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Puntland  
Development &  
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Center

**PDRC A NEUTRAL SPACE**

# **PUNTLAND ELECTIONS: CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT FORUM**





*PIC..1 : Panel: Abdirizak Ahmed Said (TPEC Chair-Keynote Speaker), Abdi Farah Juha (Minister Interior), Abdurahman A.A (PUNSAA Chair), Amina M. A. (Moderator PDRC).*



**24 April 2023**

**Garowe, Puntland State of Somalia.**



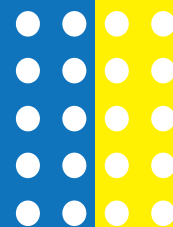
*Stakeholders dialogue forum, which brought together the various democratization stakeholders including TPEC, Political Associations, CSOs, government, and the Public, to strengthen and speed up the ongoing Local Councils Election Process*



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

On April 24, 2023, through the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) funded, the Talo-wadaag programme of PDRC and its partners supported and facilitated the convening of Puntland local election stakeholders into a citizen's engagement forum that was held in Garowe. The event took place in the compound of PDRC and was attended by representatives from the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC), Puntland Political Associations (PPA), Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA), other Civil Society Organizations (CSO), government ministers, national and international partners and, of course, a large public. The timing of the event was crucial and has come at a time when the voter registration process was successfully concluded and the planning of subsequent phases of the Local Government Elections (LGE) was in progress, and thus it has sought to maintain timely sharing of information on elections, strengthen cooperation and communication amongst key stakeholders and between them and the public, and promote the transparency and participation of the planned local council elections in Puntland.



Pic.2: Ali Farah- PDRC/ED.

## 2. The opening and introduction of the forum

Around seven o'clock in the evening, the forum started at PDRC and lasted until past 23:00 p.m. The event began with a brief introduction by the facilitator, Mr. Abdinasir, who welcomed the audience, introduced the programme goals, the panel and the guest as the keynote speaker. The executive director of PDRC, Mr. Ali Farah, further elaborated the timing and the importance of the event. He began by praising TPEC's professionalism and leadership in implementing the registration process successfully and peacefully registering more than 400,000 voters from 37 districts of Puntland despite the prevalence of security and political challenges. He then introduced the Mr. Abdirisak, who is the chairman of TPEC, as the event's keynote speaker, to the podium to reflect on TPEC's progress to date and to provide an update on the next phase's preparations until election day on May 25, 2023.

### 3. Keynotes of the Speech of TPEC Chairman

TPEC chairman; Abdirisak Said Ahmed started his address with a bit of context about the background and constitutionality of the Puntland people's desire for democratic elections. He noted the transition towards democratic elections and away from the temporary clan-based selection system was a vision that started with the birth of Puntland as enshrined in its founding Charter of 1998 and later expanded in the superseding constitution of the state which was adopted in to a constituency assembly conference held in Garowe in 2012 and by 480 regional delegates. Since then, the successive Puntland administrations had worked tirelessly to bring about one person, one vote elections and a democratic political governance system in Puntland; it is on the basis of the work they have done that the current administration has built on by being able to hold the first direct elections in three pilot districts in 2021 and voter registration in 37 districts.

The first and second TPEC commissions laid the foundation for Puntland's democratization process by developing necessary electoral laws and guidelines. However, these commissions faced many challenges, and the goal of conducting 'one person, one vote' elections did not materialize. The current TPEC III has begun its work by conducting public consultations and learning from the lessons of the first and second election commissions. An early

election was held on October 25, 2021, in Qardho, Eyl, and Ufeyn to elect local councils for these three districts ahead of the state-wide local council elections. The election was the first one under the principle of "one person, one vote" held in Somalia since 1969 and in the state since its formation in 1998. The purpose of the early elections was to assess the technical capabilities of the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) and the readiness of the Puntland State to hold full-fledged public elections to establish a democratic system of governance. The Puntland population showed great enthusiasm for the One-Person-One-Vote (OPOV) political system. After the early election, several studies were conducted to identify challenges and weaknesses, which provided valuable lessons for the TPEC team. Based on these lessons, the commission began preparations in early 2022 to conduct wider local elections across all districts of Puntland.

