



## HIGHLIGHTS

- Roadmap meetings on UNTMIS transition
- Discussions on security, elections and humanitarian needs in South West State
- Launch of Somalia's new strategy to counter IEDs
- Civil society and UNTMIS mark International Days in Somalia
- Somalia's 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence
- Advance on security, justice, and human rights initiatives
- FEATURE – Faduma Jeylani Abdi: Keeping the Baraawe hat-making tradition alive
- PHOTO STORY - A day in the life of a UN Military Advisor in Somalia
- 'Path to Peace' reaches 450<sup>th</sup> episode

## ROADMAP MEETINGS ON UNTMIS TRANSITION

In July, the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) and the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) convened four Transition Roadmap Development workshops in Mogadishu. The sessions brought together senior Somali officials and UN representatives to plan the transfer of the Mission's mandated responsibilities and activities to the FGS and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT).

The workshops focused on human rights and protection, rule of law and security, electoral support, and constitutional

review and reconciliation, respectively. Organized under the framework of the UN Security Council's resolution 2753, the workshops aimed to set out a clear and inclusive roadmap for the second phase of UNTMIS's transition, running from 1 November 2025 to 31 October 2026. The workshops were co-chaired by Ambassador Yusuf Garaad and UN Deputy Special Representative Raisedon Zenenga.

The first workshop, held on 7 and 8 July and co-organized with the Ministry of Family and Human Rights Development, focused



## The work undertaken during the workshops will be vital to ensuring Somalia is well positioned to sustain progress

on human rights and protection, including the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy. Forty-eight participants from the FGS and the UN discussed modalities for a smooth handover of UNTMIS's Human Rights and Protection Group responsibilities.

On 21 July, the Rule of Law, Justice, Corrections, and Security workshop brought together 47 participants from the FGS and the UN. Co-organized with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the session addressed a

broad range of priorities, including justice system strengthening, corrections reform, policing, maritime security, and overall security sector governance.

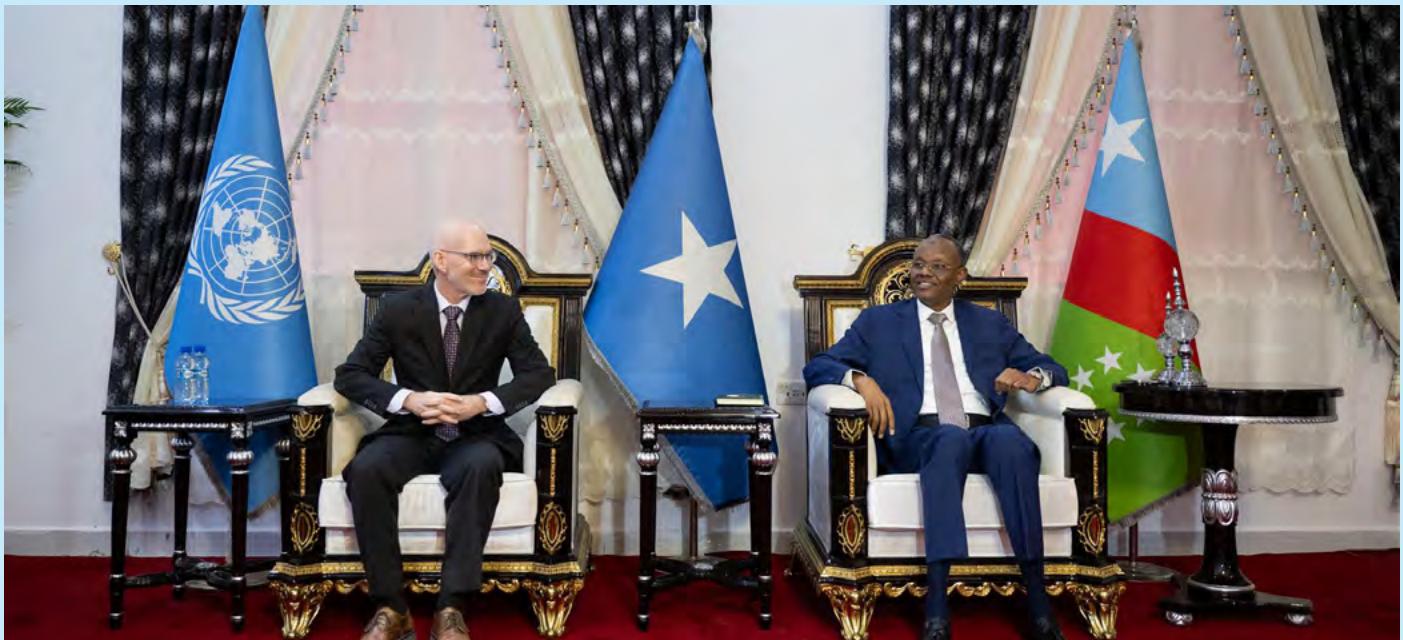
The third workshop, held on 29 July, focused on electoral support. Sixty participants – including representatives from the National Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, the Somali Police Force, and relevant ministries – identified provisions for the seamless transfer of UNTMIS' electoral assistance responsibilities, ensuring Somali institutions are prepared to assume full ownership.

