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Somalia: Transitional government must address human rights issues in order to be viable

As Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) embarks on a five-year plan to re-build the war-torn country after two years of peace talks and 14 years of state collapse, Amnesty International is making an urgent call for human rights to be made a priority.

"Vital to the success of the transitional government and the establishment of the rule of law in Somalia will be to secure justice for victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of the Africa Program of Amnesty International. "There must be an open and transparent process to start establishing the truth and responsibility for past crimes with a view to prosecutions once a competent and impartial justice system is in place."

Fighting and political violence in Somalia continues and the stage for peace and reconciliation in the country is far from set. The country is beset by extreme poverty and years of civil wars have destroyed its infrastructure. A humanitarian emergency in several regions has been compounded by the tsunami which hit the north-east coast in December. The transitional government and parliament plan to relocate from Kenya to Somalia as soon as security permits. When it does, one of the most pressing issues will be how to address and punish the crimes and crimes against humanity committed by warlords who are now part of the government, without jeopardizing the government's viability.

Critical first steps will be disbanding warlords' militia with the support of an African Union peacekeeping force, and creating new security forces which will respect human rights. "An impartial screening mechanism must keep perpetrators of crimes against international law out of the new security forces," Amnesty International urged.

In its report, *Somalia: Urgent need for effective human rights protection under the new transitional government*, (AI Index: AFR 52/001/2005) Amnesty International calls on the TFG to take visible measures to protect and support human rights in the high-risk first year of the transition. These include rights to freedom of expression and opinion, fair trial, formation of political parties and non-governmental organisation (NGOs), humane treatment of prisoners; protection of human rights defenders; protection of humanitarian workers and NGOs; and protection of vulnerable groups, especially women, minorities, children and internally displaced persons. The TFG should support the creation of an independent National Human Rights Commission to monitor and promote human rights.

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