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**EVIDENCE**

**Wednesday, December 5, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Michael Levitt**



# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, December 5, 2018

• (1305)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the continuation of our testimony on the situations in Somalia, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We are joined today by two witnesses from the Federal Government of Somalia. Thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

We have the Honourable Gamal Hassan, Minister of Planning, Investment and Economic Development. Welcome.

We also have Abdigani Jama, senior adviser, policy and strategy, from the Office of the Prime Minister.

I want to thank you both for being here with us today. This is important testimony, and we are very pleased to have you before us with your insights.

As is the normal process, you can each speak for five to eight minutes, after which we're going to open up the floor to colleagues to ask a number of questions.

With that, Minister Hassan, would you like to begin?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan (Minister of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, Federal Government of Somalia):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak before you on the endless possibilities on the strengthening of bilateral relations between Canada and Somalia.

I am very pleased to know that your colleague, the honourable Borys Wrzesnewskyj, had in the past visited Somalia and is well aware of and well acquainted with the challenges and prospects of the country.

On behalf of the Federal Government of Somalia, it is both a pleasure and an honour to address this esteemed Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development on the most recent developments that we have achieved in Somalia, and some of the challenges that remain, while expressing our hopes on advancing the special friendship between Somalia and Canada.

Canada has historically contributed to Somalia's pursuit of stability by providing thousands of Somalis with the opportunity to live in peace, receive valuable education and pursue their dreams.

Today, Somali Canadians have significantly contributed to both the social and the economic recovery in Somalia through their active contributions to the process of rebuilding the country.

Two former Somali prime ministers, a number of MPs and eight cabinet ministers in the current government, constituting some 30% of the government, call Canada their home and contribute to the special bond between our two countries.

We recognize and appreciate Canada's continued support for multilateral peace operations in Somalia, as well as efforts spent in numerous crucial areas, including women's empowerment, conflict prevention and assistance with refugees and internally displaced persons.

Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee, diplomatic relations between Canada and Somalia date back to 1968. More recently, since the first post-transition Government of Somalia came into power in 2012, we have had the pleasure of welcoming two Canadian ambassadors to Somalia: Ambassador David Angell, who presented his letters of credence to former Somali president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud on June 15, 2014, and Ambassador Sara Hradecky, who presented her letters of credence to His Excellency President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, "Farmajo", on June 7, 2017.

We are also expecting the new Canadian ambassador designate to Somalia, Ms. Lisa Stadelbauer, to present her credentials to President Mohamed very soon.

We are grateful to these ambassadors for their relentless efforts in strengthening the friendship between our two countries.

In January 2018, the Prime Minister of Somalia, His Excellency Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire, had the pleasure of meeting and interacting with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. During this historic encounter, both leaders acknowledged the importance of further strengthening diplomatic relations between the two countries by recognizing the pressing need to bolster support for Somalia's development and reconstruction efforts.

It is our hope that this committee and its leadership will take these discussions further and foster practical avenues to realizing lasting peace and sustainable development in Somalia.

Ladies and gentlemen, the election of His Excellency President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo” and the appointment of His Excellency Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khairi in February 2017 ushered in a new era for Somalia. Their vision of a reconciled and stable country led by accountable institutions that are able to deliver services to their citizens has met with wide support, both nationally and internationally.

Over the last 19 months, the government has worked tirelessly to rebuild public trust in government by delivering tangible results on key national priorities, including national security, inclusive politics, economic growth and social development, among other demands.

Constitutional reform processes, the strengthening of the country's federal system and holding free and fair elections are also some of the government's priority areas of development.

The National Independent Election Commission has so far registered 22 political associations for multi-party elections scheduled for the year 2020. We anticipate that the 2020 election—the first universal suffrage election in Somalia in 50 years—will further contribute to Somalia's full recovery and political stability.

We are also working on establishing independent judiciary services, and we are in the process of completing the review of a draft constitution. At the same time, many key bills have been passed by the cabinet and are being considered by the respective parliamentary committees.

Furthermore, with the support of international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, our government is currently pursuing prudent financial and revenue management processes in a quest for debt relief, which has entered its third and hopefully last IMF staff-monitored program. By strengthening our financial institutions and reforming our economic and trade policies, we hope to foster closer economic ties with our neighbouring countries in order to take advantage of the growing opportunities in the region.