On 30 July, Somali stakeholders and UN representatives convened to discuss matters related to the constitutional review, reconciliation, and the development of Somalia's federal system. Participants included representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, both Houses of

Parliament, key ministries, and UN offices. The workshop mapped out steps for transferring responsibilities related to constitutional processes and federal system development, contributing to a structured plan for continuity and Somali ownership.

The workshops underscored the strong partnership between Somalia and the United Nations in preparing for a responsible, phased transition. By engaging government institutions, parliament, security actors, and civil society, the consultations built consensus on priorities and responsibilities on these critical areas. As the transition roadmap moves into its second phase, the work undertaken during the workshops will be vital to ensuring Somalia is well positioned to sustain progress in all four areas beyond the conclusion of UNTMIS's mandate in October 2026.





## DISCUSSIONS ON SECURITY, ELECTIONS AND HUMANITARIAN NEEDS IN SOUTH WEST STATE



Issues affecting South West State, and Somalia as a whole, were the focus of a visit today to the Federal Member State's biggest city by the top United Nations official for Somalia.

"The President and I discussed a wide range of state and national issues, including security, preparations for elections, and humanitarian needs," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

"He briefed me on efforts to strengthen security across South West State, as well as on the successful recovery of Sabiid and Bariire, in Lower Shabelle," he added.

The UN official was speaking at a joint media encounter with South West State's President Abdiaziz Hassan Mohamed 'Laftagareen' following a meeting between the two and members of their teams.

**The United Nations will continue to do its utmost within available resources to assist those most in need**

South West State currently hosts some 800,000 people who have been displaced by the country's dire humanitarian situation, as well as ongoing conflict with the terrorist group Al-Shabaab. Baidoa alone has around 650,000 internally displaced persons.

"We also spoke about the challenges of supporting displaced communities at a time of uncertainty in humanitarian funding. I assured the President that, despite global funding shortfalls, the United Nations will continue to do its utmost within available resources to assist those most in need," Mr. Swan said.

With Somalia gearing up for electoral processes, the UN Special Representative and the South West State leader also touched on the Federal Member State's voter registration drive, which includes mobile registration initiatives designed

to ensure the inclusion of women, youth, internally displaced persons, and marginalised communities.

Current national issues also figured in their discussions, with the UN representative highlighting the need for coming together in a spirit of goodwill and engagement.

"I underscored the importance of unity and inclusive dialogue among Somalia's political and Federal Member State leaders, and I noted that President Abdiaziz has played a constructive role in such efforts in the past and could also play a helpful role in the future," Mr. Swan said.

"In conclusion," he continued, "let me stress that the United Nations will remain a partner to South West State and to the Federal Government of Somalia in advancing peace, state-building, responses to security threats, and humanitarian and development needs of the Somali people."





# UN WELCOMES LAUNCH OF SOMALIA'S NEW STRATEGY TO COUNTER IEDs

Attending the launch of a national plan to counter the threat posed by Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) across Somalia, the United Nations today commended Somali authorities on the move and welcomed the "important step forward."

"This [National Counter-IED] Strategy is the product of Somali leadership, developed with determination and foresight. It builds on the Baseline Assessment launched in February 2023, which provided the foundation for this nationally owned framework to address one of the most persistent threats to Somalia's security and stability," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

"Work has already begun. Even as the Strategy was being drafted, Somali institutions and international partners were taking steps to operationalize many of its priorities. Today's finalization therefore does not mark a beginning but rather provides a unifying framework to consolidate and guide efforts already underway."

"The United Nations remains committed to working alongside you to help translate this Strategy into lasting results," he added.

Mr. Swan was addressing the launch

of the National Counter-IED Strategy in the capital, Mogadishu. The event was organized by the Central Monitoring Department (CMD), and attended by a range of senior officials from the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the international community.

In addition to Mr. Swan, they included Somalia's National Security Advisor, Awes Hagi Yusuf Ahmed; the Minister of Defence, Ahmed Moalim Fiqi; the Minister of Internal Security, Abdullahi Sheikh Ismail; the Officer-in-Charge of the UN Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) and Director of Mission Support, Qurat-Ul-Ain Sadozai; the Chief of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) Programme in Somalia, Fran O'Grady; and representatives from the African Union, United States of America, United Kingdom and European Union.

