**Statement to the UN Security Council (via VTC)**

**By**

**H.E SRCC**

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**Madam President,**

**Distinguished Members of the Security Council,**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Security Council on the situation in Somalia. I am pleased to be joined alongside Ms Kiki Gbeho, (Officer in Charge) and the Deputy Head of UNSOM. And to quote the United Nations Secretary-General at last week’s African Union Summit, **“the ties between the African Union and the United Nations have never been stronger.”** This sentiment is also true of the strong partnership that exists between ATMIS and UNSOM.

Before turning to ATMIS's overview of the situation in Somalia, I would like to underscore two points of appreciation:

First, and on behalf of ATMIS, I would like to express our gratitude to the Security Council for its strong and continued support to the Mission and its commitment to peace and security in Somalia.

Second, I would like to pay tribute to H. E. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud for his strong leadership. Under his leadership, Somalia is now witnessing concerted efforts to advance peace and security. In fact, the African Union believes we are witnessing an emergence of a transformative change in Somalia across various fronts.

On behalf of the African Union, I want to assure this Council that ATMIS will continue to pursue its strategic objectives as mandated by the United Nations. The African Union’s dedication to supporting Somalia is solid and enduring and will extend beyond the lifespan of ATMIS, ending on 31 December 2024. This is our aspiration to ensure Somalia forms part of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa by the year 2063.

Since ATMIS last briefing in September 2022, Somalia has continued to register significant progress on its key national priorities, particularly those outlined in the Federal Government’s six pillars workplan. As noted earlier, leading these efforts has been President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who I am pleased to report has taken decisive steps, mainly to accelerate inclusive politics and dialogue as a means of advancing the country’s priorities.

To sustain and further reinforce the momentum of inclusive politics, we have repeatedly witnessed the President visit frontline positions across Somalia, lending his personal support to ongoing reconciliation processes. The result of these visits has been consensus building among local communities in support of Somalia's ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab.

Specifically, the president's visit to the region of Middle Shabelle in November resulted in a cessation of hostilities between two local communities, which have since played a central role in the Federal Government’s removal of Al-Shabaab from the region.

Similarly, the President called for cessation of hostilities and communicated the FGS’s readiness to facilitate the dialogue and resolution of the conflict between Somaliland forces and local communities in Las Anod. In response, Somaliland called for ceasefire and peaceful resolution of the conflict. The international partners, including ATMIS, gravely condemned the continued violence, including reports on the mobilization of armed groups and further urged all parties to adhere to the ceasefire, exercise restraint, and engage in constructive dialogue to establish a pathway towards peaceful resolution.

Earlier this month, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, together with the Speaker of the House of People (HoP), successfully led a two-phased reconciliation process in South West State (SWS), concluding with an agreement amongst its stakeholders. With the dispute now resolved, I applaud the determination of all stakeholders to support the Federal Government’s plans to open a new front against Al-Shabaab soon.

I remain encouraged that Somali leaders continue to pursue dialogue through the National Consultative Council (NCC), to sustain Somalia's political stability. Since May 2022, we have witnessed the continued and regular meetings of the National Consultative Council (NCC). The NCC is now helping to advance Somalia's national priorities, including security and key areas of peacebuilding and State-building.

Recently in December, the NCC met, bringing together the Federal Government and the Federal Member States (FMS), except for Puntland, to agree on key outstanding issues of federalism and democratisation.

Noting Puntland stated position on its relationship with the Federal Government, I am optimistic of Somali leaders reaching a political agreement on key outstanding issues and within the framework of the National Consultative Council (NCC). I am also encouraged that Puntland has signalled a willingness to continue pursuing dialogue with the Federal Government and I look forward to its participation at the upcoming NCC.

**Madam President,**

For decades, Somalia has been defined by its insecurity. However, I am pleased to report today that the Federal Government is not only poised for lasting peace by leading on silencing the guns in Somalia but also taking steps to bring about prosperity for its citizens. In this context, I welcome the efforts of Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, whose cabinet has, within a short period, approved over 14 bills that have now been sent to Parliament.

Many of these bills will ultimately help create regional and international confidence and attract foreign investment, allowing Somalia to realise its great potential. Somalia’s bid to join the East African Community (EAC) and the recent EAC verification team’s visit to Somalia is a good indicator of the prosperity that awaits Somalia in the coming years.

