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Written statement* submitted by Liberal International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[19 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Call to increase female political participation in the upcoming elections in Somalia

The next nation-wide legislative elections in Somalia, scheduled to take place in 2021, will represent a crucial development for the strategically located east African country, with the first direct elections on the basis of one person, one vote (OPOV) anticipated since 1969. Previous elections relied on clan elders or other delegates to select representatives, resulting in a process where 99% of the population had no vote.

Although the right to political participation is one of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Somali Constitution for all citizens who meet the conditions for participation, regardless of their gender and their tribal, regional, and political affiliations, the actioning of those rights into political reality requires breaking down clan-based traditional barriers. This in turn requires the efforts of decision-makers and clan leaders, who are almost always male.

Women have been marginalized and excluded from participating in the decision-making that shapes their lives and their country. In spite of this, historically, Somali women have been essential agents in society throughout the country's troubled past, yet women are still subjected to systematic political exclusion and a denial of their role and contributions. Somalia also has a history of violent attacks on women leaders, women who speak out against gender-based violence, and the men and women who defend them.

The selection of members of the Parliament and the Cabinet has traditionally been made on the basis of tribal quotas known as the 4.5 system, a power-sharing system dividing major positions between the four main clans, with the remaining 0.5 share being given to a grouping of smaller clans. Since clan leaders rarely nominate female candidates, the opportunity for women to engage in political work is diminished. A tribe cannot, for example, nominate a woman for a political position if she is married to a man who comes from a different tribe. It is also very difficult for a man from the clan to surrender his privileges to a woman.

A quota of 30% female parliamentarians was proposed in 2016, as it had been in previous elections, but the target was not reached. In some cases, male candidates took seats reserved for women. Some of these results were blocked, but others were not, demonstrating that one of the key issues is lack of enforcement. Still, there was some progress and 24% of elected candidates were women. However, while some progress has been made on representation, women are still excluded from real decision-making positions in politics and society.

Although the Somali government affirms its full commitment to its policy aimed at allocating 30% of the seats in the next parliament to women, according to the decisions of the outcomes of the National Consultation Forum, it appears that they are unable to persuade the tribes to abide by this decision. There is also a notable absence of women in the higher levels of government such as director general and head of department levels.

While women's political participation represents only one aspect of the struggle for women's rights in Somalia and elsewhere, it is crucial that the new voting system ensures that women's voices are heard and that female candidates have a real possibility of being elected.

Liberal International calls on the Somali political parties, the electoral commission, and the authorities responsible for the upcoming election to respect the following:

- For the quota of 30% female parliamentarians to be guaranteed by the Somali Constitution, and these seats to be reserved for female candidates only;
- That female representation is guaranteed at both the regional and federal level until the one person one vote is implemented;
- That the 30% quota should be enforced in all system levels, including the Cabinet where women today represent less than 1%;
- For other public authorities, such as the judiciary system, the police force, and all security institutions to strive to increase the number of women among their ranks;
- For violations of these rules to be investigated by the relevant Somali authorities;

- For the international partners supporting the election, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Canada, Denmark, Ethiopia, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Italy, Kenya, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America, to monitor these developments and support the Somali authorities in achieving these goals.
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