



Somaliland Non State Actors Forum

Location: Jigga-yar, Badda As, Behind WHO Office

Tel: +252-(0)-63-570536, +252-(0)-63-4414335

Website: www.sonsaf.org

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Position Paper on Issues of Voter Registration and the Electoral Systems:

On December 14 2014, SONSAF Civil Society Democratization Working Group organized a one day forum meeting for the key civil society, non-state actors and institutions to discuss both the preparations for voter registration and the overall preparations for the planned 2015 elections. The participants affirmed their commitment to advocate for an inclusive, transparent and accountable electoral model that can facilitate timely, peaceful, free and fair elections.

As the mandate of the President expires in June 2015 and the House of Representatives in July 2015 participants discussed key issues related to the electoral cycle management including the roles and responsibilities of the election stakeholders including National Electoral Commission (NEC), Government, Parliament, Political Parties, International Community, civil society, media, judiciary and other relevant actors.

Participants recommended to the NEC to draw a comprehensive and participatory elections roadmap that takes into consideration the lessons learned from Somaliland's past experiences, including the electoral shortcomings related to the voter registration in 2008 that prompted the postponement of the election and created the damaging political deadlocks in the period of 2008- 2009. This is an important lesson and reminds Somaliland that there are still many gaps in the country's electoral system. It is important that Somaliland takes steps to prevent any such electoral disputes through inclusive and political consensus prior to approaching deadlines of the elections timeline.

Participants recognized that meaningful and active participation of civil society in elections, including on civic and voter education and the monitoring and observation of processes can accelerate and ensure the achievement of an electoral process that is more effective, convincing, transparent and institutionalized in an appropriate manner.

Since early 2014, civil society has been active in facilitating negotiations for the collective recognition of the dual-track process of voter and civil registration as well as supporting the

House of Elders (Guurti) to end the recurrent conflict in the House of Representatives. In this process, Somaliland civil society and non-state actors have demonstrated their capacity to help create and promote a liberal and enabling electoral environment in the country.

Civil society is looking forward to successful elections in Somaliland with sufficient technical preparations, timely awareness raising including proper and effective civic and voter registration, and the adherence to political commitments

Recommendations:

To the National Electoral Commission:

- Develop, draw and finalize a Somaliland Elections 2015 Roadmap through inclusive, participatory and proper assessment of all relevant issues. This should prioritize reconciliation and consensus building conduct a reliable, transparent and consistent voter registration, building on lessons from past challenges and errors that included fraud, irregularities, and double registration where multiple cards were issued. Voter registration facilities must be pre-tested and their quality assured.
- CSOs is also recommending to NEC to examine adequately the possibilities of combination and separation of the elections particularly during the study of the roadmap, CSOs believe that this is one of the critical aspect of the election cycle management and drawing the roadmap.
- Recruit and train sufficient electoral staff in a timely manner. The civil society experiences on observation and monitoring of the previous elections indicate that sufficient electoral staff training and proper electoral staff selection are needed across particularly the polling staff managers. Factors that include, age and qualifications need to be carefully considered during the recruitment process.
- Establish an effective, consistent and intact Election Data Management System. This should be an integral part of the electoral capacity and strategy for mitigating electoral disputes. This will be vital in peacefully resolving electoral disputes and avoiding violence such as that experience during the 2012 elections which led to the death and injury of several people.
- Remap the election and voter registration polling centers. Fixing and mapping voter and election centers are one of the important key ingredients of the electoral process. Effective transport and security measures of the election staff deployment should be incorporated throughout the remapping plan.
- Ensure transparent and competitive bidding processes for all tenders, both local and international.

- Encourage a participatory electoral environment in which all election stakeholders are considered and whereby their views, recommendations and complaints are noted and documented and addressed. The capacity, neutrality and long term electoral experiences of civil society should be utilized and recognized throughout electoral process.
- Develop and maintain a consistent electoral and institutional development strategy. A fully functioning secretariat and opening regular offices of the NEC in the regions can be one way to pursue structured and meaningful electoral and institutional development in the long term.

