

# Submission by Society for Threatened Peoples

a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

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**Language: English only**  
Universal Periodic Review  
Eleventh Session

2010-01-11

## Somalia

In January 2009 Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed was appointed as President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). In the same month Ethiopian troops withdrew from the country. However, human rights abuses against the civilian population continued. Somalia has been embroiled in conflict since 1991, with more than 1.46 million people displaced and 614,000 refugees in neighbouring countries. Fighting continues between government forces that are supported by 7,000 African Union troops, and Islamic insurgents, who control much of south and central Somalia, including most of Mogadishu.

### **Threats against journalists and civil society activists**

The National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) has expressed its deep concern about violence and intimidation of journalists by insurgent militias and state security forces. NUSOJ described the past year as a symbol of darkness, death, displacement, detention and violence against journalists. A total of nine journalists were killed either in the line of duty or in targeted brutal attacks against media freedom, making Somalia the most dangerous place for journalists in Africa. Twelve journalists were wounded in attacks and 15 others were arrested in a systematic and well-coordinated attack against free media in Somalia. Another 100 journalists received death threats.

### **Impunity**

Impunity prevails for all crimes which were committed by Ethiopian soldiers during their military intervention in Somalia (December 2006 to January 2009). Furthermore no personnel of state security forces was brought to justice for intimidating, torturing and murdering human rights defenders, staff of NGOs and journalists.

### **Abuses of child soldiers**

The plight of internally displaced people, the humanitarian crisis and increasing poverty are facilitating the recruitment of children as soldiers by militias and the regular army. Especially in refugee camps in Kenya, Yemen but also in southern Italy and Europe, young Somalis have registered a growing number of abuses of child soldiers by all conflict parties. UNICEF estimates thousands of child soldiers in Somalia. Therefore it was an encouraging initiative that the President of the Transitional Government, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed has ordered the security forces on November 20, 2009, to stop recruiting child soldiers. However, it remains to be seen if this order really will be implemented by the state-controlled security forces.

### **Human rights and the Sharia**

The strict application of Muslim Sharia law in areas controlled by Al Shabaab and other Islamist groups has raised many concerns about the respect of basic human rights. On November 6, 2009, a man was stoned to death for adultery. The 33-year old Abas Hussein Abdirahman was killed in front of a crowd of some 300 people in the town of Merka. His pregnant girlfriend was

spared until she gives birth. It was the third stoning to death for adultery in 2009. Only a few days later on November 17, a 20-year old woman divorcee accused of adultery was stoned to death in front of 200 people. She was buried up to her waist near the town of Wajid and then stoned to death. Her boyfriend, an unmarried 29 year old man, was given 100 lashes. According to Al Shabaab's interpretation of Sharia law, everybody who once has been married and was seen guilty of adultery, has to be punished by being stoned to death.

Hundreds of people have been forced in October 2009 to watch Islamist militants executing two people for spying. The militants ordered schools to close in the town of Merca and patrolled the town with loudspeakers, urging everyone to attend the executions. Most of the spectators were children and women.

An Islamist militia executed the Somali politician Abdirahman Ahmed on January 15th, 2009, in the town of Kismayo. He was accused of "apostasy" and spying for the Ethiopian army during their armed intervention in Somalia. Four young men convicted of robbery by an unofficial Al Shabaab court without due process, had their right hands and left legs amputated in front of crowd of local people in Mogadishu in July 2009. These punishments amount to torture which is forbidden by norms of international humanitarian law in all circumstances.

The application of Sharia law and the human rights situation are varying very much even in Al Shabaab- controlled areas. In some regions Islamist commanders urged schools to stop using "un-islamic" textbooks distributed by the United Nations. In other areas commanders announced that all male inhabitants must grow beards, shave moustaches and shorten their trousers to above the ankles. In some villages there were orders that all businesses are to be closed during the prayer times. In Mogadishu, Islamist militants publicly whipped women for wearing a bra.

With great concern many Somalis have been following the destruction of non-approved religious sites of Sufi Muslims in the region of Kismayo. Some mosques and the graves of respected religious leaders were deliberately desecrated by Al Shabaab fighters who are inspired by a stricter Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

### **Plight of the civilian population**

Humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate due to increasing insecurity and armed conflict, inter-clan fighting, population displacement, diseases, food insecurity and the deterioration of livelihood. Conflict and increased attacks targeting humanitarian organisations have resulted in food aid suspensions and limited humanitarian access to conflict-affected people.

In March 2009, Al Shabaab officially welcomed international aid agencies to regions under their control, but in July 2009 the militia announced to set up an office to oversee the activities of NGOs and foreign agencies and banned the activities of the three United Nations organisations UN Development Programme, UN Department of Safety and Security and the UN Political Office for Somalia. In November 2009 Al Shabaab militia groups in central state issued a list of eleven rules with which NGOs had to comply. The list included not only a ban on alcohol and movies, but a registration fee of 20,000 US- Dollars, to be paid twice a year.

In February 2010 Somali insurgents from the Al Shabaab and Hezb Al-Islam militias stormed the offices of international aid agencies in the restive western city of Beledweyn. Dozens of heavy armed militants entered the offices of Save the Children Fund and the UN World Health Organisations, taking weapons from the security guards as well as computers. They briefly held

staff members but later released them. On December 17, 2009, heavily armed Al Shabaab fighters stormed three compounds of the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in Baidoa. They looted computers and much equipment. The militias have routinely raided humanitarian offices in the areas they control, accusing foreign aid agencies of spying against them and supporting the Transitional Federal Government.

On January 5, 2010, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) announced the temporary closure of six offices in southern Somalia due to escalating insecurity, attacks against aid workers, humanitarian staff abductions and unacceptable demands from armed groups. Ten aid workers were killed in attacks or abductions in 2009 in Somalia. In December 2009 two aid workers died after attacks in Gedo and Hiran regions. More than a dozen staff of humanitarian NGOs has been abducted in 2009. As a result of this violence a number of aid agencies have been forced to suspend programmes and withdraw staff. The restrictions on the freedom of humanitarian organisations to deliver emergency aid contribute to widespread malnutrition and death from starvation.

The UN estimates that more than two million Somalis need humanitarian assistance. The UN Refugee agency said on 9 September, 2010, that in the two previous weeks alone at least 250 people were killed and 400 wounded in clashes between Somali government forces and Al-Shabab fighters in Mogadishu. From January to August of 2010 at least 960 civilians were killed in clashes or arbitrary shelling of their houses. At least 68,000 civilians fled Mogadishu this year. Children account for one fifth of all weapons-related casualties. According to the World Health Organisation, Somalia currently only has around 250 qualified doctors, 860 nurses and 116 midwives. Somali health facilities routinely lack basic and essential medicines, medical supplies and equipment. In March of 2010 two cholera outbreaks were confirmed in Mogadishu (3001 cases and 79 deaths) and the Lower Shabelle region's Merka district (725 cases and eight deaths).

The worsening security situation has led to a withdrawal of many aid agencies. In the Afgoye Corridor near Somalia's capital Mogadishu, more than 400,000 internally displaced persons are supported by a few aid agencies. The number of cases with measles, malaria, respiratory diseases and whooping cough are on the rise. Hospitals lack enough medicine, fuel for generators and food for mothers with malnourished children. The UN World Food Programme stopped food distributions in the southern port city of Kismayo when it ceased operations in the area in August 2008 following the takeover of the town by Al-Shabab, the largest insurgent group. Al-Shabab has not allowed aid agencies access to the displaced since then.