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UN Security Council undermines humanitarian aid in Somalia

BRUSSELS (March 11, 2013) – Three global NGO consortia – InterAction, ICVA and VOICE – are dismayed at the Security Council’s decision for all UN functions in Somalia to be integrated under one UN umbrella. The NGO consortia believe this decision will jeopardize the delivery of impartial humanitarian assistance in the country. By requiring UN humanitarian coordination to fall under the political mandate of the new UN peace-building mission in Somalia, the neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action will be compromised.

On 6 March 2013, in Resolution 2093, the Security Council mandated the creation of a new UN peace-building mission in Somalia and required that all UN functions be integrated under one umbrella. In doing so, the Council members contradicted the UN’s own 2012 Strategic Review in Somalia. This review found that conditions in Somalia were not conducive to integrating all UN functions under one structure.

Many NGOs collaborate closely with UN entities, and decisions taken by the UN Security Council can have far-reaching implications for people living in conflict. As long as the conflict continues, combining humanitarian with political and military support functions risks undermining effective delivery of aid. “This is especially true in areas controlled by non-state armed groups, which is where the needs of the affected population are greatest and where access is most difficult,” said Kathrin Schick, Director of VOICE, the European NGO network.

This decision may also increase the risk of targeted attacks on aid workers. Furthermore, subsuming humanitarian functions under a political mandate carries the risk that political motives, rather than impartial assessment, will dictate aid decisions and restrict independent humanitarian reporting and advocacy.

Humanitarian groups are also concerned about further constraints on humanitarian negotiations with non-state actors. “We know this from every humanitarian crisis. Only when we safeguard our neutrality are we able to obtain consent and acceptance for our work, reach all affected populations and ensure that our assistance is provided impartially,” said Nan Buzard, Executive Director of the Geneva-based International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA).

Somalia has witnessed dramatic changes in the past year. After more than two decades without a central government, Somalia’s federal government was established in 2012 and a new president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, took office. The Security Council’s determination to ensure the strongest possible UN support to achieve political stability and governance in Somalia is laudable. However, forcing humanitarian functions under a political mandate will not enhance UN effectiveness and coherence and may have negative consequences for the security of all humanitarian workers and their access to affected populations.

Much of Somalia is still in turmoil, with large swathes of the population suffering from food insecurity and the effects of ongoing armed conflict. Under these circumstances, undermining the ability of humanitarian agencies to operate undercuts rather than enhances the overall collective impact of international organizations.

“Obviously, humanitarian NGOs must continue to serve all civilian populations under the best and worst of circumstances. But it is regrettable that the Security Council has just made a dangerous and complex situation more difficult for the humanitarian workers trying to alleviate human suffering in Somalia. We ask that all actors respect and uphold the independence of humanitarian aid work.” said Samuel A. Worthington, president and CEO of InterAction.

InterAction is the largest alliance of U.S.-based nongovernmental international organizations, with more than 180 members working in every developing country.

The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) is a global network of 74 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that advocates for effective humanitarian action.

VOICE (Voluntary Organizations in Cooperation in Emergencies) is a network representing 82 European non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in humanitarian aid worldwide.