• (1310)

Somalia is blessed with having a multitude of resources, including the longest coastline on the continent, stretching 3,300 kilometres from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean. These strategic advantages pose endless potential that could positively contribute to regional development and stability. This potential, however, can only be realized through collective efforts to address our challenges and build on our strengths. We strongly believe that with the support of your government, by pooling together our collective strengths in terms of human and natural resources, coupled with our shared values of inclusive and accountable governance, Somalia will be able to stride faster and stronger towards lasting peace and sustainable development.

Mr. Chairman and honourable members of the committee, Somalia has made visible progress in a number of critical areas, despite extraordinary challenges. We will continue to pursue reconciliation among Somalis, and stability, security, economic growth and equitable representation in all areas of government. However, to achieve these goals, Somalia is in need of stronger international support. Canada's leading role in humanitarian relief and your continued support for political process, security and peace-

building as well as social development in Somalia, through multilateral agencies, has been instrumental to our recovery. Such support was and still is very much needed. However, as we strive to sustain the progress made so far and continue on the path of reconstruction, Somalia needs more direct assistance to reach standards of full recovery. We believe that strengthening our bilateral ties and increasing development assistance for Somalia can significantly increase our chance of achieving lasting peace and sustainable development sooner rather than later.

Our government is intent on achieving lasting progress in key areas, including, number one, inclusive politics, and by completing the process of federalism as well as completing the review of the draft constitution and preparing for 2020 elections, while putting in place an independent judicial model to boost good governance.

Number two is social development. Our government, along with our international partners, is having challenges in finding durable solutions for the more than 2.6 million internally displaced persons in Somalia and for the one million Somali refugees across the region. We have put together a recovery and resiliency framework that outlines feasible steps for finding durable solutions to these crises. The Canadian government has been a key supporter in these efforts, and we continue to be grateful.

The security sector is number three. The Federal Government of Somalia, in consultation with international partners, has adopted a transitional plan to replace troops from the African Union with Somali security forces in a gradual manner. We owe a debt of gratitude to the African Union mission in Somalia, which has made huge sacrifices in helping us stabilize the country and fight extremist groups and insurgents such as al Shabaab. However, in order for the country to reach a status of full recovery, our own security institutions must be strengthened and empowered to take charge of the country's security. Therefore, the implementation of a transition plan and a strengthened capacity of the Somali security institutions are of the utmost importance in achieving lasting peace and security in the country.

Last but not least is our aim for economic development. The federal government is pursuing economic development and macro-economic stability through the introduction of economic policy reforms, thus improving governance, fighting corruption, and strengthening financial institutions. Socio-economic development is key in achieving lasting stability and is one of our government's most fundamental priorities.

The federal government of Somalia is doing all it can to achieve the above-mentioned priorities among others, and has so far been able to reach tangible results that have been witnessed and praised both nationally and internationally. However, given our limited resources and the limitations of being in the early stages of recovery, more support is needed to maintain and build on the gains made so far. Hence, we ask the Canadian government to continue to look at Somalia with renewed focus, to increase your development support and to prioritize our co-operative relationship in order to yield substantial results and achieve sustainable development, lasting peace and long-term stability in the Horn of Africa.

• (1315)

Thank you very much for your attention.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister Hassan.

We will move straight into questions.

We will begin with MP Aboultaif, please.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** I welcome the honourable minister and Mr. Jama for being with us today.

In 2016 and 2017 Somalia had an election using a fairly complex electoral system. Early in our 2015 Parliament, we went through a process trying to look into the electoral system. The result we got from electors in Canada was that basically they were leaning toward more of a simple system, or simplicity in the system. As we understand, people want to actively participate in the system.

You have elections in 2020. Can you tell us the weaknesses and the strengths of the electoral system that you have in place right now, and how you believe you're going to move forward in implementing it and in getting the result that you're looking for?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Thank you very much, honourable members.

Thank you for your support for Somalia. In 2016 and 2017, as you rightly said, we had an election process, which resulted in the election of the Parliament, the lower house. For the first time we have put together an upper house, which is the equivalent of the Senate here. We had the election of a president, the appointment of the Prime Minister and the approval of the cabinet. It has been a long process.

