recommendations on technical assistance and capacity-building in the field of human rights,” Ms. Dyfan said. “Thus, the aim of my visit was to assess the human rights situation, including the implementation of my benchmarks and recommendations since the issuance of my previous report in October 2024.”

Security

In her remarks, the Independent Expert underlined how, while assessing Somalia’s human rights developments in the context of the ongoing transitions at the UN and AU levels in the country, she took note of





the rapidly changing security, along with political and humanitarian situations, negatively impacting the enjoyment of human rights in the country.

"I strongly condemn Al-Shabaab, which remains the major perpetrator of a range of human rights abuses against civilians including children and is responsible for keeping the country in a perpetual security crisis," Ms. Dyfan said.

"I also remain concerned about the upsurge in conflict between Al-Shabaab and its associates, and government forces supported by Community Defence Forces and its international partners, as well as instances of military confrontation between the Federal Government and Jubaland State resulting into alleged killings and displacement of civilians, including in Jubaland, Hirshabelle, Galmudug, Benadir regions.

"I also learnt that these fights have led to an increase in human rights violations and humanitarian protection concerns, including Sexual and Gender-Based Violations, child recruitment and early marriage issues, among others," she

I still encourage the government to enhance the participation of all stakeholders

added. "Moreover, the ongoing political, clan and resource related conflicts have further exacerbated the human rights and security problems in the county."

Legislation

The Independent Expert expressed disappointment over the lack of parliamentary action on Somalia's constitutional review process since the passing of the first four chapters last year.

"Nevertheless, the Ministry of Justice has been conducting consultations on chapters six to nine, involving the new justice model including dealing with the prisons, the custodian courts and the Attorney General Office. I still encourage the government to enhance the participation of all stakeholders, build consensus and speed up the review process to ensure the inclusivity, legitimacy, transparency and credibility of the constitutional making process," Ms. Dyfan said.



In relation to other legal and policy frameworks, she said she remained concerned over the lack of progress in the ratification of relevant international and regional human rights instruments.

These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

"Similarly, efforts to put in place relevant national laws to properly protect human rights have not shown any progress," Ms. Dyfan said. "Nonetheless, I would like to appreciate authorities for the adoption of the Anti-Female Genital Mutilation Act by Jubaland and the Disability Act by South West State."

The Independent Expert also highlighted how the review and adoption of other key legislation at the federal level – including bills related to rape, juvenile justice, child rights and female genital mutilation – are long overdue and require proactive measures to finalize their amendment and adoption.

"While it may be encouraging to note that many of these bills have been approved at the cabinet level, it is equally concerning that no concrete actions have been taken to adopt these bills into laws at the House of People and Senate levels," Ms. Dyfan said.

Freedom of expression

On the right to freedom of expression – including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart useful information – the Independent Expert said that the space for exercising these is severely restricted.

"My interactions with journalists, social media activists, civil society organisations, international partners and government offi-





cials revealed that journalists and those who take the opportunity to exercise their rights to freedom of expression using different platforms have continued to be intimidated, harassed, beaten, and detained by security officials, with impunity,” Ms. Dyfan said. “I am concerned that all these have created a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists who report on issues related to security and conflict, leaving the people in the dark on the most-needed information to protect themselves.”

While discussing inclusion, the Independent Expert commended the Somali government for some progress made towards enhancing the participation of women and persons with disability (PWDs), including by putting in place a 30 per cent quota system for women and a five per cent quota for PWDs in electoral processes.

“Efforts are also being made to develop regulations and guidelines to practically

implement this quota system within the context of the proportional electoral system. However, I received genuine concerns from various stakeholders about the use of the clan-based system of 4.5, entrenched in the governance system of the country, that would determine the eventual outcome of the election processes,” Ms. Dyfan said, adding that she called on the Somali authorities to ensure that the regulations and guidelines result in the practical application of these provisions.