To the Government of Somaliland:

- Reiterate the government's commitment to holding timely elections, in accordance with the anticipated NEC election roadmap.
- Ensure their responsibilities for the preparation of elections are completed on time. This should include providing its portion of the election funding, ensuring the provision of security, and facilitating district boundary demarcation, creating an environment of free competition, promoting the equal use of the state media across political parties, respecting the freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and legitimate campaigning of all parties competing in the elections.

To the Political Parties:

- Follow and respect provisions of the electoral laws, signed codes of conduct, election procedures and campaigning discipline measures in order to prevent any electoral violence and unwanted political behaviors that could distort the smooth campaigning and peaceful and democratic elections.
- Participate in the development of, and comply with, the elections roadmap that NEC develops
- There should be an opportunity for the political parties who are the epicenter for the election stakeholders to think vigilantly and precisely about whether the two elections are to be combined or to pursue separate series process. This is because the political actors need sufficient critical analysis on the issues of electoral, political, economic and social factors that are needed to be taken into account before the decision of the combination or separation to take place.
- Conduct all political activities and campaigning peacefully in respect of the peace, security, stability and solidarity of the nation and in accordance with the law. The political parties must avoid any expressions that can create both social and political

tensions. In other words, refraining from such language is obligatory across political actors both ruling party and opposition parties.

- Conducting timely parties' general assembly and development of the party national campaigning agenda are all necessary to pursue.

To the Parliament:

- Pass all remaining electoral laws as a matter of urgency in a participatory manner and lessons learning from previous election cycles. Priority should be given to amending the House of Representative Election Law. All efforts should be taken to avoid the deadlock experienced in 2005 when the law was first passed.
- Ensure there is an effective judicial election dispute arbitration mechanism in place before the election. This is crucial for both the effectiveness of the election management and dealing with election conflicts and the ambiguities that can arise.
- Ensure that the women's quota is enshrined in law and is implemented in the 2015 elections. This should be included in the House of Representatives Election Law.

To the Judiciary:

- Effective and capable electoral judicial system is essential in order to constantly manage election disputes and complaints. In the past, the civil society observed that judicial electoral mechanisms are weak and need to be strengthened both at the district and regional levels.
- Introduce a tracking system for election disputes and recurrent cases experienced in all elections.
- Arbitrate all electoral disputes in an open and transparent manner, recognizing that the judiciary should operate as an independent institution as the constitution directs.

To the Civil Society and Non-State Actors:

- Conduct holistic civic education campaigns through effective and adequate outreach programs on the basis of the voter registration activities following elections.
- Reorganize a civil society election monitoring forum following the domestic election observers. The CSOs had ample experiences on the election monitoring and observation interventions and in last two elections the CSOs of Somaliland succeeded in deploying a huge number of domestic election observers across polling centers where they reported and evaluated election events around 65%.

- CSOs must be proactive throughout the election cycle and take some concrete measures in the course of the pre- election, during the election and post- election periods, including reconciling disputes, promoting freedom of expression, free contest, and creating electoral conducive environment based on mutual respect and compliance with the legal framework.

To the International Community:

- Speed up the process of funding, technical and logistics support of the elections
- Help NEC to develop sound and comprehensive strategic plans for both the 2015 elections and its long term institutional development.
- Support civil society efforts on issues of electoral process and overall election monitoring activities including constituting a civil society election monitoring forum, domestic election observers and civic and voter education.

To the Media sector:

- Conduct fair and objective reporting- this applies to both the public and private media.
- Abide by their signed code of conduct and refrain from any propaganda that can distort the election process, peace and stability.
- Contribute to and participate in public education activities on issues of civic and voter registration.

Civil Society Democratization Working Group and other relevant institutions participated this Forum about elections held on December 14, 2014

- 1. APD**
- 2. NAGAAD**
- 3. SONYO**
- 4. HAVOYOCO**
- 5. UOH-IPCS**
- 6. FOPAG**
- 7. SORADI**
- 8. Anppican**
- 9. SOMRAN**
- 10. Human Rights Centre**
- 11. TASCO**
- 12. ASAL**
- 13. SOMLA**
- 14. SPS**
- 15. COMPACT**
- 16. UCID Party**
- 17. WADANI Party**
- 18. Kulmiye Party**
- 19. UNSOM**
- 20. EU**