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Newsletter: December 2017

UNDP/UNSOM Integrated Electoral Support Group (IESG) to the Federal Republic of Somalia

Chronological Highlights

- On 3 December, the National Independent Electoral Commission of Somalia (NIEC) registered seven political parties, a major milestone since 1969 in preparation of universal elections for 2020.
- On 11 December, the NIEC launched a unique lexicon with electoral terminology, in English, Somali and Arabic, and presented the 2017 - 2021 Strategic Plan, a roadmap of how the NIEC intends to deliver universal suffrage elections in 2020.
- On 13 December, donor partners approved support for the UNDP / UNSOM Programme Document of electoral support for 2018, which has a budget of USD 6.5 million channeled through a multi-partnership trust fund. At this stage, committed donors in 2018 include the European Union, Germany, and the United Kingdom.
- On 17 December, the NIEC commenced its regional consultations with stakeholders in the Federal Member States (FMS), following the Mogadishu Agreement in November between the Federal Government (FGS) and the FMS to engage and consult within 90 days sub-national partners on electoral challenges and preparations for universal elections.
- On 24 December, the Electoral Task Force (ETF) comprising the Ministry of Interior, the NIEC, and representatives of different other relevant ministries presented to the Cabinet different options of systems of representation, to be defined during the drafting process of the Electoral Law.

Electoral updates

a. NIEC consultations with regional stakeholders

The Mogadishu Agreement on 5 November between the FGS, the FMS and the Benadir administration had tasked the NIEC to conduct state-level consultations within 90 days. In this respect, the NIEC commenced on 17 and 18 December consultative meetings with local stakeholders in South-West with visits to Baidoa and Hudur. The NIEC prepared a plan accordingly to hold inclusive consultations at sub-national level with a wide range of stakeholders, from state-level leaders to local administration officials, traditional elders, religious leaders, civil society groups, women, youth, with a view to the 2020 universal elections. This is intended to facilitate political agreements on electoral challenges, with technical and logistical support provided by IESG. The visits start on 17 December, and are supposed to end by early February.

In December, the NIEC met in December leaders of the federal member states of South-West, Jubaland and Hirshabelle, local administration, traditional elders, religious leaders, women, youth and other stakeholders. The NIEC is continuing the regional consultations in January in three to four places per FMS, including Puntland and Galmudug, and as well as Benadir and the Somaliland community in Mogadishu. The NIEC's regional consultations have been welcomed by local stakeholders and received wide media coverage (Somali radio, TV, social media). The UNDP/UNSOM Integrated Electoral Support Group (IESG) assisted the NIEC with the development of a facilitation guide and provides logistical and budgetary support to the field missions.

The consultations in the different regions can be followed on the NIEC website <http://niec.so/en>, facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/NIECSomalia>, and the NIEC twitter account <https://twitter.com/NIECsomalia> @NIECsomalia .

b. NIEC registration of political parties

On 3 December, the NIEC organized a certificate awards ceremony for the first political parties who have complied with the temporary registration requirements. Seven political parties were registered: Justice Party (Xisbiga Garsorre); Unity and Democratic Party (Xisbiga Midnimada iyo Demuqraadiyadda); National and Democratic Party (Xisbiga Qaranka iyo Demoqrayadda); Somali Unity and Republican Party (Xisbiga Midnimada iyo Jumhuuriga Soomaaliyeed); Development Party (Xisbiga Horumarka); Somali Unity and Society Party (Xisbiga Midnimada iyo Bulshada Soomaaliyeed); Somali Ummah Party (Xisbiga Ummadda Soomaaliyeed), based in Puntland. While the registration of these new parties marks a crucial step toward the 2020 elections, it is expected that more relevant parties will register in the future, including the one that was announced by the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) during the ceremony, which is also to include the President and the Prime Minister. Once voter registration is underway, parties will be able to proceed to the official stage of registration. This will require 10,000 registered voters indicating their support through a signature campaign that must be representative of 9 of the 18 regions.

c. Cabinet briefing on systems of representation

The Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation (MOFAIR) briefed on 24 December the Cabinet's "subcommittee on inclusive politics" on the drafting process for the electoral law and the options of electoral systems under discussion. An informal federal-level Electoral Task Force (ETF) led by the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation (MoIFAR), and comprising other representatives of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) as well as the National Independent Electoral Commission (NIEC), has been discussing in the past period different systems of representation. The ETF has determined that the electoral system of 'Party List Proportional Representation – Closed List' should be recommended as the future system of representation for Somalia.

The ETF has been developing a 'roadmap' for drafting the Electoral Law to ensure the Executive prepares the legislation in a consultative manner, including with the FMS. Further discussion is envisaged on the constituency options, which at present is focused on the option of one national constituency; yet, also giving reflection on state-level constituencies (6 currently recognized FMS plus Benadir) as well as the regional-level constituencies (18 historic regions). The ETF has developed a 'roadmap' which envisages as a next step in early 2018 initial consultative engagements with state-level authorities, graduating to briefings by the ETF to the Somali FGS and FMS leadership by Spring 2018. Once consensus on the system of representation is reached, this will facilitate conclusion of the drafting of the electoral legislation by the Executive, and should safeguard passage of the law by Parliament in the second-half of 2018.