Going forward, we have decided to move beyond the process we chose the last time and go for “one person, one vote” in 2020. If you look at 2016-17, you see that we used a system called “4.5”, whereby we shared the parliamentary seats based on clan constituents from different regions of the country, with different groups appointing or selecting their members of Parliament through a clan balance. We had 135 clan elders who were selected based on their leadership within their communities. Those 135 elders then selected the 275 members of Parliament who elected the Speaker and then the President. It was a traditional system that we used to elect our leadership.

Going forward, we're going to go for universal suffrage: one person, one vote. We have put together a national independent electoral committee, which is now in the process of finalizing the electoral law. There are more than 20 associations, which, as soon as we have this bill passed by Parliament, will qualify to register as

political parties. We're in the process. We have two years to go, but we feel we're in the right place to make sure that by 2020 we have the systems in place to go for one-person, one-vote elections.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** One of your President's priorities is to finalize a new constitution by 2020. Since you were a senior officer or adviser to the United States on political affairs and related democracy, governance and human rights issues, the question is, how will your government—the President and your Parliament—safeguard human rights practices within the new constitution? Will you be able to give us—it's been two years, I believe—some examples on how human rights have advanced? What steps are you taking to ensure that this is happening and is going to help you in 2020 when you put forward the final constitution?

• (1320)

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** I will answer in two parts.

First, we have a draft constitution, which is undergoing a review process. We have to review 15 chapters before 2020. We have already finalized 10 chapters. We are on the last five chapters and we hope to finalize those in the next few months. Once we do that, then we will send the 15 chapters to the Parliament for ratification.

We have three layers there. We have the Minister of Constitutional Affairs, we have an independent commission for the constitution, and we have a joint committee made up of two houses of Parliament, so we have three groups looking at the constitution thoroughly, in addition to civil society and other parts of the Somali people.

That's the constitution. It's almost final.

On human rights, we are the only country in the region that has a dedicated human rights ministry, the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development. As well we have, for the first time in our national development plan, one pillar—we have nine altogether—that is fully dedicated to gender and human rights. This pillar's entire work is to mainstream gender issues to make sure that human rights are observed in every department of the government, that all our programs are gender sensitive, and that human rights practices are upheld and good governance is observed.

These two areas, human rights and the constitution, are key priorities for us. If we don't deliver the constitution next year, in 2020, it will be difficult to hold elections, and given that our country has a history of conflict and civil war, human rights is a big issue for us. We have to make sure that what has happened in the past doesn't come back.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** As do many of us, I have a large Somali community in my area that I know very well, and my sources have told me there is funding going from the diaspora everywhere in the world, including Canada, to the al Shabaab movement. That, first of all, is disturbing, because those monies are going to support the operations of al Shabaab.

I would like to hear from you on this. What would you recommend to international partners, countries like ours, in terms of how to deal with that to make sure we are not somehow indirectly helping to feed that movement there?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Al Shabaab is a threat not only to Somalis; it's a threat to all societies, all of us.

We are not aware of particular funding sources that are going to al Shabaab. We would be very happy and willing to co-operate with anyone who could tell us who is funding al Shabaab and who is financing their operation in Somalia. It is an area in which we are much interested. All of us have great interest in finding that out to make sure we close all those loopholes.

To fight funding going to al Shabaab or any other extremist groups, we need to strengthen the institutions of Somalia. We have already passed the anti-money-laundering bill. A counterterrorism bill is required to make sure that all money coming into the country is fully vetted. We have put together, for the first time, a financial reporting centre in Somalia. It tracks all the finances coming into the country to make sure no money goes to those groups.

We're trying all we can on the ground, but we need the support of the international community to ensure financial institutions properly function in Somalia. We need to have corresponding banking accounts between Somalia and Canada and the western countries—everywhere globally—to make sure that all the money, all the activities, everything that is happening in Somalia, is transparent and accountable and that we all have access to seeing what is happening. That's the only way we can track everything that's coming into the country.

• (1325)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We're now going to move to the next member, MP Wrzesnewskyj, please.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Welcome, honourable Minister Hassan and Mr. Jama. It's a pleasure to have you on Parliament Hill.

The Somali people have suffered through decades of civil war, warlordism, religious extremism, the consequential displacement of millions and sequential famines.