Across Somalia, IEDs are a primary weapon of choice for the Al-Shabaab terrorist group and continue to pose a significant threat to peace and security.

## Implementation next

In his remarks, Mr. Swan highlighted the importance of next steps for the Strategy.

"The challenge now lies in sustained implementation. With continued national resolve, and with coordinated and focused support from international partners, this Strategy can strengthen Somalia's capacity to mitigate the threat of IED, protect the Somali people, and reinforce peace and security," the UN Special Representative said.

In their remarks to the event, the FGS officials highlighted a series of measures that will be put in place to support the plan's effective implementation, in addition to noting the significance of the strategy.

"This is a historic milestone for our country—never before have we had a unified,



This strategy is a critical step in translating existing policies into practical actions.

nationally owned framework to address the IED threat," said National Security Advisor Ahmed. "This strategy represents a decisive shift from reactive measures to a proactive, intelligence-led approach anchored in national ownership. It integrates intelligence-led operations, precursor control, capacity building, legal reform, and civilian engagement into one coherent framework. It also embeds continuous technological and tactical reassessment, establishment of a national electronic tracking system for precursor materials and creates a fast-tracking mechanism to update laws as threats evolve."

"This strategy is a critical step in translating existing policies into practical actions. As a ministry, we will expand and train the explosive disposal units of the Somali National Army. We will also ensure that law enforcement agencies and intelligence teams are able to collaborate effectively in identifying and preventing explosive threats before they happen," said Minister Fiqi.

“Furthermore, we will provide post-operation response reports, which will be shared with the National Counter-IED Centre, to be established following the validation of this strategy. Upon its completion, we will continue working closely with the Office of National Security – particularly the Weapons, Ammunition, and IED Threat Monitoring Department – to jointly prepare a national work plan to combat explosives.”

Addressing the attendees, Minister for Internal Security Ismail noted that the



finalization of the strategy was proof of the FGS' commitment to ridding the country of IEDs.

"The Ministry of Internal Security has a role in the implementation of this strategy, and it will play an important role in legalising this strategy by formulating laws and regulations to address the challenges of IEDs. The Ministry is responsible for controlling the chemical used in making IEDs through its active participation into the National Committee to Counter IEDs. That committee will be constituted once this strategy is validated," Mr. Ismail said.

## UN support

In 2024, there were more than 1,400 casualties caused by IEDs across Somalia.

Through UNMAS, the United Nations in Somalia provides training and equipment to Somali security forces, including Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams.

This training enhances their capabilities to detect and dispose of IEDs, reducing the risk to civilians and security personnel, with the Somali National Army's EOD teams registering significant success in locating and clearing IEDs.

Additionally, UNMAS works with Somali security institutions to develop their national explosive threat mitigation capabilities. This includes providing policy and technical advice, mentoring, and advisory services to support the Somali government's efforts to manage and mitigate IED threats.

From 2021 to early this year, UNMAS trained and equipped 61 of the national army's EOD teams and trained trainers to ensure sustainability of capacity development efforts. UNMAS has also trained the Somali Police Force – through funding from the Government of Japan – resulting in a total of 21 trained and equipped EOD teams among the police force.



# CIVIL SOCIETY AND UNTMIS MARK INTERNATIONAL DAYS IN SOMALIA

Over the past three months, the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), in close partnership with civil society organisations, marked two important international observances through youth-focused events designed to empower young people and promote peace and security across Somalia.

## International Youth Day

12 August 2025

To mark International Youth Day, the Somalia Youth Civic Organisation (SYCO) organised the first in a series of youth-focused events in Afgooye, Beledweyne, and Galkayo. The gatherings featured panel discussions on youth development, civic participation, and the role of young people in rebuilding Somalia. The events provided a vital platform for advocacy and empowerment, emphasising the need for youth to enjoy equal opportunities and full participation in Somali society.



## International Day of Peace

21 September 2025

Recognising the International Day of Peace and the vital role of young people in advancing sustainable peace, UNTMIS supported the Puntland Youth Association Network (PYAN) in convening two large events in Bosaso and Garowe. More than 80 youth leaders and civil society representatives came together to explore opportunities and challenges in strengthening youth participation in peacebuilding and state-building processes. The discussions underlined how inclusive civic engagement can foster social cohesion and prevent conflict.

These initiatives reflect UNTMIS's commitment to amplifying youth voices and supporting Somali civil society in shaping a more peaceful and inclusive future. As Somalia continues its journey toward stability and development, empowering young people to lead in civic, social, and political life remains at the heart of both UN and local civil society efforts.

