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

**On Security Transition in Somalia**

**By**

**H.E. SRCC**

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**Mr. President,**

**Distinguished Members of the Security Council,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Thank you for inviting me to address this Council on behalf of the African Union. Let me start by congratulating the Government of Mozambique for its Presidency of the Security Council for the month of March.

Today’s meeting on transition in Somalia is both critical and timely. I believe our exchanges will continue to allow us to offer Somalia the urgent collective support it requires as we look forward to ATMIS’s exit in December 2024.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the combined sacrifices of the Somali Security Forces (SSF) and ATMIS uniformed personnel. Many of these brave men and women have made the ultimate sacrifice over the years to advance peace and security in Somalia.

**Mr. President,**

The African Union strongly believes that since 2007, Somalia has continued to progress towards a peaceful and prosperous future, reclaiming its position within the region from the depths we witnessed 30 years ago. We also believe there remains much to achieve, even with Somalia prepared to contribute to regional peace and prosperity.

It was within this context that the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), through its 1068th Communiqué, authorised ATMIS to replace AMISOM from 1 April 2022 and subsequently endorsed by this Council in Resolution 2628 (2022).

Resolution 2628 (2022) reflects the African Union to reshape its relations with Somalia and to build upon the legacy of AMISOM. It also allows the African Union and Somalia to take new steps in our collective efforts to weaken Al-Shabaab. But more importantly, it offers the African Union a well-defined strategy to finally transfer 16 years of security assistance to the Somali Security Forces (SSF),

I am pleased to report that ATMIS has led in a new era of partnership with Somalia. This has also enabled ATMIS and the Federal Government to work closely on various strategic security issues, including the mandated benchmarks exercise soon to be submitted to this Council.

Building on the strong cooperation with Somalia and partners, we have degraded Al-Shabaab jointly with the SSF. This, we are confident, is a positive indicator for ongoing efforts at transition, particularly as we continue to deliver on our Phase 1 activities of the agreed Joint FGS – ATMIS CONOPS of 2022.

With regard to our Phase 1 activities, ATMIS has continued to conduct joint targeted operations across its mandated sectors. The result has been to deny Al-Shabaab freedom of movement. Our ability to degrade Al-Shabaab has now seen our forces increase their ability to secure Somalia’s main supply routes (MSR), and to protect main population centres and vital installations and facilities.

 More significantly, since August 2022, ATMIS has been supporting the ongoing SSF-led and owned offensive against Al-Shabaab that has resulted in security gains across Al-Shabaab strongholds, notably in HirShabelle, Galmudug and parts of Jubaland. This support has largely included provision of close air support, (2) Casualty Evacuation (CASEVAC) and Medical Evacuation (MEDEVAC) of SSF troops from the battlefield, (3) Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), (4) indirect fire (IDF) support, and (5) combat service support, such as ammunition, water, drugs, and field accommodation.

With operational successes, the theatre expanded beyond areas with ATMIS presence. This had, to some extent, limited ATMIS’ ability to support subsequent SSF operations beyond provision of CASEVAC due to the absence of ATMIS forces in those area or ongoing rotations of troops. However, I am pleased to inform this Council, that through better coordination, preparations are underway for ATMIS forces in Sector 5, to support jointly planned operations. This is an encouraging development and I wish to appeal to all stakeholders to ensure timely coordination, collaboration and communication that is required for sustained success.

Mr President,

In preparation for the drawdown of 2,000 ATMIS troops, we have already submitted to the Federal Government a detailed and realistic reconfiguration plan. While in January of this year, working with the Federal Government, and with support from UNSOS, ATMIS handed over the Maslah FoB. Thandover is a testament to the collective will and commitment to support the FGS operations and to ensure adequate implementation of the Transition Plan.

It is therefore anticipated that there will be more identified FOBs to handover, close and consolidate as more operational success is achieved in this process of security transition. In fact, ATMIS recently re-deployed to Bariire FoB as part of an operational agreement with the Federal Government and now collocating with the SSF at the Hawaadley Bridge FoB, to maintain the recent security gains by SSF.

