

Speech of the UN Humanitarian/Resident Coordinator Eric Laroche
2008 Somalia CAP Launch
11 December 2007

- Honorable Prime Minister Nur Hussein, distinguished delegates, colleagues from the Humanitarian Community, dear friends, this will be my last CAP launch for Somalia. I have seen a lot of change over the nearly two years I've been in this post. 2007 has been a year of significant change. In some ways, we stand here today with far less optimism than we had one year ago.
- Two years ago, I wouldn't have expected I would be giving this speech to you in Nairobi today. I had fully hoped and believed we would be more permanently present in Somalia by now and in Mogadishu in particular.
- We are still dealing with many of the same as well as many new problems of access. The tangible threats – both administrative and mercenary, such as road blocks – as well as security, such as roadside bombs, explosive devices etc., have continued to rise. But we have problems that go beyond physical blockages; there is a very challenging atmosphere of threat, intimidation, colored by negative statements from the authorities we should be cooperating with.
- Response to Somalia's problems has always been muted by a sense of fatigue brought on by 16 years of effort with little lasting result to show for it. Media fatigue, Donor fatigue, Humanitarian Fatigue, Political fatigue. I've worked in many difficult countries and I've yet to see a situation where energy and effort seem so exhausted.
- For a long while, Somalia seemed unable to secure a place on the international agenda. But the good news is that appears to be changing. As the context of the crisis in Somalia over these past months changed dramatically, so has the awareness and understanding of it.
- I feel we are at a pivotal moment when the eyes of the world are watching – the Security Council, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the headlines of the newspapers and the networks broadcasting images – this is a great motivator for action.
- As the Emergency Relief Coordinator John Holmes noted when he was here last week, it is not so much a lack of interest in Somalia, but a lack of imagination in how to do it. Speaking for the humanitarian community, the UN and the NGOs, this includes looking internally at how we can improve our response – making it more flexible, more reactive, and more rapid – even in the constraints of our own rules and our allocated resources.
- We have to be with and close to the people we are working for – and that requires innovation on our part. We must adapt our approach to be more operationally oriented; working out of temporary, flexible hubs, but most importantly being more present... We have to be there to protect by presence. This requires support on the donor's part, and cooperation on the part of the authorities.
- Additionally, the feelings of mistrust, the negative perceptions that have pervaded of late must be overcome. This requires regular dialogue, regular contact with the authorities. That is why I

am heartened by the presence/appointment of the Prime Minister Nut Adde. The East African press has called the new Prime Minister “Mr. Right” saying “the country has found Mr. Right.”

- I sincerely hope that we can seize this momentum to push forward for a solution on Somalia. Frankly without that solution, we will be here, one December after another, looking for increasing amounts of funds for the band aid approach that deals with the humanitarian consequences, but not the underlying, root causes of the crisis.
- To the Donors, I say we need your full support for the humanitarian response through consistent and coordinated efforts at diplomacy and peace-building. Even the most robust humanitarian intervention cannot substitute for security and political solutions. As for the humanitarian and development efforts, diplomatic and political efforts also require strong coordination and unified position of the international community.
- Member states must develop, under the leadership of the SRSG, a constructive and principled partnership with the TFG, keeping to the forefront at all times principles such as the protection of all citizens; timely, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to those in need of life-saving assistance; and the necessity of humanitarian assistance remaining impartial. You need to join us in strongly and publicly condemning human rights and international humanitarian law violations and ensuring that those who commit them are held accountable.
- I applaud your generosity and support, at the same time as I ask that you give early. Early disbursements towards the CAP are required to ensure continuation of emergency operations.
- Also, funding for the humanitarian response must be complemented by funds for early recovery and longer-term sustained interventions that can lay a foundation for development and prevent cyclical disasters or mitigate their effects. We can see in the chronic malnutrition crisis the disastrous effects of not coupling short- and long-term funding: there are areas in southern Somalia that have been in a nutritional crisis for 12 years due to a lack of sustained, multi-sectoral humanitarian and transitional interventions. We should also bear in mind that there are areas of Somali where the cycle of dependency on aid could be broken, through linking humanitarian response to development funding.
- Globally, multilateralism is very much under siege these days. It has more detractors than proponents. Some believe we, the humanitarians, should be ‘contracted’ by member states, as if we were mere public contractors. I don’t agree. Because this world cries out for, what Somalis – not the politicians and the war lords – cry out for and what the UN family must provide is a persistent display of public courage. It is worth risking offence to a member state for the sake confronting a public issue head on. If everyone runs for cover, if passivity is the image of the UN, then we do not deserve the mantle of the charter.
- To the parties of the conflict, I say the humanitarian community very much wants to strengthen and improve its coordination, and will actively engage with the new Prime Minister. It is only through Somali ownership of peace-building and the recovery process that lasting solutions can be put in place. Therefore, we need to establish mechanisms for regular and constructive dialogue with the authorities at the operational level so that together we can improve humanitarian access, the protection of civilians and the delivery of assistance. Such regular communication is the only basis on which trust can be built. However, as humanitarian workers we also need to engage with all stakeholders in a position to influence access to population in

needs of assistance and protection. The concept of good or bad victim does not exist, we are just dealing with vulnerable people in need of life-saving intervention.