# SOMALIA'S 65TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE

On the occasion of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Somalia's independence, the United Nations congratulates the people and government of Somalia and commends the nation's progress since 1960

"Somalia has much to be rightfully proud of, including achievements in advancing peace, prosperity, and governance despite facing great challenges," said the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Somalia, James Swan.

"On behalf of the United Nations family in Somalia, I wish all Somalis 'hambalyo,' on this significant day, and reaffirm the UN's commitment to supporting Somalia as it strives for even greater progress in the years to come," he added.



## UNTMIS AND PARTNERS ADVANCE SECURITY, JUSTICE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVES

Over the past three months, the United Nations Transitional Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), in close collaboration with Somali authorities and international partners, has spearheaded a series of nationwide initiatives to strengthen security, justice, human rights, and governance.

On 3 July, the Office of National Security, alongside Somali security organisations from Galmudug, Hirshabelle, and South West State, held a full-day consultation on the draft National Security Strategy and respective state-level strategies. The discussions brought together 91 participants from key ministries and security forces to tailor the strategies to evolving threats and local contexts.

On 6 July, a high-level Somali Police Force coordination meeting in Mogadishu, supported by UNTMIS and AUSSOM, brought together Somali officials and international partners. They discussed ways to advance the professionalisation and accountability of the national police, with an emphasis on the rule of law and long-term stability.

Between 7 and 16 July, several capacity-building programmes were rolled out. In Mogadishu, a ten-day maritime security training enhanced vessel monitoring and safe navigation skills for 16 personnel from

Somali maritime institutions, including five women. From 9-10 July, a workshop organised with the Ministry of Health and the WHO focused on climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health systems, highlighting the specific vulnerabilities of marginalised groups. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Information and UNTMIS convened a two-day consultation on a national policy to counter social media misuse, misinformation, and hate speech.

From 14-19 July, further training targeted Somalia's justice and security sectors. In Baidoa, 20 judges and prosecutors completed five days of practical sessions on leadership and teamwork. In Mogadishu, 30 police officers and civil society members took part in a four-day workshop on community policing and combating sexual and gender-based violence. Separately, in Puntland, the Human Rights and Protection Group conducted a three-day session for 20 mid-level Darawish Force officers on international humanitarian law, child protection, and preventing conflict-related sexual violence.

On 9 August, Kismayo hosted a workshop on Standard Operating Procedures for investigating gender-based violence cases, gathering 29 key stakeholders from government, civil society, and UN

partners. Later, on 19 August, South West State police officers attended a two-day strategic planning workshop in Baidoa. This was followed by a series of media ethics and elections reporting trainings across South West State, Hirshabelle, and Galmudug, which benefited 60 journalists.

In early September, additional activities reinforced state institutions. On 8 September, 12 Hirshabelle police officers in Belet Weyne received strategic planning training. The following day, 21 councillors from Mahaday district participated in a reconciliation and mediation workshop led by the Ministry of Interior. On 11 September, a five-day programme in Kismayo, engaging 233 students and teachers through the Jubaland Youth League, fostered human rights awareness and established school-based Human Rights Clubs.

In Puntland, from 13-15 September, UN human rights experts facilitated a three-day training for 20 judges and prosecutors of the Military Court, focusing on fair trial standards and human rights principles. Meanwhile, on 16 September, 20 Somali federal and state parliamentarians began a three-day training in Mogadishu on integrating human rights into public budget analysis, supported by the OHCHR and UNTMIS.



## FADUMA JEYLANI ABDI

### KEEPING THE BARAAWE HAT-MAKING TRADITION ALIVE



On a recent afternoon in Mogadishu's Waberi district, Faduma Jeylani Abdi sits on mat in her home, surrounded by bundles of colourful thread.

Her hands are a blur of activity, her eyes are intensely focused. And yet her voice is calm and relaxed as her hands deftly maneuver a needle and threads to craft one of Somalia's most iconic garments: a 'koofi Baraawe,' or Baraawe hat.

The 59-year-old is a member of Somalia's Baraawe community, long-known for its artisanal skills and expertise for producing the fine, hand-crafted headgear.

"We are famous for three things that originate from Baraawe town: muufo Baraawe (bread), caano Baraawe (a traditional fudge) and the koofi Baraawe!" Ms Abdi says, as her hands dart smoothly

and methodically across the still-forming hat in her lap.

The headgear is a round, brimless cap with a flat crown, often standing out due to its colourful embroidery and intricate designs. Some versions have small holes in the cloth to allow air to circulate. A top-quality version can take up to 15 days to craft, depending on the time devoted to its production.

Made only by Baraawe women, the hat is widely recognized across Somalia as a symbol of dignity, elegance and wisdom. Often, they are presented to elders as a mark of respect and appreciation, in addition to being worn by dignitaries, from presidents, parliamentarians and diplomats to clan leaders, traditional elders and others at special events.

