



The election process and its shadow of violence must not destabilise Somalia

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The Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) and its 12 affiliated trade unions are deeply concerned about the rising tensions as a result of the upcoming election process in Somalia. While, in essence, an election should be a path towards peace and democracy, the current and ongoing political arguments are contributing to social deterioration and resulting in deeper polarisation within our society. We now risk losing some of the important recent political gains we have made as a country.

Trade unions have all along been calling for direct elections in the form of one person one vote. This would firmly place Somalia on the road to democracy as the outcome would have reflected the will of the people for the first time in 50 years, resulted in more inclusive representation and set the stage for greater political accountability. However, politicians, including current presidential candidates, have unfortunately resisted such a system and opted for parliamentary and presidential elections, similar to the model implemented in 2016.

Nevertheless, with the Federal Government and Federal Member States having reached a political agreement endorsed by the both houses of the Federal Parliament, we urge the swift implementation of the electoral political agreement by both the Federal Government and all 5 Federal Member States to ensure timely elections. We implore the political leadership at State and Federal levels to reach consensus on the provisions within the agreement in order to facilitate a smooth and fair elections process.

We denounce, in the strongest possible terms, any insinuation or assertion that violence or bloodshed will result because of a particular or undesired political outcome. The very nature of elections indicate that there will be winners and losers, that some political dreams will not materialise. Our country cannot be allowed to descend into violence because of this. We welcome robust political debates and accept the diversity of views that come with this. However, these debates must not contain inflammatory hate speech that ultimately spurs Somalis towards violence. We reject measures that exploit differences and incite hostilities among communities or clans.

“Organised labour is sending a clear and stern warning that any election-related violence and/or incitement of clans to commit violence will be held accountable,” says Omar Faruk Osman, FESTU’s General Secretary. “Politicians who publicly or privately threaten to bring the country to the brink of violence by using forces must be held accountable.”

Whilst political wars are waged for power and position, workers and their families remain the biggest victims and the collateral damage in any election violence. They risk losing their income, livelihood and ability to support and protect their families. This is not only deeply disturbing at the personal and community level, but contributes to a weakening of Somali society in general. Having suffered through a difficult year brought on by a global health pandemic where workers bore the brunt of the impact, having 2020 culminate in election violence is inhumane and unacceptable.

In recent years, Somalia has made impressive strides to emerge from a painful and violence-filled past, towards a reality underpinned by human rights, democracy and economic and social development. The upcoming elections and its shadow of violence must not be allowed to threaten or destabilise this.

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