d. Voter registration feasibility study

In order to consider the feasibility of comparative approaches to voter registration, and issues that could potentially impact on the registration process in the specific Somali context, a joint Feasibility Study was conducted last quarter by the NIEC, supported by IESG and the USAID-funded electoral support BUILD Project. A wide array of stakeholders were consulted, including most of the FMS, and all interlocutors expressed their full support for universal suffrage elections in 2020. The major challenges for registration were believed to be access and security; political will and consensus; and the current absence of a constitutional and legal framework. Depending on the available time and resources, the voter registration methodology to be adopted in Somalia could be somewhere along a spectrum from a paper-based manual exercise that underscores inclusivity, to a biometric system that would underscore integrity. Either of the voter registration options would enable NIEC to meet its mandated responsibility for voter registration. However, the methodology needs to be consulted and agreed with key partners in 2018, in order for implementation to commence in early 2019. A minimum level of security to allow access will be a key factor for the success of the voter registration process.

e. Launch of a Somali electoral lexicon and the NIEC Strategic Plan

The recent launch on 11 December of the NIEC's five-year Strategic Plan (2017-2021) and the first electoral lexicon in Somali, English and Arabic, brought back to the attention of the Somali general public and the international community the challenge for universal elections to be conducted in 2020. The event was attended by representatives of the newly registered political parties; civil society organizations; parliamentarians; international partners; and government officials. The Deputy SRSR reiterated the UN's commitment to 'stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the people and leaders of Somalia as they seek to advance the country's democratic transition through realizing universal

suffrage elections'. The preparation of both documents was intensively supported by the UNSOM / UNDP IESG during 2017.

PWG-1 and Board meetings

a. Board meeting (13 December)

On 13 December, donor partners and the NIEC approved support for the UNSOM / UNDP IESG Programme Document for 2018, which has a budget of 6.5 million USD channeled through the multi-partnership trust fund. At this stage, committed donors include: the European Union; Germany; and United Kingdom. These commitments will allow the UN to commence implementation of its technical support to the NIEC in 2018, in order for preparations leading to universal suffrage elections in 2020 to be undertaken in a timely manner. Depending on the progress of the necessary legal and electoral administrative steps necessary in 2018, as well as the political and security context, and informed by a new UN Needs Assessment Mission in 2018, the scope of the UN Joint Programme for Electoral Support will be reviewed and expanded accordingly for the next phase of 2019-2021.

b. PWG-1 meeting (18 December)

Following the approval of the '2018 Electoral Support' Concept Note in November by the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility (SDRF), and the subsequent approval of the programme document by the Board in December, the electoral support programme 2018 was tabled on 18 December to Pillar-1 Working Group (PWG-1) on Inclusive Politics, together with the plans for constitutional and parliamentary support. The members of the PWG-1 decided that the different projects for 2018 are to be discussed in early January in separate sub-working groups. The sub-working group on elections is being chaired by the NIEC. DFID offered to co-chair this sub-working group.

Upcoming Activities

- Continuation of the NIEC regional consultations with sub-national stakeholders
- Engagement of the Electoral Task Force with representatives of the FMS on systems of representation and the drafting process of the Electoral Law.
- Start of new UNDP/UNSOM "Joint Programme for Support to Universal Suffrage Elections in the Federal Republic of Somalia".

End of year reflection, looking forward

The UNDP / UNSOM Integrated Electoral Support Group has been continuing to offer electoral assistance to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) to meet its commitment to universal suffrage elections in 2020. In 2017, there have been several important electoral developments, including the establishment of an informal federal-level Electoral Task Force discussing crucial aspects of the Electoral Law; the completion of a voter registration feasibility study; the commencement of political party registration; the launch of the NIEC Strategic Plan and a unique lexicon of electoral terminology in Somali; the commencement of NIEC state-level consultations in line with the Mogadishu Agreement of 5 November between the FGS and FMS; and re-affirmed donor support to the UN electoral support strategy for 2018.

In line with the UN Electoral Needs Assessment Mission and the NIEC's Strategic Plan (2017-2021), the current focus is on establishing the electoral 'building blocks' required to meet the envisaged electoral timeframe. These include in 2018: the development of the Electoral Law, including the system of representation; defining voter registration methodology; registration of political parties; establishing NIEC with the necessary capacity, also at sub-national level; NIEC engagement with stakeholders, including Federal Member States (FMS).

While the challenges are enormous, preparations for the Somalia's universal suffrage elections are gaining certain momentum, which will need to be sustained in 2018. It is critical that the focus remains on the adoption of the electoral law, and related constitutional adjustments, to allow for a clear legal framework to be put in place in time, as elections cannot be prepared in a legal vacuum. The choice of an electoral system will of course be a profound decision for Somalia, and that decision should be made in a consultative, transparent and accountable manner at all stages of the process, including during the legislative process in parliament when the legislation will be concluded by late 2018.

It is furthermore important that the NIEC arrives at a decision, consulted and accepted by stakeholders, on the appropriate voter registration methodology for Somalia at this time – manual or biometric –, so that preparations can begin for implementation of a voter registration exercise in early 2019. It is also important that political parties continue to register and organize themselves as effective groupings so that the transition from clan-based politics to policy-based politics can proceed.

The UNDP/UNSOM Integrated Electoral Support Group will continue offering sustained technical institutional capacity-building of the NIEC at national level, and at state-level as the NIEC begins to establish a sub-national presence in 2018, and will continue its

coordination of international electoral support. At the same time, it is essential that technical and financial support continues to be provided, to allow for critical activities such as voter registration to be delivered. In particular, it is essential for the NIEC to secure donors funding for its electoral operations, including in the form of the “UN Joint Programme for Electoral Support” for 2018. As universal suffrage elections will need to take place in a conducive security environment, technical advice and support for electoral security planning and coordination will also have to scale up in 2018.

IESG thanks the NIEC, MOIFAR’s Electoral Law Working Group, the members of the Electoral Task Force, all donor partners, other electoral assistance providers working with the NIEC and electoral stakeholders, and the many colleagues in the UN for the excellent collaboration in the past year, and looks forward to continuing this unique cooperation and partnership in 2018.