What we have today, it appears, is a real window of opportunity to change Somalia's course of history. It's so encouraging to hear that Canada is playing a major role in this transformation, except it's not the Canadian government; it's Somali Canadians who've returned and are making significant differences.

You referenced eight ministers of cabinet who are Canadian. As Mr. Aboultaif mentioned, in my riding I also have a number of constituents who have started up clinics and NGOs. It seems that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Canadians on the ground building this new Somali future.

Do you have any idea of approximate numbers? How many Canadians are on the ground working to build this new Somalia?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Thank you, honourable member.

It's difficult to tell exactly the number of Somali Canadians who are on the ground in Somalia today. What we know is that we have eight cabinet ministers. We have, I think, over 20 members of Parliament, including the Deputy Speaker of Parliament. We have countless numbers of business people from Canada, Somali Canadians doing great in Somalia. As you mentioned, there are NGOs and non-profit organizations. We have a large contingency. When you have 30% of the cabinet coming from one country, I think that tells us something, including me. We have them everywhere in the security sector and in the private sector, and, as I said, in the non-profits. They are everywhere.

It's natural, when you have these numbers of people, that they form a closer bond and they know each other, but sometimes it's difficult to know who is from Canada across the country. What we know is that we're making a huge contribution. We had two prime ministers, one who's actually from Ottawa, who served as Prime Minister of Somalia for the last few years. It doesn't happen anywhere else in the world that you have a prime minister who just graduated from Carleton University or Ottawa University and did a great job in Somalia. It is really something that's unique, and we need to build on that. We need to make sure, not only in Somalia but also in Canada, that people are aware of what's happening. We need your support in terms of advocating for a better Somalia and for a better narrative in Somalia. I think that will go a long way.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Thank you, Minister.

We have an opportunity, a real opportunity, to build on the good work that Canadians are doing in this transformation. There have been a number of donor conferences over the years—in 2016 in Kuwait, for instance—that looked at education.

You mentioned Minister Deeqa Yasin. Unfortunately, because of logistical reasons, she was unable to attend, but I understand she'll be here in January, so I'd be very happy to meet with her to discuss this further.

On the file of women, peace and security and engaging women in building this new Somalia, I understand that approximately 95% of Somali women are currently illiterate. I also understand that children have and continue to be indoctrinated by al Shabaab in *duksis* schools in areas that the government doesn't control. What's being done on the educational front in terms of literacy? Specifically, it seems that there is an opportunity to do a lot of good work with young girls, but also generally with children, especially those who have fallen under the influence of al Shabaab.

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Thank you, honourable member.

I think part one is generally that when you look at the statistics, you see that 91% of the Somalian population is under the age of 40, and 75% of the population is under the age of 30 years old. We can safely say around half of the Somalian population is under the age of 15, so you can imagine the number of children.

Our society is recovering from a protracted civil war. The victims of the conflict, this civil war, were primarily women and children. As you said, the statistics are huge, and the numbers we've seen when it comes to women or girls and education are not comparable to those of men in the country.

One of the things we would like to see happening, particularly with Canada's leadership, is to help us educate more girls and to help us send girls to schools. From what we know, if you educate a girl, you educate an entire village or a community, as they say. It is an area that is a top priority for us in terms of human capital development, in terms of social development, and in terms of reconciling the communities, because we need more girls in school. The enrolment rates are still at the lowest, very low, even at elementary schools.

We would like to build on Canada's recent success at the conference on girls' education in Vancouver. We would also like to praise Canada's feminist foreign policy, in which gender and women's empowerment are a priority. We would like your support to help us develop education and other services for our women and girls.

●(1330)

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Perhaps I could get a short yes or no to this question, as I'm being signalled.

Other countries have held international donors conferences. With all the human ties that we have between our two countries, would you be supportive of an international donors conference here in Canada that would focus on the file of women, peace, and security, as we look at ways to help the transformation of Somalia?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Absolutely, yes.

Indeed, it's something that we're very much interested in. It would be really helpful if you can organize that kind of conference in Canada so we can build on the success we had in Vancouver and other parts of the world.

Thank you very much. It's a very good suggestion and it is very welcome.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Thank you, Minister.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now move to MP Duncan, please.

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you.

Welcome.

As I mentioned to you, Minister Hassan, you have very impressive credentials, as my colleague from the Conservative Party pointed out.