I am particularly pleased that during the 42nd Ordinary Session of the Executive Council of the African Union, Somalia signalled its intention as a next step to its imminent admission to the EAC to become a State Party to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This positive message, again, illustrates the Federal Government’s commitment to delivering on its laudable workplan, in this case, a key priority milestone for its economic pillar.

At the African Union, as we celebrate 2023 as **“The Year of African Continental Free Trade Area”,** we are proud that Somalia continues to place at the heart of its future the importance of job creation, poverty alleviation, improved welfare and sustainable development.

**Madam President,**

Despite the security challenges that Somalia has been facing, I am pleased to inform that Al-Shabaab is now under immense operational pressure. The group is losing vital terrain. It is failing to maintain its forceful hold on its centre of gravity – the local community support. This continues to be demonstrated by local communities increasingly joining the Somalia security forces (SSF)-led and owned offensive.

It is worth noting that Al-Shabaab is now being disrupted, degraded and ultimately defeated - thanks to the courageous actions and gallant sacrifices of the SSF. Recent Al-Shabaab losses of several areas in HirShabelle and Galmudug, including Middle Shabelle, Hiiraan and towns in Mudug, such as the port town of Harardheere, all represent strategic and operational gains for the Federal Government.

Despite the current and positive security momentum moving swiftly across Somalia, in the ATMIS area of responsibility, we are mindful that Al-Shabaab still retains the capability to carry out decisive operations, including conducting complex Suicide Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVIED) attacks, Person Borne Improvised Explosive Device (PBIED) attacks, ambushes, kidnapping, assassinations and Indirect Fire attacks (IDF).

While Al-Shabaab’s tactics, techniques, and procedures have remained mainly unchanged during this reporting period, our threat picture suggests that Al-Shabaab is seeking to change some of its tactics. A key concern remains Al-Shabaab’s current use of commercial drones, which are likely to attain an armed capability in the future - a worrying trend we have observed in other terrorist theatres.

Beyond Somalia, we are also concerned with Al-Shabaab’s transnational threat towards Somalia’s immediate neighbours. However, I am equally encouraged by recent regional security engagements to address this threat with a unified approach. In this regard, the recent Summit of the Frontline States, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya, convened by Somalia, in our assessment, will enhance the security framework that ATMIS serves in Somalia.

**Madam President,**

Let me take this opportunity to update the Council on implementing key aspects of Resolutions 2628 (2022) and 2670 (2022).

Despite progress being uneven, I am pleased to report that key aspects of the mandated tasks are receiving the urgent focus and commitment they require.

At ATMIS, we have submitted a detailed and realistic reconfiguration plan, but still under review by the Federal Government and, recently, working with the Federal Government, with support from UNSOS, we have handed over the Maslah FoB as part of meeting the emerging demands of force generation. We have also deployed to the Bariire FoB as part of an operational agreement with the FGS and recently collocated with the SSF at the Hawaadley Bridge FoB.

Alongside our brave brothers and sisters in the SSF, we have contributed to the ongoing offensive to degrade Al-Shabaab in line with the agreed joint FGS – ATMIS CONOPS of 2022.

To date and beyond our joint kinetic operations, ATMIS involvement in the ongoing offensive has included: (1) using ATMIS helicopters to provide close air support, (2) provision of Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC) and Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) of SSF troops from the battlefield, (3) provision of Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), (4) provision of indirect fire (IDF) support, and (5) provision of combat service support, such as ammunition, water, drugs, and field accommodation, and provision of advisory support on International Humanitarian Law and issues related to protection of civilians, to mention but a few.

**Madam President,**

I want to be clear – the African Union’s support to Somalia, as I mentioned, will remain unwavering. And for this reason, I am grateful for the support of ATMIS TCCs, particularly their recent commitment to the Somalia Operations Coordination Committee (SOCC) to do more to support the ongoing offensive. ATMIS TCCs have already committed to deploying critical force enablers, such as attack and utility helicopters, and are now seeking robust long-range ISR capabilities and, when feasible for the SSF, to begin taking over agreed FoBs, ATMIS TCCs will, at a faster pace create Quick Reaction /Mobile Forces.

This needs to be encouraged and more support is needed to sustain the current success of the SSF-led offensive. It will require this Council to consider the encouraging results of Somalia’s pace of force generation.

