



TESTIMONIES FROM *IN THE LINE OF FIRE:* *SOMALIA'S CHILDREN UNDER ATTACK*

Amnesty International's report, *In the Line of Fire: Somalia's Children Under Attack*, draws on more than 200 testimonies from Somali children, young people and adults collected by Amnesty International in March 2009 in Kenya and Djibouti, and in March and June 2010 in Kenya. Amnesty International delegates interviewed refugees who had recently fled Somalia in order to get as much information as possible as to the situation in their country.¹ Here are some of their stories.

RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILDREN INTO ARMED GROUPS AND FORCES

A 15 year-old boy who fled Mogadishu in January 2010 told Amnesty International that his eight year-old brother was forcibly recruited by al-Shabab, and subsequently died. He was himself threatened into joining the armed group:

"There is a place where they keep children, where al-Shabab tried to make me go. They used to come to the blocks where we were living and they would take children so that they could keep them and make them fight. [...] Al-Shabab told me that they would kill me if I didn't come with them. They asked me three times to go with them but I refused to go. I stopped going to the playground because I was scared they would try and force me to go with them. They took my brother. He was recruited by al-Shabab when he was eight years old. He was taken while he was playing football. We went to the place where we know that they make them fight and we found his dead body there."

A 10 year-old boy who was taken to an al-Shabab military camp for training told Amnesty International:

"There were so many boys in the training camp. They trained us and gave us a small gun."

A 15 year-old boy from Kismayo also told Amnesty International that al-Shabab members were coming in his school to recruit children in their ranks:

"I was at school when I was in Somalia. As I was going to school once al-Shabab took my books from me. They told me that I had to join them or they would take my books away. They said that I should leave my school. I refused to join them. They slapped me but then they left me alone this time. Sometimes al-Shabab would come into my school. They would beat the students who came late and take them away to fight. One day there were two children who were taken from our school to go and fight with al-Shabab."

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS AND EDUCATION

A 12-year-old boy from Mogadishu described how two different schools he attended over a period of three years were hit by bombings:

"My primary school was far away in Bakara, I had to take the bus to get there. The school closed after fighting

¹ The names of interviewees and other personal details have been kept confidential when these could lead to their identification and compromise their safety

started, it was bombed, teachers died inside the school. It was in February 2006. I had many friends who died and were injured that day but I wasn't at school... After that I went to a private school in Bakara. A bomb exploded there also, six people died and three were injured, all were pupils from the ages of seven to 14. This happened in June or July 2009."

A 17 year-old girl from the Wardigley district in Mogadishu described:

"I left because of fighting. I couldn't sleep at night. There was fighting day and night. There were bomb blasts near the house and some fires as a result of the bombs. The fighting was between al-Shabab and the government. ... I was at school in Mogadishu. Every day when I went to school there was heavy fighting. A bomb blew up very near me. There was smoke and fire very close to me but I managed to run away. Our school closed down because of the fighting."

Another girl, aged 16, from Mogadishu, also said that al-Shabab imposed restrictions in schools and that some of her teachers were killed by al-Shabab:

"There were four teachers killed in 2009 by al-Shabab but I do not know why. They were all men. Al-Shabab wouldn't allow teachers to ring the school bell. Boys and girls were not allowed to be in the same class. At different times, al-Shabab would come to the school every day. They wouldn't force people to join them but they would ask them."

OTHER TARGETED HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES AGAINST CHILDREN

A 13 year-old girl who left Baidoa in the early weeks of 2010 told Amnesty International that al-Shabab beat her up for not wearing the hijab at home:

"I was living in Baidoa. Al-Shabab were beating people up. They tell you that you have to wear heavy clothes. Al-Shabab came to my house and beat me up. There were five men who beat me. Even inside the house I was told that I had to wear a hijab. They were carrying a cane called a kalabash. I was caned twice and they also caned my mother."

CHILDREN CAUGHT UP IN INDISCRIMINATE AND OTHER UNLAWFUL ATTACKS

A 15 year-old boy from Mogadishu, told Amnesty International:

"I arrived [in Kenya] in March 2010. I fled with my family because of the fighting. The war was getting worse. My three brothers were killed. It was shortly before we fled. They were coming from the market by bicycle and they were caught in cross fire. They were hit by a "bomb". One died on the spot and the two others died later, while we were on our way to Kenya. Their names were Ahmed, who was 10, Abdikadir, who was 12, and Yusuf, who was eight years-old."

An 18 year-old woman described her and her 17 year-old brother's struggle for survival after they lost their parents:

"We went to school early one day and when we came back home our parents were not there. When we got to our house, in Shibis in Mogadishu, we found that the house had been bombed. We do not know whether anyone died in the bombing or whether there were any survivors. We tried to find out what had happened but we were not able to get any information. This was in August 2009. After finding the house bombed, we fled with neighbours from Mogadishu and went to another village, Hamarweyne, also in Mogadishu. This village is in an area controlled by the government. I stopped going to school. I no longer had money to pay for school fees. I stayed in Hamarweyne for two and a half months. I fled from Hamarweyne in January 2010 because our neighbour with whom we were staying decided to leave for Baidoa. I then fled to Baidoa and stayed there for 20 days. This is an al-Shabab controlled area. I decided to flee to Kenya because I could not find anyone to live with. We had no money and there was no one to protect us."

A 15 year-old girl from Mogadishu explained:

"One day I went to school and when I came back for lunch my family was not there and the house was destroyed. It was in December 2009. I came here [to the refugee camp] with my maternal aunt. I had 10 siblings: the oldest is

22, the youngest is three. The small children were at home as well as my mum and dad that day.”

TRAUMA RESULTING FROM CONFLICT

Two boys, aged 10 and 12, from Sakow in Lower Juba separately described to Amnesty International witnessing residents from their village being killed or tortured in public. One said:

“Initially the government was in control but then al-Shabab came. Things became much worse. They would put someone’s arm in boiling oil. They would also dig a hole, put someone in it and then throw stones at them. I saw a man have his arms put in boiling oil. He had come from the mosque with shoes that were not his and he was caught – he was accused of stealing someone else’s shoes. There were also stonings after al-Shabab came and they would force you to come and watch. They could also kill you by shooting bullets at you or they could shower you with boiling oil. There were also amputations. All of these were done in public.”

A 14 year-old boy from Mogadishu said:

“I left because of the torture and the killings. ... I witnessed a man being slaughtered. Al-Shabab killed him, I don’t know why. He was caught when he was walking in the market. He was taken to the outskirts of town. They called everyone together to watch. This happened in Mogadishu. He was slaughtered with a knife to the back of his head in May 2009. I also saw them beat someone with a gun and then they shot him dead. This happened the same month.”