Children

In relation to the rights of Somali children, the Independent Expert welcomed various efforts and steps, including the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Children and Armed Conflict’s following up on the implementation of a 2019 roadmap on children in armed conflict, as well as identifying and responding to the needs of children affected by conflict.

“I also noted the progresses made on implementation of the age verification guidelines, and cooperation on the handing over of disengaged children,” Ms. Dyfan said.

“Nonetheless, grave violations against children, such as, recruitment of children by the community defence forces and clan militia, have continued,” she noted. “Similarly, the ongoing conflict, the funding crisis and the dire impact of climate change in some parts of the country have contributed to the closure of schools and an increase in the displacement of families, affecting children disproportionately.”



Minorities

When discussing minority groups in Somalia, the Independent Expert noted that while there was consensus on their presence there seemed to be a lack of clear understanding of who these groups should include.

“Along the same lines, I noted that there is a lack of appetite to fully accommodate them in crucial national and regional decision-making processes. While members of minority and marginalized groups have continued to face discrimination at all levels, including in accessing public services and exercising their rights to participation, no solid action appears to be taken to protect their fundamental rights,” Ms. Dyfan said.

“I call upon the government to embark on concrete legal and institutional measures to safeguard the rights of those groups left behind and enhance inclusivity and equality among all groups of the community as it is being promoted by the government,” she added.

Independent Experts

Independent Experts like Ms. Dyfan are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council.

Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council’s independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures’ experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organisation and serve in their individual capacity.





UN EXPERT URGES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY NOT TO LEAVE SOMALIA BEHIND

Somalia faces extraordinary challenges in the fight against Al-Shabaab and Daesh armed groups, a UN expert said in May, expressing solidarity with the people and the Government in the face of persistent terrorist threats.

"I recognise the extensive efforts by the Somali authorities to prevent terrorism, through a comprehensive strategy combining law enforcement, military operations, combating violent extremism and addressing the root causes of terrorist recruitment," the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Ben Saul said in a statement at the end of an official visit to the country.

"I also acknowledge Somalia's severe security and resource constraints."

Saul noted with concern that Somalia has adopted excessive and overbroad terrorist definitions and offences, as well as expansive intelligence and security powers that could compromise fundamental human rights. He warned that some terrorism offences attract the death penalty even when they do not involve intentional killing, as required under international law.

During his visit, the expert received reports

of arbitrary arrests, protracted pre-trial detention, lack of legal representation, possible enforced disappearance, excessive use of force, and ill-treatment in detention.

"I am deeply concerned about widespread violations against children in armed conflict, including killings, maiming, forced recruitment, sexual and gender-based violence, and trafficking," the Special Rapporteur said.

Saul said he was particularly concerned about the use of military courts to try terrorist suspects, which lack sufficient independence and fair trial safeguards.

"Prison conditions also do not meet international standards," he said.

The Special Rapporteur acknowledged achievements of military operations against terrorist groups, but said he was concerned that military forces lacked the necessary rules, procedures and accountability mechanisms to prevent, prosecute and remedy violations. He also expressed deep concern over the use of clan militias alongside the military, in the absence of a legal framework to safeguard human rights.

The Special Rapporteur urged Somalia, with international support, to establish and adequately resource rehabilitation and reintegration centres and programmes for

individuals who disengage from Al-Shabaab, including women survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

He warned that countering terrorism financing laws risked impeding the delivery of independent and impartial humanitarian relief to vulnerable civilian populations in acute need.

"Counter-terrorism laws are also adversely affecting the freedom of the media to report on security matters and restricting and chilling the human rights work of civil society organisations," Saul said.

"I encourage Somalia to establish independent and effective oversight and accountability mechanisms for all counter-terrorism actors, redouble efforts to address root causes, pursue conflict resolution and peace-making, strive for inclusive and participatory governance, and combat corruption, poverty and discrimination against minorities."

He encouraged international partners to maintain political and financial support for Somalia, in the face of devastating recent funding cuts by some donors.