- The TFG and any decision maker and leader of the opposition or representing the insurgents must fulfil its responsibilities towards the Somalis; among the most important of these is that all parties, including the Ethiopian troops, work towards ending the violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. Atrocities are ongoing, not only is there no accountability, there is no public call for it.
- The population is exhausted by this war and by having been through a series of natural shocks and man made conflicts. Fighting has been particularly fierce this year and we are getting more and more information about increased levels of violence and brutality imposing an atmosphere of terror. Furthermore, there is a renewed risk of once again becoming hostage of a never ending situation: human shield of the insurgent and first victim of retaliation and collective punishment inflicted by the TFG and the Ethiopian. A strong commitment from all sides to support access for humanitarian delivery to all populations would recognize their suffering and could contribute to future confidence building measures.
- We, the humanitarian community (we sometimes call it an industry) the UN, the international NGOs, Red Crescent family, haven't created to work with timidity, myopia and inertia. We are a larger, more and more complex, but powerful system. We among the aid workers are often doing the most remarkable work. We have much to be proud of. We have proponents that can handle any adversary. We don't have to be marginalized, trivialized or patronized. The issue for us to be and remain credible – for all our constituents including Somali families, our counterparts, the international community, the media.
- As humanitarian partners, we need to continue to work towards finding alternative methods of delivering assistance in a challenging operational environment. We need to strengthen our connections with – and build the capacity of – civil society to ensure emergency response when access is difficult.
- We are meeting today in the shadow of Madina General, an incredible, courageous, decent, honourable and dedicated leader of civil society. I want to say what I truly believe: it is possible that the international community could have or should have disarmed IDP camps. The prevalence of arms in Somalia is not a secret. The prevalence of arms in IDP camps is kept secret. If we the international community, the UN, the INGOs would have taken security matters, and protection of civilians more seriously, may be Madina General would still be serving her people. There is nothing more political than security. Relying on governments is never good enough in times of conflict. We have to accord security the overwhelming importance it deserves. Madina General might have been alive today. There will always be tragedies and sacrifice in humanitarian work. But we should never let it be unnecessary.
- All of us in the international community must recognize the dangers and logistical challenges of working in Somalia and praise, particularly, the work done by Somali staff – some of whom have themselves been displaced by the latest conflict – and their continued commitment to provide life-saving assistance in an exceptionally difficult and dangerous environment.
- I'd like to acknowledge the support we have received: Since the last time we met in this type of forum three months ago there has been a nearly 20% increase in funds to the appeal. I call on

agencies to meet this task by matching the needs and challenges with the appropriate amount resources – including by bringing more experienced and senior staff into the field.

- But I must warn about the ‘high cost’ of Somali operations – in many senses of the word: We must not pay the price of fulfilling the humanitarian imperative by sacrificing our own principles. That includes recognition from ALL parties on the impartial nature of humanitarian assistance: there are no terrorists among the hungry... That said, those who go hungry for too long, who are vulnerable, who are brutalized, that are not in school or that do not have a job... these are the potential terrorists, as they have nothing to lose.
- I am leaving with a sense of hope. We have re-evaluated our approach and now we need to back it up with action that is operation-oriented. I am grateful for both the presence here today of PM Nur Hassan Hussein and for his intention to give top priority to address the humanitarian crisis.
- There seems to be a waking up from the sense of ‘fatigue’. It is my hope that in addition to waking up, all of us will step up and grab hold of the momentum to force a change. Why? Because when I look around this room and I see many colleagues and many friends, what I am reminded of is that our voice is potentially the most powerful of all because of our humanitarian mandate. We many not always have the politician behind us, but we have many supporters:
 - The mothers, fathers and children from ordinary Somali families
 - The mothers, fathers and children from all around the world who need protection, services and just a decent life.
- We, the humanitarian community, have principles, programmes, people and public to serve and protect. The glue that binds us is courage. The courage to be once and both uncompromising and principled with parties to the conflict, but also and more importantly uncompromising and principled with ourselves and to be able to balance humanitarian imperative and the necessity to remain principled.