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**Statement of
Ms Isha Dyfan
Independent Expert on the Situation of Human Rights in Somalia**

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Third Committee
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Honourable Chairperson,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to present my report on the situation of human rights in Somalia to the Committee. The report highlights the progress and challenges in the area of human rights over the past year and shares initial reflections on the way forward for achieving sustainable progress on the situation of human rights in Somalia. My statement here today will focus on recent developments in the country.

Madam Chairperson,

The ongoing armed conflict, frequent terrorist attacks, and chronic humanitarian crises, continue to take an unacceptable toll on the civilian population. The conflict has also resulted in grave violations against children and in conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls, especially in camps for internally displaced persons and refugees and in host communities rarely generating any accountability. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic and the desert locust infestation, have placed an additional burden on Somalia's already fragile infrastructure and institutions, and further impacted progress towards the realization of human rights in the country.

In spite of this complex situation, Somalia has made strides in advancing their human rights agenda, through commitment to and adoption of legal, policy frameworks with a view to protecting and promoting the rights of its people, in particular, those most vulnerable. It has also made progress in terms of its reporting obligations under the UN treaty bodies.

However, we are also witnessing clear signs of regression and pushback, on the legislative front, especially in the areas of women and children's rights. The absence of a strong legal and institutional framework negatively affects the fair dispensation of justice and continues to impede the fight against impunity.

In this regard, I reiterate my deep concerns at attempts to derail efforts to strengthen the protection accorded to victims of sexual and gender-based-violence at the Federal level, with the draft Law on Sexual Intercourses Related Crimes, and in Somaliland, with the adoption of the Rape, Fornication and Other Related Offences Bill by the House of Representatives. These two pieces of legislation are severely flawed, fall short of international and regional human rights norms and standards, and represent an affront to the rights and dignity of victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

As Somalia gears up for its parliamentary and presidential elections, it is crucial to ensure the meaningful participation of all segments of the population including women, youth and minorities. I call on the Somali authorities to strengthen protection of the democratic space, by guaranteeing the rights to freedom of expression and opinion, and creating a safe and enabling environment where journalists can operate independently, free from acts of harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrests and other types of pressures.

The appointment of a Special Prosecutor to investigate and to follow up on the killings of journalists to bring to justice those who organized, planned and carried out the killings of journalists, is a positive step in this direction. Once the national human rights commission is operationalized, these institutions can bridge the protection gap and lead to better accountability for human rights violations, provided that they are equipped with adequate human, financial and technical resources to carry out their mandates.

Madam Chairperson,

The sustained support of the international community is most crucial at these nascent stages of Somalia's human rights, democratic, and institutional developments as the country endeavours to address discrimination and inequality, towards lasting peace and security for all.

I look forward to continuing working with the Somali authorities and civil society organizations to advance the promotion and protection of human rights in Somalia.

I thank you for your attention.