"This is a critical moment for Somalia," he said. "Sustained international engagement is essential to support national efforts to build lasting peace, strengthen rule of law, and protect human rights while countering terrorism."

The Special Rapporteur will present a detailed report on his findings to the UN Human Rights Council in March 2026.

*The experts: Ben Saul, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism.

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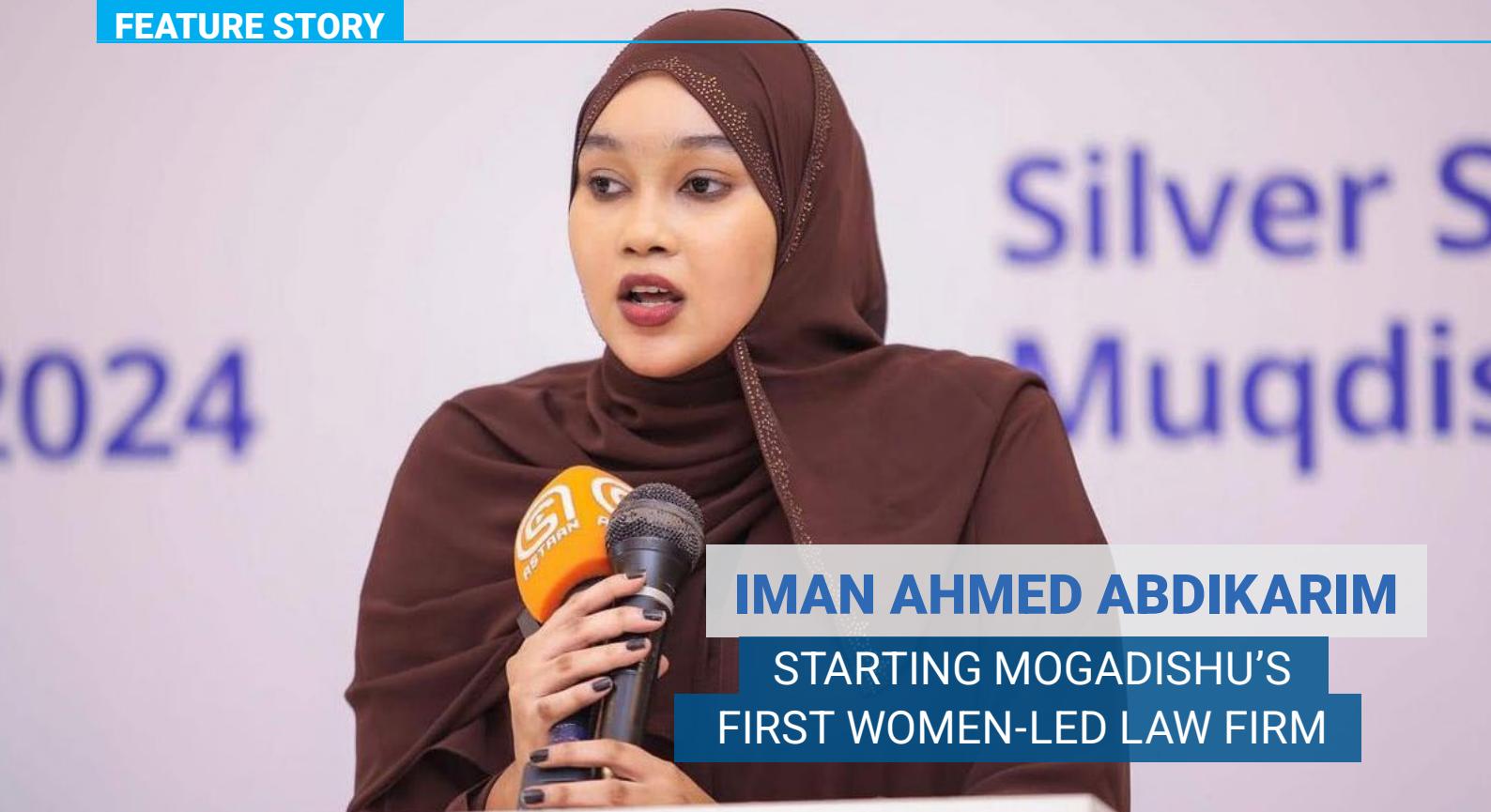
Country-specific observations and recommendations by the UN human rights mechanisms, including the special procedures, the treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review, can be found on the Universal Human Rights Index <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en/>