For the Baraawe community, the hat is more than a fashion accessory or a societal accoutrement. The hat carries a deeper meaning for them – it connects them to their roots, tradition and identity.

"Only the people of Baraawe craft these hats. No one else makes them, and we grew up mastering this skill," Ms. Abdi says.

#### Community

Baraawe is located on the Benadir coastline, some 200 kilometres south of the Somali capital of Mogadishu. Because of its strategic location, the town was chosen to be the capital city of Somalia's South West State.

The Baraawe community began crafting hats as a means of generating extra household income. For women, it became a primary occupation, helping sustain their families in tough economic times, and the traditional craftwork has been maintained across generations.

"Men have no role in the hat-making process. This work is exclusive role for



Only the people of Baraawe craft these hats. No one else makes them, and we grew up mastering this skill





women artisans, helping their families during times of scarce economic activity," Ms. Abdi notes.

Born in 1966 in Baraawe, Ms. Abdi began learning at a young age from her mother and aunts.

"The need to support my mother and the desire to master this art motivated me. I can still remember sitting beside my mother as a 13-year-old girl, after finishing lessons at the madrassa for the day, and practising hat-making," Ms Abdi says.

Though the trade in the hats was relatively small, it was steady and families could earn enough to sustain themselves.

As Ms. Abdi grew older – and continued to learn and practice – when the time came to choose a way to make a living, there was no question as to what kind of work she would take up.

#### Pride

But Ms. Abdi dismisses any notion that she faced limited choices when deciding on her future. Her perspective is somewhat different – she takes pride in her work and her community's contribution to wider Somali society.

All Somali men, from all backgrounds, wear the koofi Baraawe as a marker of identity, dignity, prestige and heritage

The skills, techniques, and knowledge involved in making koofi Baraawe are intangible cultural heritage

export them to Saudi Arabia, where pilgrims seek high-quality, traditional headwear."

#### Livelihoods

The market for koofi Baraawe was severely affected by Somalia's civil war. It has been gradually growing back as the country rebuilds, but not without new challenges for its producers.

Ms. Abdi's pride in her artisanal work, and her community's cultural wealth, is tempered by the realities of commerce in the modern world.

Currently, a handmade genuine koofi Baraawe costs between \$50 and \$80, while a lower-quality, mass-produced item can be bought for a fraction of those amounts.

"Fake imports have flooded the market. Some sell for as little as \$5," Ms. Abdi says. "In contrast, authentic Baraawe hats in Mogadishu cost a lot more, depending on the artistry, materials and design."

"The genuine hats use soft, breathable fabric like baati (a light cotton), while fakes are made of elastic material. A real koofi Baraawe allows for air circulation, sweat from the scalp passes through holes; counterfeits do not have these," she says.





Skills, techniques, and knowledge involved in making koofi Baraawe are intangible cultural heritage

A recent wander around Mogadishu drove home just how prevalent the knock-off hats are.

"The entire city is flooded with them!" Ms. Abdi says. "Finding an authentic one is rare, perhaps one in a thousand."

To add to the challenges, finding younger generations which are keen to take up the craft is increasingly difficult. The work is labour-intensive, requiring intricate hand-eye coordination and an artistic eye, as well as the ability to pay meticulous attention to detail.

The loss of these skills jeopardises the passing on of the unique techniques that define the koofi Baraawe. According to Ms. Abdi, Baraawe artisans attribute this reluctance to generational changes involving the views and roles of families.

"Today's girls do not want to sit and spend hours crafting these hats. In my time, people did what was expected of them to do. Now, young people think the older generation was not as clever as they are today," she says.

#### Solutions

Some Baraawe artisans – Ms. Abdi included among them – have called for a ban on the cheaper, imported versions of the hat. But even those calls are diminishing as the number of expert koofi Baraawe artisans declines as older generations, including potential teachers, pass on.

"The artisans who used to craft the Baraawe hat are either dead, too old or

have gone abroad," Ms. Abdi notes. "The small number of remaining artisans keeps getting smaller."

"The craft has a future, but artisans need help. A person with support can stand alone, without it, what can they achieve? I want to teach the young how to make these hats," she adds. "We pray our traditions can regain their former glory."

