

# Michael Keating

The UN mission chief on the daily challenges of rebuilding Somalia after 25 years of war



My day starts with some exercise, breakfast in my room, then an 8am planning session. The schedule typically includes meetings in town with politicians, receiving Somali or international visitors, and seeing colleagues working on issues such as elections, security sector reform, rule of law, child protection, gender, human rights, food security, displacement and reconciliation.

There are around 500 international UN staff in Somalia, the majority in Mogadishu. Many more are based in Kenya. The Somali authorities would like the diplomatic and aid communities to shift entirely to Somalia, but security concerns, logistical practicalities and the cost of maintaining staff are deterrents.

Getting around can be a major operation. A close protection team accompanies me day and night, plus local security teams when I move around Mogadishu. I long to shop in local markets, linger in the tea houses and seaside restaurants serving lobster but they are off bounds. I do make quick impromptu visits – for example to the fish market in the capital and the livestock market in Hargeisa.

I occasionally visit the regions to meet authorities, elders, business people, women and youth groups. The UN has well protected compounds in six locations and staff in several outposts, from Bosasso and Garowe in the north to Kismayo and Baidoa in the south. Sometimes we have to fly our own bullet-proof vehicles with us, landing on murrum airstrips cleared of goats and camels.

Much of my time is spent facilitating discussions among Somalis on building a federal state, a political adventure for them – and me. Twenty-five years of civil war have destroyed the country's institutional infrastructure.

There are many grey areas in the 2012 Provisional Constitution, including the relationship between the central govern-

ment and federal states, the respective powers of the president and prime minister, resource management and sharing. Every step is subject to complex negotiations. The end result will be a uniquely Somali state which accommodates both clan and national identity.

Rebuilding capacity to provide security will take time and is highly political, given the levels of distrust. Moving beyond exclusively clan based politics will only be possible by working with clan power brokers, not against them.

The population has low expectations of and little faith in government. In many areas, Al Shabaab is more effective in providing security and rule of law – albeit their own brutal version – than government.

Security is a major priority. The Security Council-mandated African Union Mission in Somalia has 22,000 troops from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda in the south and centre of the country. Having cleared urban areas of Al Shabaab over the last five years, AMISOM is trying to adapt to a change of insurgency tactics: hit and run assaults on military bases, and spectacular attacks against civilians.

The UN is also a target, not least as we provide non-lethal support to AMISOM, including food, water, transport, health and communications. I am the senior UN security official in the country – a heavy responsibility.

I see the President and Prime Minister at least twice a week, sometimes together. Our conversations have been dominated

by the upcoming limited franchise electoral process at the end of the current parliament's term in August, the complexity of getting buy-in to the model and the challenge of implementation, including ensuring women's participation. This will be a pivotal moment in Somalia's political journey.

In 2012, using the so-called '4.5 formula' – equal representation for the four big clans plus space for minorities – just 135 clan elders selected 275 MPs. This time, the Electoral College will be expanded a hundred fold – to 14,000. There will be an Upper House chosen by federal states – a modest but significant shift away from '4.5'.

One person, one vote elections are scheduled for 2020 – a hugely ambitious goal given that there is no civil or voter registry and that the institutional and legal infrastructure to run elections is not in place. Somaliland has managed six elections over the last 25 years, so it can be done.

Somalia is a theatre in which regional rivalries have been played out for decades. These inevitably persist but there is a surprising degree of international consensus that chaos in Somalia is in no-one's interest. There are about 20 diplomatic missions in Mogadishu, including China, Ethiopia, the EU, Kenya, Turkey, Qatar, the UK and the UAE. France, the US and others have secured plots and have plans to open embassies.

I clear my head by walking or bicycling along the beach next to our compound. The 'Beware of sharks' signs are intimidating but in the unremitting heat, I cannot resist an occasional quick dip in the ocean. I get to bed around midnight after a 15-hour day and after calls to family, I sleep well.

*Michael Keating is UN Special Representative for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia*

**'I long to visit local markets, tea houses and seaside restaurants, but they are off bounds'**