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IMAN AHMED ABDIKARIM

STARTING MOGADISHU'S FIRST WOMEN-LED LAW FIRM

Somalia is recovering after years of conflict which affected so much of society – including the country's fragile justice system.

It is a system that is rebuilding itself but also re-organizing itself – the male-dominated legal field is slowly opening as more and more Somali women pursue legal careers.

One of them is Iman Ahmed Abdi Karim, a 28-year-old female lawyer who also founded Mogadishu's first female-led law firm.

"My mission is to defend the rights of Somalia's most marginalised, especially women, minorities, and the poor, who have long been denied a fair hearing," says Ms. Abdi Karim.

Her journey into law began not in a classroom, but in front of a television screen. She was inspired watching popular US television drama series such as 'Law and Order'.

"From a young age, I was drawn to legal dramas," she recalls. "They taught me to appreciate the dynamics of the courtroom and the power of a lawyer in defending the defenceless."

Beginnings

Ms. Abdi Karim was born in Rome, Italy, in 1997, and moved back to Somalia with her mother at the age of two. She entered the local school system, undertaking her studies at the Mogadishu Primary and Secondary School in Shabab, then later at the Sheikh Hasan Barsame, from which she graduated in 2015.

There was no doubt as to what she would study in university.

"My love for the law has never faded, and I never considered studying anything else," Ms. Abdi Karim says.

She enrolled in a Bachelor of Laws degree at SIMAD University in 2017, and was one of just 40 students admitted to the Faculty of Law's programme. Not everyone shared her enthusiasm for her chosen area of study.

"The country was emerging from war, and justice institutions were weak – people would ask me, 'Why study law? Is there even law in this country?'" Ms. Abdi Karim says. "But my mind was made up. I knew I would have much work ahead helping those whose voices went unheard."

After graduating in 2021, she pursued a postgraduate degree in Law and Sharia at the University of Mogadishu and, in 2022, earned her license to practise law from the Somali Bar Association.

She was fortunate to secure a position at a law firm in Mogadishu, where her area of focus was commercial law, providing advice to private companies and individuals who

could afford the legal fees involved.

Ms. Abdi Karim enjoyed her exposure to private practice, but she sought something more – a way for the law to help a wider slice of society.

"All the people I helped could pay for themselves, but I also saw others turned away because they had no money. That was when I knew I had to work independently," she says, adding that this realisation led to her resigning not long afterwards.

New start

In August 2023, Ms. Abdi Karim founded Hii Law Firm. She invested all of her savings in the firm, and based its foundation on a clear principle: access to justice should not be a privilege for a few.

Within months, what began as a two-person operation grew to employ 12 lawyers, offering both paid services and free legal

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My love for the law has never faded, and I never considered studying anything else
”



aid. The firm has taken on more than 50 pro bono cases since its founding and also collaborates with local and international civil society organisations to raise awareness of human rights across the country and beyond.

An example of its partnerships is that with DefendDefenders, a non-governmental organisation based in Uganda and which, according to its website, works “to strengthen the work of human rights defenders in the sub-region by reducing their vulnerability to the risk of persecution and by enhancing their capacity to effectively defend human rights.”

“Many doubted that a young woman could contribute meaningfully”

“We partner with DefendDefenders to support those who cannot afford legal fees,” Ms. Abdi Karim says.

Hiil Law Firm’s approach does not stop at litigation, whether paid or pro bono. The firm also conducts legal training sessions for the public, and contributes to civil society initiatives involving Somali media, youth and civil society in order to help educate them about their rights.