With Somalia on track to meet its target of 15,000 newly trained forces this year, I welcome the recent return of 3,500 Eritrean-trained SNA troops, some of whom have already been deployed to the frontlines, and the ongoing training of SNA troops in Egypt, Ethiopia, Turkey, and Uganda. On 6th February, Somali Cabinet Ministers approved the agreement between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and United Arab Emirates (UAE) on military and security cooperation and Counter-terrorism. With such commitment, ATMIS is confident that Somalia is on track to assuming security responsibility from ATMIS by December 2024.

These brave young men and women must be supported of the equipment to fight Al-Shabaab, the appropriate firepower, and adequate ammunition supplies. This will only be possible when this Council, again, takes into account the progress already made by Somalia in meeting the sanctions benchmarks effectively and timely as a pathway to lifting the arms embargo.

Similarly, with Somalia expected to generate 15,000 forces, there is now an immediate need to increase the level of the current UNSOS support package beyond the mandated 13,900 to the SSF. In the interim, ATMIS remains committed to continue providing International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law Training of Trainers (ToT) to SSF and to support efforts to advance the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2000), on women, peace, and security (WPS).

**Madam President,**

Turning to the adjustment of the timeline of Phase 1, we believe that this extension should provide the Federal Government and ATMIS space to complete important mandated tasks. As we have stated, there has been uneven progress, and there remains a need for further consultations on two critical issues, namely: (1) a "strategic sector-by-sector approach to drawdown and (2) funding of the six-month delay.

Regarding the initial drawdown of 2000 ATMIS troops, ATMIS has been looking at various options based on the direction provided by the African Union Commission. For a successful sector-by-sector approach, there is need to undertake more detailed planning with the Federal Government to understand where they would want ATMIS to continue to hold and where the Federal Government would be either willing to take over or willing to accept the risk of some ATMIS troop drawdowns across the sectors.

As this Council will recall, Security Council Resolution 2670 (2022) agreed to the Federal Government's request to delay the drawdown of 2000 ATMIS troops to June of this year. In doing so, it was also anticipated that ATMIS partners would financially support a delay of the drawdown. Regrettably, Resolution 2670 (2022) does not provide the funding modalities required to support the six-month extension and key partners, including the European Union (EU), have indicated no new funding.

I remain deeply concerned by the shortfall in the funding available for ATMIS and the Somali Security Force. With no resolution on who and what mechanism will fund the current drawdown delay, there is an urgency to address the funding issue of ATMIS.

We further believe this issue must be addressed within the broader funding context for African Union Peace Support Operations. In this regard, I welcome the United Nations Secretary-General’s most recent call to the Security Council at the last African Union Summit that African Union Missions must be afforded the need to access assessed contributions.

With the Security Council meeting next month to discuss security transition in Somalia, under the presidency of the Government of Mozambique, this meeting could be a breakthrough moment on funding – and provide the Council, African Union and key partners an opportunity to address ATMIS's outstanding funding requirements

**Madam President,**

Somalia continues to experience an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. In response to this, and as part of the larger international partners’ support, the African Union Permanent Representative Sub-Committee on Refugees, Returnees, and Internally Displaced People visited Somalia in December 2022 to show solidarity with Somalia and assess the humanitarian situation.

This delegation met with the government and humanitarian partners, visited IDP camps in Mogadishu and Baidoa and extended a solidarity gesture to the FGS in support of the humanitarian drought response. ATMIS also facilitated the delivery of humanitarian supplies, including through provision of escort and security to WFP to deliver 144 Metric Tons of assorted food commodities in hard-to-reach areas in HirShabelle and Southwest in 2023.

**Madam President,**

As this Council is aware, I took over the leadership of ATMIS in November 2022, with extensive experience in peace support operations both with the United Nations and the African Union, and I am proud to be able to work with a team of truly dedicated and talented people who do not take for granted the opportunity to help rebuild Somalia.

Under my leadership, ATMIS shall remain reliable partner and a dependable ally. With this, I renew my commitment to timely and effective implementation of the mandated tasks as assigned by this Council.

As we continue the onboarding of the Police and Military leadership, ATMIS will continue to require a strong civilian component with a clear sense of purpose. With the support of the African Union Commission, I plan to begin the recruitment of national staff to enhance ATMIS effectiveness.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate once again my appreciation for the opportunity to brief the Council and renew the African Union commitment to Peace, Stability and Development of Somalia and its people, in line with the aspiration of AU’s Agenda 2063.

I thank you.