



Transcript: Somalia's Future

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Ms. Healy, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here today to talk to you and share with you the situation in Somalia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I got into the main thrust of my speech, I'd like to briefly mention an aspect of the Somali political landscape that does not come to the mind when we talk about Somalia.

Somalia used to be a multiparty democratic state. I was one of very few countries in the continent where political power changed hands in a peaceful and democratic way. Between 1960, when Somalia became independent, to 1969 when the military took power in a coup d'etat, three free and fair general elections and one presidential election took place. The loser conceded willingly and congratulated the winner. The will of the people was respected.

I am bringing this issue to fore in order to dispel the negative image that has take shape in the minds of the citizens of this world that Somalia is a hopeless country and is beyond redemption. It is not.

Since October 1969 Somalia has been through 20 years of military dictatorship and an additional 16 ears of a conflict that left behind the death of more than half a million people, the complete collapse of the socio-politico-economic infrastructure as well as the displacement of millions of people. The effect of this conflict is still visible in the land and people.

As you know, many attempts were made to bring peace and stability to Somalia, but all failed. It seemed that every time one reconciliation conference failed to bring peace, new armed faction appeared in the political arena. The warlords who own and run these militias were given seats on each reconciliation conference. This behaviour sent the signal that “violence pays” and within a short period Somalia became the most dangerous place on earth.

However, neither the Somali people nor the international community gave up on the effort to find a lasting peace in Somalia. Their perseverance was rewarded in 2004 when, after a two-year conference in Kenya of representatives of the Somali people, a Transitional Federal Charter was agreed by the delegates and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was born. It was an all inclusive broad-based government and each and every social group were truly represented.

Despite many difficulties that we faced, the government relocated from Nairobi to Somalia. Unfortunately, Mogadishu remained a haven for violent groups whose leaders were also members of the parliament as well as the transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG).

An apparent breakthrough for Somalia came about in June 2006, when an alliance of religious groups collectively called Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) defeated the warlords who controlled Mogadishu. I say apparently because the early optimism that we saw did not last. Although initially they made positive statements about peace and reconciliation and their intention to work with the TFG, they emerged on the agreements they reached twice with the TFG in Khartoum and the third time refused to sit with the government delegation and showed a hostile intent towards

the TFG. This hostility turned to a real threat to the TFG. In December 2006, they attacked Baidoa, the seat of the government.

The UIC was bent on taking the political power by force. However, when they were defeated by the TFG army and fled Mogadishu, the leadership of the UIC resigned and disbanded their organisation. They decided to go underground and harass the government through guerrilla warfare. That did not materialise and the UIC cease to exist as an organization.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, the government is in control of the whole country. But establishing complete security and law and order would require time and tremendous effort. Mogadishu is overflowing with arms of all types and sizes. Some are leftover of the previous regime and warlords. But most of the sophisticated arsenal came from countries that support international terrorism whose intention was to support the UIC to maintain its grip on Mogadishu and surrounding areas. Some of the countries were our historical allies, who have contributed much in the Somali National Peace Process in Kenya 2002/2004. We urge these countries to help us rebuild Somalia and refrain giving hands to the spoilers of peace and stability.

These arms are in the hands of individuals or organised groups. Pacifying Mogadishu would need time and patience and winning of the hearts and mind of the general public. There is no military solution for peace in Somalia and the TFG is determined to bring peace to every corner of Somalia.

It was a matter for regret that Somalia has recently attracted attention as a haven for terrorist organisations and as an exporter of the radical phenomenon. The lack of central government that could control the borders of the country contributed to this situation. As early as 1992, there were unsubstantiated rumours that some of the local warlords were sheltering some known terror organisations. It is now an accepted fact that the individuals who bombed the US Embassies in Nairobi and Dar-Es Salaam came from Somalia.

Terrorism is an international phenomenon and needs international effort to eradicate it. It is an article of faith for the TFG that never again shall Somalia become a haven for terrorism. We shall never allow violent organizations to take a foothold in

Somalia. The demise of the UIC is the beginning of this process. It is incumbent upon the international community to help Somalia in its counter terrorism efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Somalia is standing at a crossroad. For the first time in two decades the future of Somalia is in the hands of its people. We have a government that is the result of a long process of national reconciliation. It is determined to re-establish law and order and democratic governance. We know it is a long and difficult road but one which we are determined to take. Somalia must reclaim its sovereignty and the people must take the destiny of their country in their hands.

We believe that the future of Somalia is bright. After the defeat of the Islamic Courts, I called for a national reconciliation congress that would finally reconcile the warring Somali clans and that would cement the political reconciliation that was achieved in 2004. This congress will take place in Somalia in the coming weeks. It will be open for Somalis from all walks of life, inside as well as outside the country. We hope it will consign conflict to history once and for all.

Among the objectives of this reconciliation congress is:

- To inform the public about the outcome of the Somali National Reconciliation Conference that took place in Kenya in 2002/4. In this regard particular attention will be given to the meaning of the transitional period and the transitional federal charter.
- To achieve inter and intra clan; genuine reconciliation and forgiveness and the cancellation of our traumatized memories of the civil war.
- Establish and advise on a mechanism for the return of properties to their rightful owners through the legal system.

There is one question I am asked time and time again. Namely: what are we going to do about the Islamic courts? Let me address this issue as clearly as I can. The Islamic courts as an organization is no longer. We have nothing against negotiating with anyone as long as the objective of such negotiation is the advancement of peace in Somalia. We hear about the existence of moderate elements in the Islamic Courts. I say: tell us where they are and we shall seek them out and talk to them and try to bring them into the fold.

The only conditions we put on anyone who is interested in dealing with us are to lay down their weapons, renounce violence and show commitment to peace and respect of the law. We will not talk to armed groups who are bent on destroying the peace and stability we are seeking.

The future.

As stated in the Transitional Charter, the commission will draft a new constitution that will form the cornerstone of the democratic governance the TFG is working to establish in Somalia. This constitution will be written and agreed upon before the end of the transitional period.

The writing of the constitution will be followed by a popular referendum to approve it. It is very important that this process is not only transparent and credible, but also based on the will of the people. Once the constitution is passed, the government will prepare the country for a free general election.

Although these steps are important for the political process and the strengthening of peace and reconciliation, it is important that the institutions of government are also built. These institutions are the engine that allows the state to function. Without these institutions, it would be difficult for the government to function properly.

While the government will not spare any effort to rebuild the institutions of government, there is also a role for the international community to play. As I have said previously, Somalia is coming out of a terrible conflict that has destroyed the socio-politico-economic structure of society. We hope and expect that the international community will contribute towards the creation and functioning of these institutions. The international community can help us not only with financial assistance but also expertise, training and capacity building.

Ladies and Gentlemen. There is a real opportunity to restore peace and good governance in Somalia. This will be achieved by a process owned by the Somali people. But for it to succeed the international community must be involved. We hope the United Kingdom will lead the world in this endeavour.

Let me conclude by saying that Somalia has seen better and more peaceful days. It has also seen a democratic system of government. I am sure it can be turned

around, and it is my aim to make Somalia peaceful enough for democracy to flourish once more. I hope we can count on your support.

Thank you.