

Wednesday, April 26, 2023

## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF SOMALIA

H.E. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud  
Villa Somalia  
Mogadishu, Banadir

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for the political leadership you provide for the country. As a citizen who is concerned about our fledgling democracy—and the **violent coups and conflicts** that have spread across Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, and Sudan—I am concerned this trend is likely to extend to Somalia and make worse its long agonies of failing governance, civil wars, and violent extremism.

Excellency, lessons from field experience show that the twenty thousand African forces, and thousands of locally-trained military and police forces, sponsored by foreign powers, have not worked closely with civilian agencies since the formation of the transitional administrations to reduce high civilian casualties, provide justice and fair resolutions of violent conflict, build the capacities of governments and strengthen national security. **This underscores 16 years of work to reinforce military and police forces have failed to reduce instability.**

Excellency, in spite of external assistance for three decades, our people are deeply hurt and split and many of them have lost their trust in one another, though intra-group trust is increasing. This situation dictates that whatever group of friends comes to power, the others will line up in opposition. This is because the opposing group feels alarmed and defenseless by the possibility of a one-party government. This, along with problems caused by foreign powers which add to the many of our unending challenges, shortens the life of the government. **To reverse such a situation, effective authority structure reforms are therefore needed to prevent the looming crises from escalating into an all-out armed conflict between the warring communities.**

## CHIEF OF STAFF

Excellency, in order to make sure that you will be running a continuous administration (different from accusations against you of “micro-management”), delegating responsibilities at last may be advisable. As a matter of fact, delegating tasks to individuals you trust minimizes your duties and gives you more time to focus on bigger issues, such as security and the offensives underway. In Somalia, this means requiring even more from a chief of staff. It is widely believed that you pay little attention to day-to-day operations in your office. **It is time to choose and groom your daughter, Jihan Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, as close advisor who handles the most-delicate strategic matters and becomes the chief of staff.** Jihan can serve you as extra eyes and ears by pointing out political potholes you may not recognize. Jihan being your daughter, will definitely ensure that you make the most of your limited time and that information arrives at the right point in your decision-making process, and that follow-up happens without you having to check.

Excellency, to move forward, it is also important that you form two separate committees: i) **a reform task force**, and ii) **an evaluation board**.

## REFORM TASK FORCE AND EVALUATION BOARD

Excellency, since institutional reforms can be so controversial and political, **bringing in Qamar Ali Omar, first lady as a chair in the reform task force adds a critical dimension of importance and a focus on achieving objectives.** In my opinion, reform task forces benefit from an **evaluation board**—a mix of former presidents and prime ministers. This group of high-level stakeholders—**Abdiqasim Salad Hassan, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, Ali Mohamed Ghedi, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, Abdiweli Mohamed Ali Gas, Abdi Farah Shirdon, Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed, Hassan Ali Khaire, and Mohamed Hussein Roble**—provide strategic direction for the programme, provide governance, and support the chair of the reform task force. This creates a balance of hands-on experience and authorities who are agents of change. **You need them in your administration. Find the resolve to take bold action that will lead our nation into the new era of governance.** Key reform areas include:

## REFORM TASK FORCE MANDATE

- i) A constitutional settlement agreed by all major stakeholders and completed within the remainder of your term in office.
- ii) Developing an administrative intra and inter-working policy guideline between federal government and the member states.
- iii) Drawing a policy guideline that would facilitate intra and inter-member state-working relationships.
- iv) Devolving functions of the federal government and member-states institutions, in order to pave grounds for respective development programs.
- v) Separating the human resource capital between the federal and member-states governments.

- vi) Introduce inventories preparations for allocating existing assets and liabilities between the federal government and the member states, as well as other existing public/local authorities.
- vii) Making an immediate address of the economic inventory process of all the country's archival records within and overseas.
- viii) Tabulating the external budget support received from the donors, since 1991.
- ix) Developing constitutional framework for revenue and levy collection.
- x) Initiating constitutional framework that sets forth a medium-term plan aligned with the long-term development objectives (2024-2060).

Excellency, in order to be able to perform all the aforementioned functions, a **reform task force should be equipped with capable staff possessing the appropriate competence and moral standards**. The staff should have a sound technical background in different sectors—policy, security, and the economy—they are supposed to operate according to the mandate of the reform task force. Part of their competences will be assessed by the **evaluation board**. The board are expected to function as guardians and advocates for the sustainability of the overall process.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUITY

To accomplish the reform task force's mission, Excellency, **you must ensure the prime minister, Hamza Abdi Barre, and his entire cabinet including Somalia's intelligence boss, Mahad Mohamed Salad, and the Chief of the Somali National Army, Odowaa Yusuf Rageh continues to remain in office with minimum disruption for the remainder of your term in office**. Also, to ensure a national unity, Excellency, there is required massive cooperation and consultation between your administration and the member states. The purpose of this is that ministries, departments, and agencies at the federal and state level wide essential functions continue. Maintaining a continuity of federal and state governments operations helps identify and shrink the gap between existing and desired competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitude), evaluate efficiency and effectiveness of all their activities and further facilitate the planning process.

In the past, changing Prime Ministers has caused more damage to the President than it has been worth.

#### THREATS TO THE PRESIDENCY

Excellency, the steps above ideally might help the Presidency survive. I say this because of apparent threats, both internal and external, that pose existential challenges to the continuity of government in Somalia.

You are well aware that we are in a vastly different world than the one of your previous term in office. Most significantly, African states are once again pawns in a great-power Cold War. Somalia so far has experienced the positioning but not the all-out confrontation of these powers. **But as the explosion in Sudan has demonstrated, like Ethiopia before it, know that the risk of such a showdown in Somalia may well be forthcoming within the next year**. The hallmark

of this great power competition is successive coups and factions supported by different external actors. Somalia is primed for such a catastrophe.

In the absence of an explicit policy of Somali neutrality between the great powers, it is impossible to satisfy competing demands. Somali has proven it cannot win by taking sides. Somalia can choose to take no one's side, but it cannot take everyone's side.

This is a difficult balancing act for any head of state. **But it is impossible to achieve if a president is surrounded by individuals allied with different external actors while also pursuing the agenda of personal enrichment at the cost of the welfare of the president.**

I name here for your benefit the three individuals central to undermining your presidency: **Aweis Yusuf Haji, Ali Balad, and Hodan Osman.** To enable any to have access to power or financial resources, most specifically the Central Bank of Somalia, may well be, under these global circumstances, political suicide. And even before that, the delay and eventual failure of the debt relief process.

**Furthermore, it does not help that those around you have perpetually raised questions about your health and weaponized doubts about your fitness to remain in office.**

As I see it, Excellency, there is the route of stability through neutral, reliable, and stable continuity of government, or the end of Somali Government as we know it and the beginning of a new, dark and unpredictable road for Somalis into the future.

Good Luck Mr. President and God Bless Somalia,

**Abdirazak Fartaag**

Chief Executive Officer

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