#### UN support

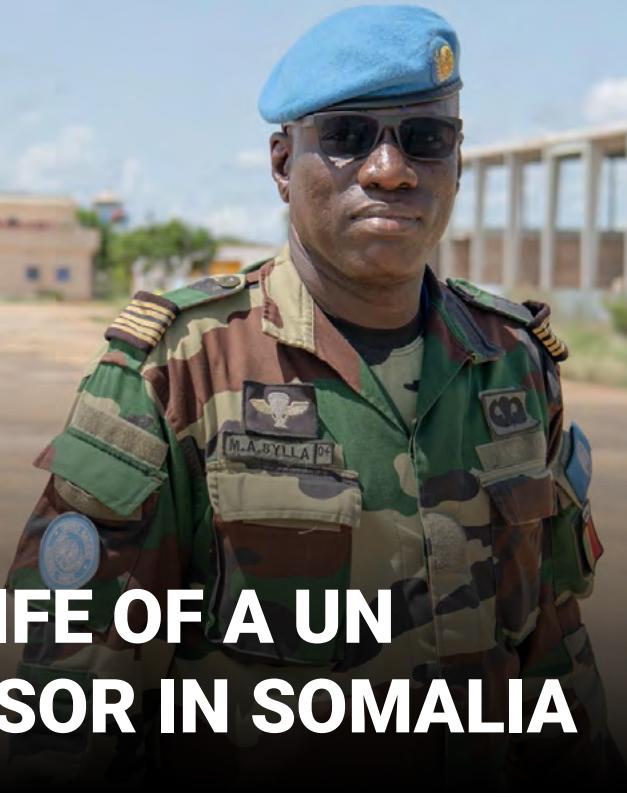
The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Somalia works with local partners and Somali communities to highlight the richness and diversity of Somali people and their culture, and to promote meaningful participation in a peaceful and inclusive future for all Somalis.

As a signatory to the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, Somalia has the opportunity to document and protect traditions like Baraawe hat-making. Creating an inventory of intangible heritage could help preserve this craftsmanship for future generations.

"Koofi Baraawe is a cultural icon for the Baraawe community and indeed for all Somalis. The skills, techniques, and knowledge involved in making koofi Baraawe are intangible cultural heritage and represent the diverse ways in which women artisans of the Baraawe community express, maintain, and transmit their cultural heritage across generations," says the Chief of the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia's (UNTMIS) Human Rights and Protection Group, Kirsten Young, who also serves as the OHCHR Representative to Somalia.

"It is immensely important that the community safeguards its culture and identity. With the ongoing rebuilding of the cultural sector in the country, Somali authorities have the opportunity to support and strengthen the Baraawe community's efforts to preserve koofi Baraawe and enjoy their cultural rights," she adds.





# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A UN MILITARY ADVISOR IN SOMALIA

Somalia has been rebuilding after decades of war and civil strife, and the international community's support – including that of the United Nations – for its efforts are wide-ranging, covering areas from humanitarian aid to economic development.

Another of those areas is the strengthening of the country's national security institutions and developing the skills of Somali security forces.

At the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), some of the experts responsible for support in this area are located in the Defence Sector Reform (DSR) Section, which provides security sector coordination and military advisory support.

Part of UNTMIS' Rule of Law and Security Institutions Group, the DSR Section provides guidance on defence reform to Somali national institutions through established coordination mechanisms, liaises with international security partners, supports the implementation of the Somali Security Development plan, and advises on how military developments affect the political landscape, and vice versa.

The section collaborates closely with the Somali National Army (SNA), African Union forces (AUSSOM), and Federal and State-level stakeholders to ensure coherent, sustainable and Somali-led security outcomes; and is staffed by a team of military experts hailing from

Ghana, India, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Turkey, Uganda and UK.

They are led by UNTMIS' Senior Military Advisor, General Mohamadou Abdoulaye Sylla, an infantry officer in the Forces armées du Sénégal (transl.: Armed Forces of Senegal) with more than 30 years of experience in his country's military, as well as prior service with UN peace operations in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan.

Gen. Sylla recently visited Baidoa, the largest city in Somalia's South West State.

## 05:30 a.m. – A disciplined start

As the sun rises, so does Gen. Sylla! With 32 years of military life under his belt and a firm believer in the lifelong benefits of

exercise, he rises early to begin his daily workout – no noise, no crowds.

"For me, there is no better way to start the day: some effort, some sweat, get the heart pumping and then I am ready to face whatever the day has in store for me!" Gen. Sylla says in-between sets of weights.

"Sports is the only thing a soldier does for himself while serving in the military. Indeed, everything you do is for others in the sense of serving, but as you build your body fit for your mission of service, you get health and vitality for your own benefit," he adds.

## 07:30 a.m. – In the lounge and on the tarmac

With his exercise and breakfast squared away, Gen. Sylla is soon at the UN's depa-





ture facilities at the Aden Adde International Airport, ready to catch a regular UN flight to Baidoa. Today's transport is the Antonov An-26, a workhorse of the UN's small fleet of aircraft used to move between Mogadishu and various parts of the country.

