

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL
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The London Conference on Somalia has not adequately tackled the dire human rights situation in the country which is threatening the lives of civilians including children, Amnesty International said today.

“The recent surge in military operations increases civilians’ vulnerability to attacks and displacement, and brings more arms into a country already awash with weapons,” said Benedicte Goderiaux, Amnesty International’s Somalia researcher.

“This is a lethal mix that could fuel further human rights abuses. At this conference we hoped to see more efforts to improve the safety of the Somali population.”

Though the conference’s closing communiqué made some reference to human rights, it fell short of the measures required to address the risks faced by civilians in Somalia.

At a minimum the international community must ensure that its current actions in Somalia do not contribute to a further deterioration in the human rights situation.

The international community must take concrete measures to increase the monitoring, documenting and public reporting of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed by any party to the conflict in Somalia.

Children in Somalia are particularly vulnerable in the armed conflict. They continue to be killed – including in recent airstrikes in southern Somalia – while many more lose parents, carers and homes to the fighting.

Armed groups specifically target children, recruiting them as child soldiers, and denying them access to education.

The step up in military operations against al-Shabab has led the armed group to intensify their child recruitment drive. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and militia affiliated with them have also been accused of having child soldiers in their ranks.

The international community should ensure that effective mechanisms are put in place for the

disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers. Until then, no military or security assistance should be provided to armed forces and groups that use child soldiers, and the international community must respect and strengthen the UN arms embargo on Somalia.

“It is disappointing that international discussions continue to sideline the protection of civilians, and especially children. There is no question that this must be central to any strategy to improve the future of Somalia,” said Benedicte Goderiaux.

Amnesty International is also calling for action to address wide-ranging impunity for the decades of human rights violations and abuses committed in Somalia, some of which could amount to war crimes. An independent commission of inquiry should be established to investigate these abuses.

“Unless impunity is tackled, perpetrators of human rights abuses will have no incentive to stop and others will be encouraged to commit abuses,” said Benedicte Goderiaux.

“The international community must not leave Somalia’s civilian population to bear the brunt of this endless cycle of violence.”