



Direct Elections and Democratic Transition Key to Ensuring Accountable, Transparent and Inclusive Governance in Somalia

18 May 2024

The Federation of Somali Trade Unions, along with its 12 affiliated trade unions, welcomes the National Consultative Council's (NCC) decisions on the constitutional review and democratization process, with organised labour deeply involved in actively observing and intervening in the constitutional review process to ensure it safeguards fundamental human rights and facilitates Somalia's genuine transition to democracy—a crucial step towards establishing a fair and just society where the voices of all Somalis, especially the working people, are instrumental in shaping a democratic and inclusive future for the country.

Trade unions are particularly heartened by the NCC's solid commitment to adopting a "one person, one vote" electoral system, a change that organised labour in Somalia has consistently championed over the past five years. This move towards direct elections not only embodies the will of the people, a persistent demand from workers reaffirmed most recently during the International Labour Day celebrations on 1 May 2024, but also marks a critical step towards ensuring that every citizen's voice is heard and valued, thereby strengthening the foundations of Somalia's democratic governance.

Representing over 173,000 members, Somali trade unions firmly believe that the era of indirect elections must end, necessitating an irreversible shift to direct elections that empower citizens to directly choose their leaders and herald an era of democratic and accountable governance. This change, crucial for meeting the people's vote needs, ensures that every citizen can participate directly in the electoral process, which is essential for fostering transparent, accountable and truly representative governance at both the State and Federal levels—key elements vital for the nation's progress and stability.

Historically, indirect elections, which some argue are not the right solution but merely a workable one, have often resulted in unaccountable representatives forming national leadership, a process widely acknowledged to be rife with corruption. This method, involving only a select few representatives, tends to centralize power among a small elite, increasing the potential for vote-trading and political patronage. The inherent lack of transparency and accountability in this system makes it susceptible to manipulation and fraud, resulting in leadership that does not truly reflect the people's will and perpetuating a protracted and corrupt electoral system that erodes public trust and obstructs the path to genuine democratic governance.

FESTU and its affiliated trade unions are committed to actively engaging in the legislative process to ensure that forthcoming election and political party laws align with international best practices, thereby establishing a secure, clear and implementable legal foundation for elections that are free, fair and truly democratic. By advocating for these standards, organised labour highlights the necessary safeguards for the integrity of Somalia's electoral system and enhances democratic governance, fundamental for fostering trust and stability in the national political landscape. This commitment underscores our dedication to justice and our belief in the essential role of transparent, equitable electoral processes in advancing the interests of all citizens.

In the constitutional review process, trade unions are dedicated to continuing their bold and pragmatic approach, as demonstrated during the review of the first four chapters, to ensure a human rights-focused and people-centred review. This approach is designed to ensure that constitutional revisions accurately reflect the majority view of Somalis, remain progressive and adhere to Somalia's international human rights obligations. Our untiring dedication to this process is driven by a determination to uphold and strengthen a democratic constitutional order, actively resisting and unapologetically exposing any attempts to undermine the progressive nature of the current provisional constitution.

Furthermore, trade unions call for the proactive and constructive re-engagement of Puntland in the ongoing constitutional and democratisation process, which is essential for a process embraced by the entirety of Somalia. The issues of direct elections and democratization align with what Puntland's leadership has advocated and Puntland's absence significantly diminishes a legitimate voice in the national discourse. Political differences between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Puntland government should be resolved through dialogue, on-the-table discussions and, above all, by prioritizing national interests over individual political differences.

This statement is issued by the Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) along with the following 12 affiliated trade union organisations:

1. National Electricity Workers Union of Somalia (NEWUS)
2. National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ)
3. Somali Agricultural & Food Workers Union (SAFWU)
4. Somali Construction Workers Unions (SCWU)
5. Somali Hotel and Catering Workers Union (SHCWU)
6. Somali Maritime, Fisheries & Port Workers Union (SMFPWU)
7. Somali National Teachers Unions (SNTU)
8. Somali Nurse Workers Association (SNWA)
9. Somali Petroleum and Gas Workers Union (SUPEGW)
10. Somali Tailors and Textile Workers Union (STTWU)
11. Somali Telecommunications & Posts Union (STPU)
12. Somali Transport Workers Union (STWU)