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Somalia: UN arms embargo must stay in place

It is premature for the UN Security Council to consider lifting an arms embargo on Somalia later this week, Amnesty International said as it warned such a move could see armed groups such as al-Shabab getting its hands on even more weapons, while removing existing mechanisms of transparency and accountability.

Despite improvements in security in some areas of the country, including in Mogadishu, civilians still face a high risk of being killed or injured during outbreaks of fighting, in air strikes, mortar shelling or through the use of suicide attacks and improvised explosive devices.

“Without adequate safeguards, arms transfers may expose Somali civilians to even greater risk and worsen the humanitarian situation,” said Gemma Davies, Amnesty International’s Somalia researcher.

“For several years, the arms embargo on Somalia has been continuously violated with arms supplied to armed groups on all sides of the conflict. The flow of arms to Somalia has fuelled serious human rights abuses committed during the conflict.”

The widespread availability of arms in Mogadishu and elsewhere in Somalia continues to lead to greater insecurity for civilians.

During a recent Security Council debate on Somalia, Fowsiyo Yusuf Haji Adan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Government urged both financial and military support to consolidate peace and to help hold areas recovered from the control of armed groups.

Adan also requested the lifting of the arms embargo, stating her government’s intention of putting in place “the necessary mechanisms to ensure that armaments do not fall into the wrong hands”.

Although this intention is welcome, Amnesty International believes that such mechanisms should be implemented first and that the Security Council should only proceed with the lifting of the arms embargo once they prove effective.

“Instead of lifting the embargo, it should be strengthened by incorporating strict rules granting exemptions to prevent arms from getting into the wrong hands and being used to commit human rights and humanitarian abuses.”