Taking into consideration the lessons learned from the early elections held in Qardho, Eyl, and Ufeyn, as well as the discussions with political associations about their concern about the closed list system, TPEC has amended the "Closing List Procedure" to the "Closed List



*Pic. 3: Abdirisak Said - Keynote Speaker.*

Clarification Procedure." This new procedure aims to address concerns about candidates at the bottom of the list who do not campaign or contribute votes to their respective political associations. This will be a fair competition system that ensures all candidates have a chance to succeed while still maintaining the integrity of the closed-list procedure. This system will be technically, methodologically, and conceptually sound without compromising the Closed List Procedure, as in the Election Law.

In May 2022, the Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) released a time line for the upcoming election, along with the necessary materials and facilities. However, due to prolonged droughts, the initial plan to conduct the voter registration exercise in July 2022 was postponed. After consultations between the political associations and TPEC, it was agreed to conduct the voter registration exercise from January to March 2023, which was successfully completed.

Nearly 411 regular and mobile teams, consisting of 2,594 personnel, were working on the registration process to reach throughout Puntland, including remote areas. The teams used sophisticated technologies to verify that individuals did not register themselves more than once. On March 18th, 2023, the TPEC released the total number of registered people, which was 401,120.

The enabling factors for the achievement of fairly high voter registration that was made possible are as follows:

- The local people's desire and commitment helped the registration process. To ensure that the registration process reached as many people as possible, various strategies were implemented and adapted. One such strategy was the engagement of local media, which helped spread information about the process to wide audiences. Additionally, vehicles equipped with audio systems were dispatched to rural communities, ensuring that even those in hard-to-reach areas were informed about the registration process. Importantly, TPEC also established a call centre, which citizens could use to receive free clarification on the registration process and any other electoral information. This service has proven to be highly effective and successful, serving more than 157,000 people thus far.
- The close and effective collaboration among the election stakeholders, including political associations, the government, CSOs, and TPEC, played a crucial role in the process.
- TPEC's transparent and clear plans, along with its commitment, were essential to its success. Despite challenges such as the geographical distances between areas and the limited availability of electricity and Internet in remote areas, TPEC teams overcame these obstacles by implementing alternative plans to ensure a successful registration process.

From another standpoint, the Ministry of Interior defined the borders of each of the electoral districts. The registration process progressed without any

security interruptions, despite concerns that Al-Shabaab might attempt to disrupt it, especially in districts neighbouring the Golis Mountains, which serve as a hideout for Al-Shabaab. The government ensured security provisions at the voter registration sites.

On April 23rd, 2023, the TPEC initiated the distribution of voting cards in 22 out of the 33 electoral districts in Bari, Karkaar, Sanaag, Hayland, and Gardafu regions in Puntland. The remaining districts in Mudug and Nugal will receive their voting cards on April 26th and 28th, 2023. This distribution process will continue for two weeks until everybody has received his or her voting card. The distribution of these cards is a critical step, as it is required for voters to be able to cast their votes on Election Day. Without the card, individuals will not be able to vote.

Further more, political associations submitted their candidate lists to TPEC. TPEC is currently in the process of vetting candidates for the upcoming election and is expected to release the final list of candidates on April 29, 2023. Additionally, TPEC has provided guidelines and the schedule of political campaigns among the political associations. According to TPEC guidelines, all political campaigning and public demonstrations by political associations must end 48 hours before the election day. During this time, there will be continued public awareness campaigns to ensure that voters are informed and prepared for the election. The election will be held on May 25, 2023, from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 470 polling stations across 33 electoral districts in the regions of Nugaal, Bari, Sanaag, Mudug, Karkaar, Hayland, and Gardafu in Puntland. After the election, TPEC will start the process of counting the votes, which will be done manually in the presence of representatives of the political associations and election observers.

The counting process is expected to take a few days, after which TPEC will announce the preliminary results. The political associations will then have a chance to raise any concerns or disputes they have about the results, and TPEC will investigate these before announcing the results. This election will see political associations contest council seats, and the three political associations with the highest number of votes will transition to become the three permanent political parties that will contest the Puntland state parliamentary elections. After the local council elections and the certification of the three political parties, TPEC will be formally disbanded and a permanent commission called the Puntland Electoral Commission (PEC) will be formed. The PEC will be responsible for the conduct and implementation of the parliamentary elections in Puntland.



