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## **Somalia: Stop attacks so help can get through**

The deaths of at least 40 humanitarian or human rights workers this year, and the ever growing threat of attack by armed groups and militias, is putting at least three million Somalis at even greater risk of malnutrition and disease, Amnesty International said today.

In a new [report](#) Amnesty International highlights how targeted violence against peace activists, humanitarian workers and human rights defenders has forced many organizations to suspend programmes and withdraw staff. This is at a time when Somalia is in the middle of a humanitarian emergency, with the United Nations estimating that around 3.25 million Somalis – 43 per cent of the population – will require food aid until the end of 2008.

These attacks have been motivated by a number of reasons, including an incorrect but widespread assumption in Somalia that humanitarian agencies are spies for western governments.

“These killings, abductions and threats mean that workers and rights defenders no longer enjoy the limited protection they previously held, based on their status in the community as impartial distributors of food and emergency services, or as advocates of peace and human rights,” said David Copeman, Amnesty International’s Somalia Campaigner.

Attacks continue, with UN staff killed by bombing attacks on 29 October, the targeted killing of a UNICEF engineer in the central town of Hudur on 19 October and a women’s rights activist killed in Guriel on 25 October.

Where the identity of the attackers is known, the majority of killings have been attributed to members of armed opposition groups, including al-Shabab militias, and the various Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS)-affiliated militias (often also called Islamic Courts).

The remaining killings were attributed to criminal gangs, or in a smaller number of cases, to militias associated with the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) or to the Ethiopian military. Most recent killings have been carried out by one or more gunmen, almost always described as between 15 and 25 years old. Threats are issued by phone, in leaflets and by word of mouth.

Amnesty International calls on all parties to the conflict in Somalia to stop these illegal attacks on humanitarian workers and civil society.

“International leaders must establish a mechanism, such as an International Commission of Inquiry, to investigate these killings, kidnappings and beatings and bring those responsible to justice,” said David Copeman.

“Donor governments and the UN must also increase their efforts to ensure a transparent and clearly demonstrated distinction between apolitical emergency humanitarian relief, and any political or development activities assisting TFG or the peace process.”