

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Somalia: Still no end to human rights violations?**

*Amnesty International today condemned the kidnapping of several humanitarian aid workers in Somalia's capital Mogadishu, and expressed concern for the safety of those still held by a local militia.*

*"Taking humanitarian workers hostage is an appalling abuse of human rights. Such actions contribute nothing to the restoration of peace and security in Somalia. This abduction is only one more brutal act in a ongoing circle of violence," Amnesty International said.*

*"The people of Somalia have already suffered too many human rights violations, and civilians have had to endure abuses for far too long," the human rights organization said. "Both Somalia's Transitional National Government and those opposed to it claim that they want to transform Somalia into a safe and secure country, where human rights are respected. But if even humanitarian staff cannot carry out their work freely, without threats or intimidation, the future for human rights in Somalia looks very bleak indeed".*

*Nine humanitarian aid workers were abducted in Mogadishu on 27 March 2001 after gunmen loyal to Musa Sudi Yalahow, a faction leader whose militias control part of Somalia's capital, attacked the compound of the international aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) - Spain in northern Mogadishu. The aid workers included three expatriate staff of the international aid agency MSF and six Nairobi-based UN staff who were in Mogadishu on a three-day visit to assess ongoing polio and cholera projects.*

*In heavy fighting that ensued between militia members loyal to Musa Yalahow and troops supporting Somalia's new Transitional National Government (TNG), an unconfirmed number of people, including possibly over a dozen civilian bystanders, are reported to have been killed and an unknown number of persons wounded.*

*Although five of the hostages were released and handed over to the TNG early this morning after negotiations between a local politician and militia members, four UN staff are still held captive at two separate locations in northern Mogadishu. A spokesman of Musa Yalahow has been quoted as saying that the hostages had been taken to show the international community that Mogadishu was still not safe.*

*Amnesty International is appealing to those responsible for the abductions to release the remaining hostages, and until they are released to guarantee their safety and physical integrity.*

### ***Background***

*After the fall of the Siad Barre regime in early 1991, Somalia was without a central government for almost ten years. Following a peace conference in Arta, Djibouti, a new Transitional National Government (TNG) was appointed in August 2000. The TNG has the support of the United Nations and parts of the international community, but several militia leaders in Somalia continue to challenge its legitimacy and have recently formed an alternative "Somalia Reconciliation and Restoration Council" with the aim of organizing another peace conference within the next six months.*

*The security situation in Somalia, and particularly Mogadishu, has deteriorated in recent weeks and several armed clashes between different militias, as well as between militia members and a newly established TNG*

police force have left at least 20 people dead, many of them civilians. In an attack on the provisional headquarters of the TNG in Mogadishu, three people were killed on 22 March 2001 and several others injured.

Amnesty International's condemnation of abuses committed by armed opposition groups does not imply recognition, or condemnation of any of these groups. The organization's sole concern is the protection of human rights. Both the transitional government forces and militia members in Somalia are bound by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which requires them to treat those taking no active part in hostilities humanely and not to subject them to acts of violence such as killing, torture or hostage-taking.

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