Could you elaborate a bit more on what my colleague just raised about educating women and girls? Recently in the Canadian media, we had a story of a success in one African country where the struggle

to educate and give opportunities to women and girls was simply that they each had to spend five hours a day carting water. Canadian aid then provided the drilling for safe wells run by solar.

Could you speak to the main barriers to women becoming educated and girls getting access to the schools? Is it religious? Is it cultural? Is it basic survival?

What is your strategy on moving forward on that agenda?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Thank you.

When you look at the situation in Somalia, you see it's quite a bit different from the situations of some of our African brothers and sisters, and it is the same when it comes to challenges.

We have a culture of bringing up and nurturing and supporting our girls and women, but because of the situation on the ground, because of what happened in the civil war and the civil conflict, the biggest impact was on women and girls. Now we have dedicated an entire pillar in our national development plan for women, gender and human rights, because we realize some of the basics are not met when we look at their representation in the schools, in the marketplace and in politics. Although we tried recently to implement a quota of 30% of women members of Parliament, we achieved around 25%, which is 5% short. We aim to reach 30% or more in the next election.

When you consider empowering women in their level of education or in other areas, because of our culture, which empowers women despite the challenges we have, hopefully in the next few years we will be able to achieve great success, but we cannot do it alone. We don't have the resources to do everything we have put together in the plans. We don't have the resources in place to achieve the goals and priorities we set out, so we are looking at places like Canada and other friendly countries to help us realize those plans, to realize implementation of those policies and help us to move Somalia forward.

If we empower and invest in our girls and our women in every sector, actually it is a no-brainer that the country will go further and will achieve success.

●(1335)

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I have a simple question related to that. You know that Canada has adopted this feminist international assistance policy. Is your country willing, in your request for assistance, to make that a priority on how you will spend your assistance dollars?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** That's absolutely a yes. We will adopt any policies that will empower our women, our girls. We can call it any name. It doesn't have to be a feminist foreign policy. It can be any policy that will empower them, and we will ensure—for instance, we are obligated to have gender mainstreamed in every ministry. We are asked to make sure we set up gender units in every ministry, which will make sure the hiring process is fair to them and make sure their needs are taken care of, that there is no harassment in the workplace, and ensure they are truly represented in every sector in the government.

Even with all those efforts, we are short of where we want to be, and whatever policies we can adopt to ensure there is fair representation and equality, we will be more than happy to do.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** You've raised the issue about the refugees, a good number of whom are essentially stranded in Yemen, which is not a very safe place to be right now.

I wonder if you could speak to whether there is a repatriation strategy. Is it safe for them to come back to Somalia? Is Somalia investing any kind of effort in trying to bring those Somalis back to Somalia?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** What is happening in Yemen is unfortunate. As soon as the conflict in Yemen started, we had more than 30,000 Yemeni refugees and Somali returnees back in Somalia, especially in the northern regions of Puntland and Somaliland. We were supported by IOM and UNHCR. Most of the people are still stranded in Yemen. Over 250,000 Somalis are still refugees in Yemen. Most of them are in the Houthi-controlled areas.

We have active communication with them. We try all we can to make sure they stay out of the conflict zones. We are in touch with the UN. We are in touch with other agencies. We would like them to be repatriated safely, if possible, back into Somalia.

We know it is not easy sometimes. The distance between Somalia and Yemen is not that far, but sometimes there are very dangerous areas to journey through to come to this side. We're asking anybody who can help to move them to safer places to do so, because initially they were there as refugees and then this happened, and they will basically be the biggest victims in this kind of situation.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** I have a few more minutes. I'd like to ask you about your strategy for exploiting oil and gas.

The experience around the world of exploiting oil and gas has been mixed. With that exploitation come potential conflicts with the communities where that development is occurring, and potential environmental impacts.

I am wondering if you have been developing an overriding strategy for how you might explore the exploitation of that resource while trying to do it in a better way than has been attempted in many other nations.

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** That is true.

I think it was a week ago that our Minister of Petroleum and Minerals went to South Africa and attended an oil conference. He announced that Somalia is ready to award over 200 oil wells offshore, not onshore, and that is different. When you look at the offshore, there is huge potential for Somalia in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea.

We are going to do that in a way that is more environmentally friendly and sustainable, so that it doesn't become a curse but instead becomes a source of stability.