*Pcs: 4: Focused Audience.*

## 4. Panel discussion



*Pic.5: Panel Discussion in Progress.*



The panel discussion provided an interactive platform for the participants to engage with the panelists and ask questions. This session was structured in a way that facilitated a two-way exchange of ideas between the audience and the panelists, supported by political associations. The questions raised by the participants were answered and clarified by the panelists, leading to a productive discussion on the topic at hand. The panelists included the Minister of Interior, Honorable Abdi Farah Juxa, the TPEC Chairman, Honorable Abdirisak Ahmed Saed, and the PUNSAA Chairman, Honorable Abdirahman Abdirisak. Each panelist was provided with relevant questions, and they addressed them accordingly. Below are the major questions raised during the discussion, along with the clarifications provided by the panelists:

1. What is the role of the government in the upcoming local election in Puntland? What are the plans that the government has made, so far, in terms of election security and providing necessary services for vulnerable people? By Amina M. Abdulkadir, event moderator, PDRC.

**Hon. Abdi Farah Juxa, Minister of Interior Affairs:**

As per the Puntland State Constitution, the government is responsible for creating an enabling environment for the conduct of free, fair, and transparent elections. In the upcoming local election, the government's role is to provide security, facilitate the distribution of necessary materials, and ensure that the election process is conducted without any disruption.

Regarding election security, the government has developed a comprehensive plan that involves the deployment of security personnel to polling stations, ensuring the safety of election materials, and monitoring potential threats to the election process. Additionally, the government has also initiated measures to provide necessary services for vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities, internally displaced persons, and elderly voters, to ensure their participation in the election.

2. What is the role of civil society in conducting fair and transparent election? What are the perspectives of the civil societies to the election marked to hold 25th May 2023? By Amina M. Abdulkadir, event moderator, PDRC

**Hon. Abdirahman Abdirisak, Chairman of PUNSAA:**

The role of civil society in conducting fair and transparent elections is critical. Civil society organizations (CSOs) act as watchdogs to ensure that the election process is free, fair, and transparent. They play a crucial role in raising public awareness and educating voters on their rights, monitoring the election process, and observing the electoral process to ensure compliance with electoral laws and regulations.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) played a vital role in the early elections of Eyl, Qardho, and Ufayn districts by establishing an 'Election Situation Room' to monitor and collect election complaints. They also established a 'Women's Situation Room' to monitor election abuses against women. Moreover, CSOs constructively criticised the TPEC and the government for failing to improve the electoral system's effectiveness and quality. Their efforts helped to ensure that the voices of all citizens were heard, and that the election was conducted in a free, fair, and transparent manner.

In the upcoming election, CSOs will play an essential role in monitoring and observing the election process to ensure that the electoral laws and guidelines are adhered to. They will closely observe the procedures of the election management and report any discrepancies. Local communities and CSOs are optimistic that the elections will be free, fair, and transparent.

3. We are almost close to Election Day. Therefore, how best TPEC is prepared both financially and technically for the upcoming election day? By Amina M. Abdulkadir, event moderator, PDRC

**Hon. Abdirisak Ahmed Saed, Chairman of TPEC:**

TPEC has made significant progress in its preparations for the upcoming election, both financially and technically. Recently, the main consignment of election equipment arrived, which is a major milestone. Additionally, the candidates' list is currently under the vetting process and will be released soon, giving voters an opportunity to learn about their options. The distribution of voting cards is also underway, ensuring that eligible voters receive their cards on time.

Further more, TPEC has put in place strict electoral laws and guidelines, along with comprehensive security and safety strategies. It has also recruited well-trained electoral personnel and provided them with the necessary equipment and tools to ensure a smooth voting process. With all these measures in place, TPEC is poised to conduct a successful and transparent election, and voters can have confidence in the integrity of the process.

4. According to the local council election law, political associations are required to submit their candidate lists to TPEC 50 days before the election day. You (TPEC chairman) have stated that TPEC received the candidate list on April 23rd, which is one month before the election day. Does this not contradict the law?  
By Mohamed Kowte

**Hon. Abdirisak Ahmed Saed, Chairman of TPEC:**

As per the electoral law, political associations are mandated to submit their candidate lists to TPEC 50 days prior to the election day. TPEC had requested the lists earlier and also allowed for several extensions, but political associations were unable to submit the lists on time due to PA's internal technical issues. While this may seem to contradict the law, unforeseen circumstances such as this delay are considered under the law. Currently, the candidate list is undergoing a vetting process and will be released soon.