"You don't join the army for comfort – and it's the same for the United Nations! As long as it gets you safely and on time from A to B," Gen. Sylla says while waiting for his flight's boarding to be announced.

#### 08:30 a.m. – In the air

The flight from Mogadishu to Baidoa lasts only one hour – but it's time well-spent for Gen. Sylla. He reviews his notes for his planned meetings throughout the day.

Broadly, as the UN's Senior Military Advisor, he is expected to provide real-time advice based on the latest political and security developments. The thrust of today's trip is to assess security at the UN compound in light of any external threats.

"Getting out to meet with interlocutors from the Somali government and security forces, as well as those from international partners like the forces serving with the

African Union peacekeepers here is important. E-mails and video calls can help, but getting out to meet and confer with interlocutors face-to-face is an essential part of confidence- and trust-building and getting a real appreciation of the challenges being faced and how we can help is a vital part of my work here," Gen. Sylla says soon after landing.

#### 09:00 a.m. – Landing in Baidoa

Home to 1.7 million people, including a substantial number of people displaced by Somalia's ongoing conflict with the Al-Shabaab terrorist group and worsening climate impacts, Baidoa is the largest city of Somalia's South West State, and serves as its interim capital.

Officials and experts from the UN system – including many humanitarian agencies such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration – operate out of a shared compound next to Baidoa's Shaati-Gaduud International Airport. The compound and a nearby administrative centre are protected by Ethiopian National Defense Forces under the umbrella of AUSSOM.



South West State is a relatively green and lush part of the country. The sky is cloudy and a cool breeze greets Gen. Sylla as he deboards and makes his way from the airport to the UN Compound.

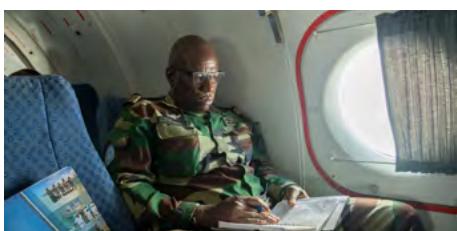
"It's been raining a lot lately, which is good for the terrible drought situation, but it also makes the area greener and that always reminds me of home during the rainy season," Gen. Sylla says, thinking of his home country, Senegal, almost 7,000 kilometres away on the other side of the continent.

#### 09:15 a.m. – First meeting: Head of Office

On these trips around Somalia, Gen. Sylla is subject to limited and sometimes changing flight schedules. He tries to have his schedule full to make the most of every minute on the ground in each location.

He prefers to start such visits with a discussion with the UNTMIS Head of Office – in this case, it's Magnus Bjarnason, who heads the Baidoa office, an Icelandic national with ten years of service with the United Nations in Somalia, most of it spent heading UN field offices across the country.

"The heads of offices for UNTMIS around Somalia are responsible for political and





state building support to the Federal Member State governments, based in the respective state capitals. We are always keen to ensure that local issues on the ground are clearly understood by colleagues working on the big picture national issues," Mr. Bjarnason says after their meeting.

Gen. Sylla concurs: "It's important for me to have a situational overview and detailed updates on the political and security dynamics in the area, and that's exactly what Magnus gave me today. I can't stress enough how important it is to have eyes and ears on the ground to get this information first-hand."

#### **10:00 a.m. – Second meeting: Sector 3 Commander**

Following his meeting with Mr. Bjarnason, Gen. Sylla heads over to the nearby compound which is home to troops from the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF).

South West State borders Ethiopia, and the ENDF has a long history of military support for Somalia. It extends as far back as the country's civil war and includes serving as one of the troop contributing countries to the African Union's various UN-backed peacekeeping operations in Somalia over

the years – the current incarnation is the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).

For the purposes of AUSSOM's deployment, the South West State region is designated as Sector 3, with the ENDF being responsible for helping local troops secure the immediate surrounds.

The area surrounding Baidoa is contested by Al-Shabaab and the UN Compound is no stranger to mortar and rocket attacks. In support of South West State's administration, ENDF troops stationed there play a major role in securing the immediate surrounds.

At the AUSSOM Sector 3 headquarters, Gen. Sylla meets with Brigadier General Besfat Fente Tegegn, the Sector Commander.

Their discussion focuses on recent security developments in the region, coordination with Somali forces, and strengthening joint operations in line with Somalia's national security priorities. In addition, with Brigadier General Tegegn due to rotate soon back to Addis Ababa soon, Gen. Sylla has an introductory meeting with his replacement.

"People may get thrown by the heavy military aspect of what I do – uniforms, salutes, weapons and all that – but, at its



core, this kind of work is also centred on human relationships. Like that cliche of 'Team-work makes the dream work!' Gen. Sylla says after the meeting.