We have a bill in Parliament now—it's almost in the final reading—which is a petroleum law that will allow the establishment of a petroleum agency that is independent, which will run these contracts. Hopefully very soon, if we are able to pass the bill and go through the remaining steps, I think we'll be able to have a system in place that will protect all those areas. It will protect the environment and the rights of the workers, and ensure that there is fair competition and that we extract these resources in a very sustainable manner. We don't want things that will negatively impact us.

That's in the works, and the minister is really pushing to finalize all the key legislation and policies.

• (1340)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now move to MP Saini.

**Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.):** Good afternoon to both of you, and a warm welcome.

I want to ask you two questions and get commentary on both questions.

I think right now the single greatest threat to Somalia is the internal security situation you have right now. That includes parts of the autonomous regions that are being controlled by al Shabaab. You also have a Gulf Cooperation Council crisis that seems to have spilled into Somalia from Qatar and the UAE and Turkey.

It seems that your opposition leader has returned after a one-year absence. I think his name is Abdishakur Warsame.

That is just for your commentary. I think that before Somalia can really start to progress, the internal security and the internal governance situations have to be solved first.

Could I have your commentary on what you may be doing and on what approach you may be taking?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Thank you.

In terms of the internal security situation, if you looked at Somalia two years ago or three years ago and then today, you would see a huge difference. We are making significant progress on the security situation.

For example, two years ago I moved back to Mogadishu, and when I look at it today, it is a completely different city.

**Mr. Raj Saini:** Does the government control all of Mogadishu?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Yes, it definitely does, and beyond that, in the regions surrounding Mogadishu.

Most of the country is free of al Shabaab. There are pockets outside in the rural areas where they do hit and run and pockets where they are in control. Compared to a few years ago, you see, by and large, that Somalia is now almost out of the hands of al Shabaab. They don't control any significant city or port, or any major infrastructure. Security is improving with the support of AMISOM and through contributing countries.

Our friends and international partners will also help us in other areas. We're doing a lot in the security sector. Let me give you a few examples.



As soon as this government came into power, we did something called ORA, operational readiness assessment. We make sure every soldier is counted with biometrics. We make sure every soldier on the government payroll is on active duty. We have a bill in Parliament that's going to help put all those soldiers who have reached the age of retirement into a pension system for the first time. We have a transition plan, which we negotiated and agreed upon with international partners, that will allow the transfer of security from AMISOM to Somalia security forces in a gradual manner. That has already started. They handed over the first base to the Somalia police force. We have a security architecture, which was agreed to in London with our international partners, that is covering all sectors of security—police, military, intelligence, you name it. We have a system called the comprehensive approach to security, the CAS system, in which we have partners.

Somalia is co-chairing meetings on the security sector. For example, you have Somali National Army issues, co-chaired by a donor and the Somalia government. You have the police. You also have countering violent extremism; there is an entire strand, or pillar, dedicated to that, co-chaired by a Somalia minister and the partner country.

We have all those systems in place and things are improving on a daily basis, but we're not 100% out of the woods yet. That's why we will appreciate having support from Canada in the security sector.

For instance, we adopted a federal structure in Somalia, with three layers of government, as in Canada. Sometimes it's difficult to know exactly where one's power ends and where the other one's starts. You have the RCMP, for example; in Ontario, you have the OPP; and you have city police. We have similar things, but we will need your expertise in helping us identify the relationship between these forces in terms of resources, structure, power sharing and all that stuff.

It's still in the early stages, but we're making huge progress.

• (1345)

**Mr. Raj Saini:** I'm really glad to hear that, because if the internal security situation has improved, then there can be an attempt to really strengthen the economy. When you look at the economy right now, you see that you have almost 2.5 or 2.6 million people who are internally displaced, as well as 800,000 refugees who are living outside the country.

The biggest question right now for Somalia, if you look at the GDP and the economy, is that you see that almost 65% is in an agriculture-based economy, and the rest is supported either by telecommunications or by foreign remittances.

My question is, if Somalia is going to really advance itself... One of the good things or one of the really confidence-building measures is that the U.S. has decided to reopen some diplomatic presence in Mogadishu, which I think is a very positive step.

