**Statement to the UN Security Council**

**By**

**H.E Ambassador Mohamed El-Amine Souef**

**Special Representative of the AU Commission Chairperson (SRCC) for Somalia**

 **& Head of ATMIS**

**New York, 19 October 2023**

**Mr. President,**

Thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on the situation in Somalia. Let me start by congratulating the Government of Brazil for its Presidency of the Security Council for the month of October. I am pleased to be joined alongside Ambassador Catriona Laing, the Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM).

 Before I begin, allow me to salute, once again, the dedication and bravery of the Somali Security Forces and the African Union troops and police personnel and to pay tribute to those who paid the ultimate price in pursuit of peace and security in Somalia.

Prior to my trip to New York, I undertook extensive engagements with all partners, including the Federal Government of Somalia, on the transition. On 12 October, I hosted a briefing session with diplomatic partners in Mogadishu to take stock of the progress so far achieved in the transition process and to determine the required support for a successful and orderly transition. It was apparent that continued partnership and collaboration between the African Union, the United Nations and other key partners remains vital in delivering our collective support to Somalia.

Today’s Council meeting is therefore timely and urgent, as Somalia remains united under the stellar leadership of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in the country’s effort to deliver lasting peace, security, and stability, I strongly believe that our continued interaction will allow us to afford Somalia the urgent concerted support it needs in this regard.

Since my last briefing in June, despite the continued challenges facing Somalia, we have witnessed commendable progress on some of Somalia’s immediate and outstanding issues. These have predominantly focused on maintaining consensus building and dialogue among Somalia’s leaders and the ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab.

I am pleased to report that the National Consultative Council (NCC) continues to play a leading role in fostering unity between the Federal Government and its Federal Member States (FMSs). In August, the NCC agreed to accelerate the Federal Government’s offensive against Al-Shabaab and to prioritise stabilisation and reconciliation in the newly recovered areas. This is ongoing and deserves our collective support. Despite Puntland’s absence in the NCC, I am encouraged with its expressed intention to engage in direct talks with the Federal Government of Somalia. This signals renewed willingness to re-engage and I look forward to Puntland’s return to the NCC, which remains a crucial mechanism for building consensus and advancing national priorities.

**Mr. President,**

Turning to the security situation.

We continue to assess that Al-Shabaab remains the main threat to Somalia and, presently, the region. In the last three months, while we have seen Al-Shabaab prove its resilience across some ATMIS sectors, we do not assess this to be a resurgence of Al-Shabaab.

In response to Al-Shabaab’s resilience, we have continued to see the unwavering commitment of the Federal Government in the fight against Al-Shabaab. Leading this effort has been President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. His long presence on the frontlines in Galmudug has offered inspiration to the Somali security forces-led and owned offensive.

 In parallel, ATMIS has continued to support the FGS-led offensive against Al Shabaab. In this regard, ATMIS launched shaping and clearance operations in all the Sectors, provided artillery support in Maxaas and undertook the historic inter-sector operation in Califoldheere Forest. This dislodged Al Shabab from its defensive positions and enabled SSF to achieve considerable operational successes. As offensives against Al Shabab progress, ATMIS intends to undertake similar inter-sector operations in support of the FGS offensive where necessary.

 In addition, ATMIS and key partners have also registered achievements in the implementation of key mandated tasks. Key here has been the successful completion of the Joint Technical Assessment and submission of a report to this Council for consideration in accordance with Security Council resolution 2687 (2023).

 As part of efforts to continue the agreed drawdown, the Joint Tripartite Committee, consisting of ATMIS, UNSOS, and FGS, completed the drawdown of 2,000 ATMIS troops in June and, began activities for the Phase 2 drawdown, which saw the ATMIS Bio Cadale FOB transferred to the Somali Security Forces on 17 September. In line with SSF and ATMIS operational requirements, the Raga Ceel FOB, an ATMIS FOB in Middle Shabelle, was handed over to the Somali Security Forces on 18 October to constitute mobile forces.

 Moreover, I am particularly pleased to report remarkable progress in the introduction of new enablers in the theatre. Four helicopters from the Republic of Burundi shall be deployed to Somalia in the coming days. This will certainly augment ATMIS operational support to SSF; a significant step towards achieving an orderly and smooth transition.

**Mr. President**

 Operational and military successes, while significant, are not enough to degrade and ultimately defeat Al-Shabab. They must be supplemented by other enabling elements, such as dedicated support to the FGS’ reconciliation and stabilisation efforts, comprising promotion of social cohesion and extension of State authority, including to newly liberated areas.

 Through the National Reconciliation Framework, Somalia has demonstrated the political will to pursue dialogue. Through SSF and ATMIS, there is sufficient capacity to protect civilians. And through ATMIS, UNSOS, UNSOM and UNCT, there is the necessary platform to coordinate support to Somalia’s stabilisation and reconciliation efforts. We must not lose sight of these important aspects.