5. When we came to Puntland, the government resettled us in the camps where we currently live. We were informed that the government had leased this land to us for seven years. However, the landlord is charging us 8-11 dollars per month per family as rent. We have been living here for more than 25 years, so why don't we have the same rights as the host communities in Puntland? By Abdullahi, IDPs communities.

**Hon. Abdi Farah Juxa, Minister of Interior Affairs:**

It is truly shameful that people who have been living in Puntland for such a long time are being treated in such a manner. Land is a valuable resource, and it is supposed to be managed effectively by local governments. Therefore, if displaced communities

have representatives in local councils, their voices can be heard, and such problems can be addressed by the appropriate government institutions.

Land and internally displaced people (IDPs) issues are some of the major crises that the government is currently facing, and efforts are being made to address these issues, including the development of the 'Durable Solution Strategy'. The 'Durable Solution Strategy' aims to establish conditions and provide means that allow internally displaced persons to integrate and/ or settle in host communities with dignity and rights. This strategy also aims to find sustainable solutions to land tenure issues for both displaced communities and host communities. It is crucial for all stakeholders to work together to find lasting solutions to the challenges faced by IDPs and to ensure that their rights are protected and respected.

6. Will the three political parties have a role in the decision-making process of the way forward since the term of the current government is close to ending?  
By Asiya Ali

**Hon. Abdirisak Ahmed Saed, Chairman of TPEC:**  
The role of TPEC is to hold the LCEs and certify winner political parties and there its mandate will terminate. However, and as constitutional institutions, the three political parties will have a role in the decision-making process of the way forward, in accordance with the laws that govern them.

7. In the public perspectives, some people have the concern of the fairness of the TPEC, to this end, how TPEC will be neutral for all the political association? Can you provide more information on what steps TPEC will take to ensure neutrality and fairness in the upcoming elections? By Mohamed Jama

**Hon. Abdirisak Ahmed Saed, Chairman of TPEC:**

To ensure neutrality and fairness, TPEC will take several steps as it did in early elections, such as:

- **Transparency:** TPEC will be transparent in its decision-making process, by providing clear guidelines and procedures for all political associations and candidates to follow.
- **Impartiality:** TPEC will demonstrate impartiality by treating all political associations and candidates equally, with out any bias towards any particular group or individual.
- **Professionalism:** TPEC will maintain a high level of professionalism in its operations, by ensuring that all staff members are well-trained and competent in their roles.
- **Monitoring:** TPEC will monitor the electoral process closely, to ensure that all political associations and candidates are adhering to the rules and regulations. It will also encourage international and domestic observers to monitor the election process and report any irregularities or concerns.
- **Collaboration:** TPEC will closely collaborate with other stakeholders, such as civil society organizations, government, political associations, and international community, to promote transparency and accountability in the electoral process.
- **Voter Education:** Ensure that the voter education process is comprehensive and unbiased, and that all voters are informed of their rights and responsibilities. By implementing these measures, TPEC will ensure that the electoral process is conducted in a fair and transparent manner, and that all political parties and candidates are given an equal opportunity to participate.

8. The early elections were successful although there was political conflict among the associations, particularly in the Eyl district, which took months to resolve. An armed conflict also occurred in Garowe during the voter registration process, with the opposition alleging that the electoral process was not based on consensus. Will KAAH accept the results of the election? By Mohamed Jama

**Hon. Abdi Farah Juxa, Minister of Interior Affairs:**

To ensure a peaceful and stable transition of the governance system, the acceptance of the political associations regarding the election results is crucial. All political associations including KAAH have confirmed that they will have confidence in the electoral process and will accept the results of the election. In case of any issues or complaints, the political associations will resort their concerns through the appropriate channels.