Sticking to the economy for a second, right now the biggest issue that I think Somalia is facing is the inability to mobilize tax revenue at the local, state or national level. If Somalia is going to progress, if the internal security situation is improving, then the economy has to be the next step, because if they don't go hand in hand, the security situation will not be good and nobody will invest. If the economy is

not improving, then people will be unable to meet their daily needs, which will lead to other situations.

What is happening in terms of the economy right now? What kinds of improvements are you making? I know the Chinese have done a lot of infrastructure, but what is Somalia doing to take control of its own economic destiny going forward?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** I think that's a really good question. Security and economic growth are interlinked. You cannot have one without the other.

What we have done so far... When we came into office we had over \$5 billion in debt from many years ago, and we still have. What we initiated is we put together an economic growth committee. The cabinet has four subcommittees, and one of them is dedicated to economic issues. We have decided to go through the difficult but very much needed reform process to achieve debt relief from the IMF and the World Bank, and from the IMF in particular. We are going through that.

In that process we have reviewed all the contracts. We have increased the tax base for the first time. Government revenue went up. We have met all the IMF benchmarks when it comes to the benchmarks they put forward. We have, for the first time since the civil war started, people who work for the government getting paid on a monthly basis. Since January 2017 up to now, everybody who works for the government has been paid on time.

We pay taxes—

**Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC):** That's better than here.

**Some hon members:** Oh, oh!

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** We all pay taxes from these payments. We have instituted value-added taxes for the first time. The tax brackets went up in some other areas that had never been taxed before. You can see that the economy really went up, if you look at the government's revenue. The GDP has increased. We have over 3,000 businesses registered since last year, an 80% increase in terms of businesses.

In terms of investment, which is under my ministry, we are getting inquiries and communication from different parts of the world. People are coming in and asking questions about investment. They're actually looking at both onshore and offshore. They're looking at agriculture. They're looking at livestock. We are the largest livestock exporter to the Middle East. We're seeing a huge interest in Somalia.

There are two things. Because of the stability and because of the economic activities and the focus from this government on the economy, hopefully by next year we are going to meet all the IMF benchmarks and we will be able to access concessional loans from the IMF and the World Bank and other creditors. Hopefully, by then we'll be able to undertake massive infrastructure projects.

• (1350)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Vandenberg is next, please.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.):** Minister Hassan and Mr. Jama, I'm very happy to have you here. As an MP from the Ottawa area, I'm very happy to see Carleton graduates who are succeeding so well and contributing so much. Thank you very much for that. I think that underlies the fact that we have so many Somali Canadians—talented, educated and passionate Somali Canadians—who are not just contributing here but also contributing in Somalia. I'm very pleased to see that.

My question is actually a combination of what you said about the importance of inclusive politics, good governance and institution building and what Mr. Wrzesnewskij was asking with regard to women. We know that institutions need to have representation from all people in society. Could you comment a little bit about the role of women, both in political participation, in the constitutional process, and in institutional capacity-building?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Thank you very much. I know that in Ottawa Centre, you have a large Somali constituency. I have family members who live in that riding.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Good. Wonderful.

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Yes. In fact, my mother lives in that area also, so thank you.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** I'm very pleased about that. Thank you.

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** You are right about inclusive politics. We actually have several subunits under that, and around 10 ministers are dedicated to those issues—the constitutional review process, elections, and also federalism as a whole, through reconciliation and other areas. These are all active projects within inclusive politics.

For the elections in 2016 and 2017, we basically allocated a 30% quota for women. Although we fell short by 5%, that was the first time we allocated a quota for women. The plan was to at least introduce some measures to ensure that they were politically represented and had full representation in Parliament and in the cabinet as well. Going forward, we will not go back from 30%. We are trying to increase the number to 40% or 50%, if possible. That is the bare minimum, 30%.

It has taken place. We have a lady in charge of the independent election committee, and others are in charge at the Ministry of Women and Human Rights Development and others. We have key women leaders in the government who are pushing for institutional reform at the Parliament level, in cabinet, and also in government departments, to ensure that gender mainstreaming is taking place, women's rights are protected, and political representation is well adopted and accepted across the board.

We have champions. All of us, not only Somali Canadians but others, are 100% working hand in hand with them to ensure that at the next election we increase this number and we also empower those already in the system to ensure that their rights are protected and their voices are heard.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Thank you. That is very good to hear. As you know, Canada is at only 27% in our House of Commons. I think we have a lot of work to do on this around the world. If there is anything Canada can do to facilitate that, I think that's something this committee would be very interested in.

