



The Choice is Ours – FESTU welcomes the signing of the Federal Electoral Bill into law

23 February 2020

The Federation of Somali Trade Unions (FESTU) and its 12 affiliated sector unions commend the signing of the country's Federal Electoral Bill into law as a historic and tangible move towards the realisation of democratic rights of Somalis and ultimately, a stable and peaceful society.

The President's signing of the bill into law on 21 February 2020 at Villa Somalia was a culmination of a long policy development process which saw the extensive input by various bodies and political stakeholders. Although the law falls short of creating the most conducive political environment for elections and fails to guarantee women's meaningful political representation, it nevertheless presents an unambiguous framework that upholds the unquestionable right of every Somali to choose their own political representative. This law represents the first opportunity in over half a century for every eligible Somali to directly vote for members of the Federal Parliament (Lower and Upper Houses).

The credibility of the process must now continue and the proper implementation of the law for all Somalis including minority groups must be prioritised. Organised labour and its progressive allies will continue to use legitimate and effective means to ensure that conservative and controversial components in the law are addressed.

Somali trade unions call for every reasonable measure to be put in place for the upcoming elections to be free, fair and free-of-violence. Any attempt to violate democratic principles and provisions of the constitution by manipulating the electoral process, intimidating prospective voters or utilising dangerous and divisive means to secure victory, will be strongly denounced and challenged. Ordinary Somalis have, for too long, been silenced and coerced into particular social, political, and economic realities, many of which are not of their own choosing. This law presents an opportunity for the country to develop along a path chosen and determined by the majority of Somalis.

"Legislation is only beneficial if implemented correctly. We urge the relevant authorities and political stakeholders to begin, in earnest, to implement the provisions within the new law in a timely manner in order that the process is efficient and leads the nation to new democratic dispensation. Delays in the process will ultimately result in the Somali people being further robbed of their right to decide their own political future, which, given Somalia's social and political context in the last 50 years, is unacceptable," said FESTU General Secretary Omar Faruk Osman.

FESTU calls on the federal government to act swiftly to liberate areas controlled by extremists in order to prepare those communities for the upcoming elections. These environments have been significantly eroded and residents within them have suffered sustained attacks and repression. Rebuilding these communities to be election-ready will require political will and sufficient resources. The voices and political wishes of voters in these areas must be captured in the upcoming elections.

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FESTU President: Ahmed Osman Said

FESTU General Secretary: Omar Faruk Osman