 I also wish to express concern about the El Niño phenomenon which is expected to increase the risks of flooding along the main two rivers, the Juba and Shabelle, likely leading to loss of lives, property, population displacement, disease outbreak and destruction of infrastructure and crops. The El Niño is likely to worsen the humanitarian situation in IDP camps, including those next to ATMIS FOBs. It is also expected to reduce SSF and ATMIS operational tempo and disrupt road resupply.

 As ATMIS, we have already established, in consultation with UNSOM and UNSOS, a Mission-wide Disaster Management Committee to coordinate the Mission’s mitigation, preparedness, and early action. It will, however, require extensive resources to limit the negative impact of El Nino and this Council is invited to continue supporting Humanitarian action in Somalia.

**Mr. President,**

As this Council is already aware, in September, the Government of Somalia formally transmitted to this Council a note requesting a "technical pause" of the ATMIS Phase 2 drawdown of 3,000 troops. In the Government's note, it underscored that a technical pause would provide the necessary time to address significant challenges identified in the Joint Technical Assessment and further provide an opportunity to address the current security dynamic across Somalia.

 Responding to this request, the African Union Peace, and Security Council (AU PSC) met on 30 September and agreed to support Somalia's request in accordance with its Communiqué 1177 (2023).

The African Union's decision to support the technical pause was due to its recognition of Somalia's operational realities, including successes and setbacks in the ongoing offensive against Al-Shabaab. The Federal Government's request also represented a pragmatic response to the current security transition realities.

While the African Union looks forward to this Council's endorsement of the AU PSC Communiqué 1177 (2023), it remains vital that the drawdown of ATMIS troops be informed and guided by a careful assessment of the prevailing security situation and the Somalia security forces (SSF) capability.

This must aim to avail the SSF with the necessary firepower to take over security responsibilities while also undertaking offensive against Al Shabab. In this context, this Council should, as a first step in November, consider lifting the current arms embargo on Somalia. This is also in light of the report of the assessment team on the benchmarks stipulated in Security Council resolution 2662 (2022), which clearly highlights the important progress made by Somalia in meeting the conditions for lifting the arms embargo.

**Mr. President,**

As the African Union anticipates a positive endorsement of AU PSC Communiqué 1177 (2023), it is important to underscore two key points.

**First,** the technical pause of the Phase 2 drawdown will now provide Somalia, ATMIS and key partners the opportunity to secure the collective gains we have all made in Somalia. The pause will create space and time for a re-assessment of the operational needs of the Somalia National Army to defeat Al-Shabaab. This is ongoing, and we are beginning to see the results.

**Second**, as this Council considers AU PSC Communiqué 1177 (2023), it remains vital that its endorsement of the technical pause addresses the growing financial deficit faced by ATMIS as the Mission prepares to exit in December 2024. As previously indicated in this August forum by many members, the ongoing efforts to transfer security responsibilities to the Somalia Security Forces (SSF) must be matched with sustainable, predictable, and adequate funding through a consideration of assessed contributions for ATMIS and similar AU Peace Support Operations (PSOs).

It is in this regard that, I convey the African Union commitment to burden sharing, including through the allocation of funds from the Peace Fund to support ATMIS operations. I also express profound gratitude for traditional and non-traditional partners’ support to SSF and ATMIS, previously, AMISOM, through the years, and request sustained support, including through the UN-operated Trust Fund, to ensure a successful transition process.

**Monsieur le Président,**

Dans quelques mois, ce Conseil entamera à nouveau des discussions sur le renouvellement du mandat de l’ATMIS. Compte tenu de la récente pause technique de la phase 2 du retrait, le renouvellement du mandat de l’ATMIS en décembre devrait être l’occasion d’une réévaluation collective de la situation sécuritaire en Somalie ainsi que les besoins immédiats et à long terme qui permettront au gouvernement somalien d’assumer pleinement ses responsabilités en matière de sécurité et de continuer à dégrader et finalement à anéantir Al-Shabaab.

En ce qui concerne l’Union Africaine, l’Organisation mène actuellement, conformément au Communiqué 1068 (2022) du CPS, une évaluation des leçons apprises de l’AMISOM. Cet exercice permettra à l’Union Africaine de finaliser son rapport sur sa future présence en Somalie. Nous sommes, toutefois, conscients de l’importance des points de vue de nos différents partenaires et, plus particulièrement, des points de vue du Gouvernement Fédéral de la Somalie sur le type de soutien dont il aura besoin, de la part de l’Union Africaine, après 2024.

Ainsi, l’Union africaine entend jouer un rôle clé dans les discussions en cours sur Post ATMIS. Cela nous permettra, sans aucun doute, de tirer parti de nos avantages respectifs pour soutenir une paix durable en Somalie.

La paix et la sécurité doivent être au premier plan des efforts collectifs visant à créer les bases d’une transition ordonnée et harmonieuse, pour la paix durable et la stabilité en Somalie, après le départ de l’ATMIS.

C’est dans cette optique qu’ATMIS renouvelle son engagement à soutenir tous les efforts visant à maintenir et à développer les acquis durement gagnés, au cours des 17 dernières années, au-delà de décembre 2024, y compris dans le cadre d’un mécanisme d’assistance et de renforcement de capacité, en matière de sécurité.

Je vous remercie.