

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

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### **Somalia: Amnesty International condemns direct attacks on civilians and other violations**

Amnesty International condemns the attacks that have caused dozens of civilian deaths and injuries in the past two days in Mogadishu.

An attack on 24 August on the Muna Hotel, a hotel situated close to the Presidential Palace and frequented by members of the Transitional Federal Parliament, killed 33 people, most of whom were civilians, including four MPs, according to a count by the Somali government. Five members of the security forces were also reportedly among those killed. Two or three heavily armed attackers reportedly wearing uniforms of the government forces, entered the hotel after killing security guards at the entrance and started shooting at people inside the hotel, opening bedroom doors and firing at guests, according to local sources. Al-Shabab, the armed group opposed to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia, claimed responsibility for the attack.

This attack demonstrates the contempt of al-Shabab for the lives of Somali civilians, and their disregard for the basic tenets of international humanitarian law. Al-Shabab claims that such attacks are targeting the government, but the reality is that they are attacking and killing civilians, those who do not participate directly in the hostilities. Direct attacks on civilians are war crimes.

The attack on the hotel occurred the day after al-Shabab launched another offensive against TFG forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the peace support operation that protects the TFG. On 23 August at about 4pm, al-Shabab attacked government and AMISOM positions in Mogadishu, using mortars and other weapons. Amnesty International received reports that AMISOM responded by also shelling mortars. Local sources reported that as a result of this fighting, between 29 and 38 civilians were killed and almost a hundred injured, in the districts of Bondhere, Howlwadag, Hodan and in Bakara market. On 24 August, radio director Barqad Awale was killed by a stray bullet while fixing the transmitter of the radio station, as fighting was raging in the capital. Fighting continues today, and there are reports of more civilian casualties.

Launching attacks with weapons such as mortars, which cannot be precisely targeted, in areas of Mogadishu populated or frequented by civilians may amount to indiscriminate attacks. Yet all parties to the conflict in Somalia continue to use such tactics which invariably result in numerous civilian deaths and injuries, destroys homes and results in displacement, loss of livelihoods and further misery for Somali civilians.

A core principle of international humanitarian law is that parties to a conflict must always distinguish between combatants and civilians. They must take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian casualties. Indiscriminate attacks, including those using methods whose effects cannot be limited as required by international humanitarian law and which strike military objectives and civilians without distinction, are prohibited. .

Amnesty International calls on all parties to the conflict to adhere to the rules of international humanitarian law, and take all possible steps to avoid civilian casualties. Amnesty International further calls on the international community to prioritise the protection of

civilians and humanitarian access in its policies on Somalia, and to take action to take all possible steps to bring an end the impunity for crimes under international law which has reigned in Somalia for the past two decades. An independent and impartial Commission of Inquiry, or similar mechanism, should be established to investigate and map crimes under international law which have been committed in Somalia and recommend measures for accountability.