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Somalia: Amputations and public killings must stop

During a week that has seen scores of civilians killed, hundreds injured and thousands displaced by clashes between pro- and anti-government forces in Mogadishu, Amnesty International said that armed opposition and local clan militias in control of Kismayo have been carrying out amputations and unlawful killings.

On Friday, 8 May, religious leaders in "Freedom Park" in Kismayo amputated the hand of Mohamed Omar Ismail after he was accused of stealing. The stolen items are reported to be valued at 90 USD.

Kismayo is under the authority of an armed opposition faction and local clan militia. The Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, under President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, does not exercise authority over the area.

Hundreds of local Somali residents reportedly witnessed the punishment of Mohamed Omar Ismail, including some with cameras.

Amnesty International received disturbing photos showing the amputation.

“Punishments like amputations and killings illustrate the extent to which violence still substitutes for the rule of law in many areas of Somalia,” said Michelle Kagari, Deputy Director of Amnesty International’s Africa Programme.

“Armed opposition leaders controlling Kismayo are carrying out punishments without any oversight or accountability. These punishments amount to clear human rights abuses – in some cases unlawful killings and torture.”

Amnesty International called on the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia – and armed opposition and clan militias currently in control of Kismayo and other parts of the country – to publicly condemn all human rights abuses, including punishments carried out without due process of law. The organization called on all parties to the conflict to immediately stop all killings, amputations and other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments throughout Somalia.

Local opposition leaders in Kismayo are believed to have been carrying out amputations and unlawful killings since at least 2008, including the public killing of several men accused of murder. In one incident on 22 April 2008, a man accused of murder was shot to death by a firing squad.

In October 2008, Amnesty International reported that 13-year-old Asho Ibrahim Duholow was publicly stoned to death by 50 men in front of a crowd of about 1,000 spectators in Kismayo. She had been accused of "adultery" by local al-Shabab militia and sentenced to death after she had reported to them that she was raped

by three men.

“Such acts of brutality highlight the critical need for the UN and other international actors to take concrete steps to stop continued human rights abuses, including by establishing an independent commission of inquiry or similar mechanism to investigate human rights abuses by all parties to the conflict and bringing perpetrators to account,” said Michelle Kagari.