#### **10:30 a.m. – Compound defences**

Following his meeting with the AUSSOM Sector 3 leadership, Gen. Sylla pops over for an update on the UN Compound's Counter-Rocket, Artillery and Mortar (CRAM) system.



Operated by the ENDF contingent, the system is an essential component for keeping UN and staff located in the protected area safe.

The system, developed through close UN-AUSSOM collaboration, is a key part of the security infrastructure in Baidoa.

For Gen. Sylla, the visit is a chance to assess operational readiness and reinforce the importance of coordination in protecting personnel and assets.

#### **11:00 a.m. – Security walkthrough**

Continuing on the issue of security for UN staff, Gen. Sylla then joins a senior UN security officer, Alan Mahbubul, for a comprehensive walkthrough of the compound.



Beyond technical checks, the discussion highlights a deeper objective: ensuring the safety of UN personnel so they can continue their critical work supporting the Somali people through peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development efforts.

Mr. Mahbubul, a Bangladeshi national with 21 years of experience in the UN as well as the Bangladesh Army, is a staff member of the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS). Somalia is one of the 131 countries in which UNDSS operates with the aim of enabling the safe and effective delivery of UN programmes and activities in the most complex and challenging environments.

#### 12:40 p.m. – Fast farewells

The return flight to Mogadishu is due to take off in early afternoon – leaving Gen. Sylla little time to catch up with other colleagues.

With ten minutes to spare, he makes the most of brief conversations with colleagues, including UNTMIS' Public Information Officer in South West State, Mohamednor Abdi Kadir Abdisalam.

"The United Nations can be an eye-opening experience as it brings people together from all over the world to do good things – and here I am discussing local developments in my home state with a senior officer from the other side of the continent," Mr. Abdisalam says afterwards.

Mr. Bjarnason and Mr. Mahbubul see Gen. Sylla off to the airport terminal, from where



he quickly checks in and makes his way to the waiting plane.

#### 01:00 p.m. – Take-off and return

The Antonov's engines take some time to warm up and start, and the flight finally takes off.

The lush scenery below starts to change to a coastal, desert environment as the flight comes closer to Mogadishu, with its stunning coasts coming in to view.

Onboard, Gen. Sylla takes a moment to enjoy the scenery and reflect on his day's engagements and upcoming tasks.



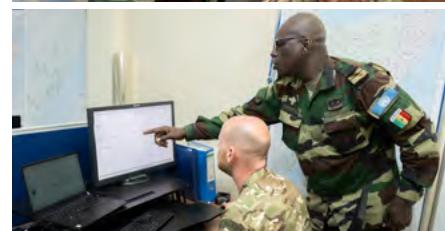
"One of the perks of this kind of work: great views!" Gen. Sylla yells above the engine noise, before landing.

#### 03:00 p.m. – Back in the office

From the airport, Gen. Sylla heads back to the nearby UN Compound in Mogadishu where he goes to his office to make sense of all that he has heard and learned on his trip. After pulling his notes together, he discusses the visit with members of his team to inform the strategic planning and recommendations advice that underpins the Mission's defence reform priorities.

"It's always better to get everything down while it's still fresh in one's mind, of course, but also, life can be unpredictable here with unexpected workload, so I prefer not to delay – especially as I have a meeting scheduled for tomorrow and some of the aspects of this visit should be covered," Gen. Sylla says.

And with that, he turns around and starts working on a report.



# 'PATH TO PEACE' REACHES 450<sup>TH</sup> EPISODE



'Path to Peace' (transl.: Tubta Nabadda), the flagship Somali-language radio programme of the UN Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), aired its 450<sup>th</sup> episode in July.

First broadcast in 2016, the weekly radio programme has become a trusted platform for dialogue on a wide range of issues shaping Somalia's future – from peace and governance to development, security, humanitarian needs, and environmental challenges.

Reaching Somali-speaking audiences across the country and beyond through FM and community radio stations as well as UNTMIS digital platforms, the

programme provides a vital space for inclusive discussions.

Over the years, Path to Peace has featured voices from all segments of the Somali society – elders, women leaders, youth activists, government officials, academics, and civil society representatives – bringing diverse perspectives to the public. Listeners describe it as an important source of information on reconciliation, civic participation, and the role of communities in building peace.

The 450<sup>th</sup> episode marked nearly a decade of broadcasting, reflecting the resilience of Somali voices and the importance of dialogue as the country advances on its path toward stability.

## PHOTO HIGHLIGHT

Health systems can only function with health workers. The UN supports efforts to improve health systems so that more people can access quality care. Shown here, a nurse checks a young girl's height at a UN-supported clinic in Garowe.



Contact: UNTMIS Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Group (SCPAG) | [untmis-scpag@un.org](mailto:untmis-scpag@un.org)