I also note that you said half of your population is under the age of 15, and I think you said that 75% are under the age of 30. This is a very, very young population. There are organizations like UN-Habitat. In fact, one of my constituents, Sharmaarke Hassan, is working with UN-Habitat on youth in the region.

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Yes.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** A number of others are working on this. How do you turn the potential of so many young people into something that is positive and thriving? What are some of the things we can do through our development policy that would ensure that young people are able to get the opportunities to be able to contribute fully to Somali society?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** I know Sharmaarke very well. I used to be his mentor at school, at Carleton.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** I notice you are also with UN-Habitat.

• (1355)

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Yes. I serve as Somali's permanent representative to UN-Habitat.

I think what we can do, and what you can do to help achieve this, is to designate Somalia as one of the priority countries for development. I think Canada can do that. By any measure, I think we qualify to be treated specially when you look at development assistance. Canada is doing a lot, and we are grateful, but if we focus on development, that will help us foster long-term stability and long-term sustainability.

About the statistics I mentioned, we are a very young nation: 91% of the people are under the age of 40. I mean, when you look at it, it's just unbelievable. We would like your support. If we could get your support when it comes to development, I think that would go a long way—really.

**Ms. Anita Vandenberg:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have time for one last question.

MP Alleslev, go ahead, please.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Thank you.

Thank you very much for being here.

To follow along from what my colleague was saying, the economy and security obviously go hand in hand. You are working—and we're helping you, I understand—on the security side. Could you go into a bit more detail on the economy? What would you argue as being the three key economic industry drivers that you're focused on, and what, briefly, are the challenges or obstacles within each one of those?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** We have unlimited natural resources. In the fishery sector, for example, we have the longest coastline on the continent. We have untapped resources in oil and in the seas, in both the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. The overall blue economy in Somalia is—

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Pardon?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** The blue economy, marine resources.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Oh, okay.

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Second is agriculture. We have nine million hectares; we've only utilized one million so far, so there's huge potential. We are the largest livestock exporter to the Middle East. We exported over five million animals last year.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Your three are oil and gas, blue—fisheries—and agriculture.

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** Yes, and iron resources.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** What are the key obstacles?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** There's also a potential for renewable energy in the country. Throughout the year, there's strong radiation, strong solar, a strong sun that we can utilize to produce energy. The resources are endless. What we need is the capacity to utilize these resources.

If we focus on the fisheries sector, for example, I know that Canada's maritime regions can help us develop our capacity in the fisheries sector. That alone, if utilized properly, could yield over \$1 billion a year in income for the government.

On agriculture, if we take advantage of the remaining eight million hectares, for example, you can imagine what we could produce. We have two major rivers in the country, and we barely use them for agriculture. We need the expertise and technical know-how to utilize and take advantage of these resources.

On livestock, instead of exporting live animals, we are thinking about setting up slaughterhouses, for instance, to ensure we also create jobs by setting up tanning factories that create jobs for youth, and then exporting shoes and other products as a result of that.

We know we have the resources. What we need is the technical know-how. We have identified key priority areas, as I mentioned, key productive sectors—

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** I apologize. I don't have a lot of time, so I just want to give you one more opportunity.

You said that you would like to have Canada consider Somalia as a priority for development. If you were competing with all the other countries right now and you were making your 30-second compelling argument for why Somalia, among other countries, should be chosen as a priority for development, what would that 30-second pitch be?

**Hon. Gamal Hassan:** I can say it in three parts.

Number one is the special bond between Canada and Somalia. We are one of the largest African diasporas in Canada.

Number two, we are strategically located, so any investment you make into Somalia's long-term stability will yield results very quickly.

Third, we are ready and have plans in place, and we already have priorities set for quick-impact investments in the areas I mentioned, and there's also the willingness and political will from our side to make sure these things happen and all these priorities are realized.

● (1400)

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** That's outstanding. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Yes, thank you very much to both of you for travelling here to be with us.

Ambassador, this was very insightful testimony that is important for us to hear and to have on the record for us to consider as we move forward with finalizing our report.

I want to thank you both for your presence here today.

With that, we are adjourned.

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