In anticipation of increased SSF-led operations across Somalia, and a possible increased pace in force generation, ATMIS has scaled up its combat mentoring activities. As a result, between September 2022 and March 2023, ATMIS forces across all six sectors and the Force Headquarters have conducted 22 different mentoring courses for 1102 SNA personnel.

ATMIS support has gone beyond the military effort and also included police and civilian efforts. ATMIS has implemented a Logistics Support Plan, including through the establishment of Joint Operations Centres and Joint Operational Logistics Bases (JOLB) at the sector level, while a Statement of Unit Requirement (SUR) and equipment review have been completed at the ATMIS level.

In addition, ATMIS has continued to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian relief to vulnerable populations across its AOR, including in hard-to-reach areas. ATMIS has continued to ensure that its operations are conducted in strict compliance with applicable International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Human Rights (IHRL) and the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), including through Pre-Deployment Training (PDT), Pre-deployment verification (PDV), and In-Mission Training. This support has also been extended to the FGS with an enhanced advisory role to Somalia National Armed Forces (SNAF) since the beginning of the ongoing offensive and the involvement of the ‘Community Defence Forces’ (CDF).

**Mr. President,**

In November 2022, the African Union Peace and Security Council received a request from the Federal Government to revise the drawdown timeline. The request was deemed necessary by the Federal Government of Somalia, this Council, and the African Union. Granting this request has also ensured the security gains made by SSF can be maintained and created space and time for both ATMIS and Somalia to complete key mandated tasks. Today, with the support of ATMIS, Somalia continues to hold the operational and strategic advantage over Al-Shabaaab, with the SSF recovering around 75 locations from the group since last August.

Somalia took decisive steps to increase the pace of its force generation, with newly arrived troops now active on the frontlines against Al-Shabaab. While the African Union continues to applaud Somalia's courageous efforts on the battlefield, we remain concerned that three months into the mandate extension, there still remains no agreement on who and what mechanism will fund the current drawdown delay.

 More worrying for the African Union is that the unfunded mandate is now resulting in the Mission being unable to fully implement this Council's mandate in areas such as stabilisation in the recovered zones.

A second challenge resulting from the delayed drawdown has been this Council's request under Resolution 2670 (2022) for the Mission to implement a "strategic sector-by-sector approach to drawdown. As the Council will be aware, the Joint FGS – ATMIS CONOPS of 2022, endorsed by this Council, the European Union and other key partners agreed on the "pro rata formula" – a more equitable approach to drawdown.

In an effort to meet this Council's expectations, ATMIS has been looking at various options. For a sector-by-sector approach to be successful, we need to undertake more detailed planning with the Federal Government and build on the Mission's baseline assessment. This needs to be supported and, again, strong coordination and collaboration between the relevant stakeholders is required.

**Mr. President,**

The African Union believes that while progress in advancing the transition requires more collective effort, not only from ATMIS and Somalia but from key partners to ensure the prerequisite support is in place, Phase 1 of the transition has offered us all key opportunities that must not be overlooked.

First, to sustain the current success of the SSF-led offensive, the recent adjustment to the timeline of phase 1 will need Somalia's key partners to reach a consensus on providing the SSF with additional equipment to ensure Somalia can continue degrading and ultimately defeat Al-Shabaab. A first step must be the lifting of the arms embargo and the willingness to increase the level of the current UNSOS support package beyond the mandated 13,900 to the SSF.

Second, there should be an agreement on revising the existing joint FGS – ATMIS CONOPS of 2022. We believe this will allow ATMIS and the Federal Government to implement a "strategic sector-by-sector approach to drawdown" as requested by the Security Council.

With ATMIS's mandate due to expire soon, we believe the opportunity now exists to begin frank discussions on addressing the current mandate capability gaps that can incentivise an orderly transition from ATMIS to the SSF by December 2024.

I thank you.