9. There are several candidates from IDP communities, but voters from IDPs are vulnerable to being influenced in terms of whom they vote for. What mitigation plans or strategies are in place to avoid such intimidations? By Abdullahi Rubaani

**Hon. Abdirisak Ahmed Saed, Chairman of TPEC:**

To prevent intimidation of voters from IDP communities, TPEC and the Police will

“...We encourage IDPs to call immediately if they feel pressured or intimidated”. Abdirizak Said  
~Ahmed, TPEC Chairman.

provide hotline numbers that people can call for free if they have any concerns or complaints. We encourage IDPs to call immediately if they feel pressured or intimidated. It is important that everyone follows electoral laws and guidelines, and that no one acts outside of legal frameworks. While political associations have the right to propose candidates, TPEC will ensure that the candidate lists are inclusive, including minority, women, and IDP groups. This will help to ensure a fair and democratic election process.

10. There is a perception that the current government intends to use the local council election as a means of extending its term. Can the government provide clarification on its position regarding this concern? By Mohamed Said, event participant.

**Hon. Abdi Farah Juxa, Minister of Interior Affairs:**

The government is not using the local council elections as a pretext to extend its term. The duration of the term is set by the constitution, and presidential elections must be conducted on time in accordance with the law.

11. What does the success of this election mean for the process of state rebuilding in Somalia? By Amina M. Abdulkadir, event moderator, PDRC

**Hon. Abdi Farah Juxa, Minister of Interior Affairs:**  
The success of the upcoming election in Somalia holds great significance for the process of state reconstruction in the country. If the election is

conducted successfully and peacefully, it will demonstrate the feasibility of holding similar elections in other parts of Somalia, which could promote political stability and create an environment conducive to further development. More over, the election would prove the potential of federalism to transform power and governance services to the grassroots level and help decentralize power from

"The transition to a multiparty system in Puntland is a testament to the possibility of rebuilding Somalia as a great federal nation with decentralized power, from the highest levels of government to the grassroots."  
 Abdi Farah Juxa. Ministry of Interior Affairs, Puntland State of Somalia

the highest levels of government. There fore, the success of this election could be a major milestone in the process of rebuilding Somalia as a great federal nation.

In the absence of the election in Bo'ame, Buhoodle, and Taleex districts of Cayn and Sool regions, what are the legal implications according to the electoral law? By Amina M. Abdulkadir, event moderator, PDRC

**Hon. Abdi Farah Juxa, Minister of Interior Affairs:**  
 Due to the ongoing political conflicts between Somaliland and Puntland states over the regions of Sool and Cayn, specifically the districts of Lasaanod, Buhoodle, and Taleex, it is unlikely that the upcoming local council election will take place in these areas. The conflict poses a threat to the security and

stability needed for a fair and peaceful electoral process. It is important that efforts towards finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict and ensuring the safety of citizens in these regions should be a priority in order to create an environment conducive to free and fair elections. Additionally, according to electoral law no. 7, it is not mandatory to hold elections in areas that are experiencing conflicts and instability, such as the case with these districts. However, in parliamentary elections, those communities should have political representation.



*Pic.6: Supreme Court Representative -Lawyer Said and other Int. Comm. members present at the event.*

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The discussion forum, which brought together a variety of stakeholders of the democratization process in Puntland, resulted in the following main conclusions and recommendations. The panel was quite articulated as participants and panelists were conversely engaged in deep and meaningful discussions about the most pressing issues related to the upcoming election. Following recommendations are essential for the success of the democratization process in Puntland and intended to ensure fairness, transparency and conducting the elections in peaceful manners:

01

All actors and stakeholders involved in the democratization process in Puntland need to demonstrate sufficient political will for the process to succeed.

02

It is crucial to conduct an early, comprehensive conflict risk analysis to promote a secure and safe environment for the upcoming elections. The government should also provide strong security mechanisms to avoid potential security risks and threats that hamper or disrupt the election.

03

Continuous inclusive dialogue is necessary, along with a firm commitment to the observance of human rights and the rule of law.

04

The capacities of political parties/associations must be strengthened and built on a non-partisan manner. Where necessary, capacities and means; such as promotion materials shall be provided/granted.

05

Women, disabled and young people shall be included, but where possible, in human rights and election observation synergies to ensure their representation.

06

The development and availability of Simplified Codes of Conduct can increase citizens' confidence in the election process.



*Pic: 7- Participants Interact with the Panel.*