It has trained more than 300 members of the public, and collaborates with media associations such as the Federation of Somali Journalists (FESOJ) and the Women in Media Network (WMN) to advocate for press freedom.

“We helped free 15 journalists working with FESOJ and Women in Media Network. We have also conducted 10 workshops with them,” Ms. Abdi Karim notes.

Breaking barriers

In Somalia, the legal profession has traditionally been dominated by men. Women entering the field have often faced bias as a result of social prejudice and negative perceptions of the role of women in leadership and the legal system.

“Many doubted that a young woman could contribute meaningfully,” Ms. Abdi Karim says. “But attitudes are shifting. Today, people are willing to work with us.”

The Somali Bar Association (SBA) was established in 2011 with, according to its website, the mission to improve the standards of the legal profession in Somalia “through feasible access to justice, and promote the equity and equality that is enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other subsequent international bills of human rights.”

The SBA states that there are currently 320 licensed lawyers practising in Somalia and 87 of them are women.

“Women are important and necessary in the legal profession as lawyers, prosecutors and judges – they bring essential perspectives, especially but not only on issues affecting women,” says the SBA’s Secretary-General, Dahir Mohamed Ali ‘Dahir Arab.

Ms. Abdi Karim has high hopes for the Hiil Law Firm, and is determined to see them come to fruition. She dreams of expanding the firm’s reach with offices across Somalia, developing a pipeline of female lawyers, and ensuring that justice is accessible for all.

“The future belongs to those who dare. Justice is not given – it is built,” she says. “We must keep pushing forward.”

UN, women and the law

In Somalia, the United Nations supports and encourages women’s access to justice through institutional strengthening and capacity-building for justice institutions. This includes increasing women’s partici-



pation in the legal profession and women lawyers’ associations, to strengthen gender empowerment in the justice system.

Equal participation of women in the legal profession reflects gender equality in public institutions and builds trust among all sections of society.

The UN has historically supported female participation in the legal profession, through scholarships and work experience opportunities in government, as well as enhancing women’s voice in informal dispute resolution processes.

“Despite women’s increased engagement in public life, they remain significantly under-represented in decision-making positions: while there are female prosecutors and court administrators, there are no women judges in the country,” says Nasrin Khan, the Head of the Rule of Law and Security Institutions Group at the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS).

“Greater representation in the law is vital to ensuring that courts represent their citizens, address their concerns and hand down sound judgments,” she added. “By their mere presence, women in this field enhance the legitimacy of courts, sending a powerful signal that they are open and accessible to those who seek recourse to justice.”



ON INTERNATIONAL DAY, UN IN SOMALIA COMMENDS STANDING WITH SURVIVORS AND VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Marking the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict in June, the United Nations commended communities for continuing to stand with survivors and victims of sexual violence, including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

"In Somalia, CRSV is a crime that targets not only individuals but also their families and communities. For Somalia to build a society free of stigma and the trauma of sexual violence, we all must work to prevent and respond to sexual violence," said the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

"Somali communities deserve praise for supporting survivors and victims of these heinous crimes. The United Nations urges Somali authorities to continue and enhance their efforts through initiatives that address stigma against survivors and victims of sexual violence and support them, their families and communities to heal from these crimes," Mr. Swan added.

In line with this year's theme of 'Intergenerational Effects of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,' the United Nations in Somalia works with stakeholders to highlight that sexual violence harms not only the

victims of sexual violence, but also the fabric of entire communities and leaves survivors and their families to deal with its devastating effects for years to come.

Since 2015, the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict has been observed annually on 19 June, with the date marking the UN Security Council's adoption of a resolution recognizing sexual violence as a weapon of war and a threat to international peace and security.

FEATURED PHOTO

Expanding opportunities for young Somali women to enter their country's Information and Communication Technology is key to closing the digital gap and promoting inclusive progress. Shown here, girls take part in a coding workshop in Mogadishu.



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