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## **Somalia: Rape and sexual violence a constant threat for displaced women**

Women and children living in Somalia's makeshift camps for displaced people face a high risk of rape and other sexual violence, Amnesty International said today after returning from a research trip to the country.

The organization's researchers spoke with dozens of women and girls who felt at risk of sexual violence. Some of them, one as young as 13, had recently been raped. Most victims said they hadn't reported the attacks to the police because they feared being stigmatized and had little confidence in the authorities' ability or will to investigate.

"Women and children, who have already been forced to flee their homes because of the armed conflict and drought, now face the additional trauma of living under threat of sexual attack," said Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International's Senior Crisis Adviser.

"Many of the women we met live in shelters made of cloth and plastic sheeting which provide no security at all; in the context of the lawlessness which generally prevails in the country and the lack of security in these camps, it is hardly surprising that these horrific abuses are occurring."

One 14-year-old girl living in a displacement camp in Mogadishu was raped in the shelter where she lives as she was recovering from an epilepsy attack in late August.

She told Amnesty International:

"I woke up to find a man who was undressing me and I tried to scream but he grabbed me by the throat and so I could not scream. My cousin (aged 4) woke up and he told her to be silent. He did his business and then ran away."

The girl's grandmother told Amnesty International the neighbours who had been woken by the girl's scream saw a man aged about 30, wearing a kikoi (a traditional loin cloth) and carrying a bakor (a walking stick with a hand-grip), leaving the shelter and running away.

Another woman, a mother of five, told Amnesty International that she managed to fight off an armed man who entered her shelter and tried to rape her in early August. During the struggle she sustained gunshot wounds to both her hands. She was three months pregnant at the time of the attack and lost her baby as a result.

Though camp residents went to the police to report the attempted rape, the police failed to investigate.

Investigations, prosecutions and convictions for rape and other forms of sexual violence are rare in Somalia, so survivors have little incentive to file complaints with the police. Some women have faced

additional abuse and stigmatization if they do report the crime.

Police practices in Somalia often compound the stigma associated with survivors of sexual violence who can be subjected to insensitive and intrusive questioning. Few female police officers are available to deal with sexual assault cases in spite of their frequency.

According to the United Nations, there were at least 1,700 cases of rape in IDP (internally displaced persons) settlements in 2012 in Somalia, with at least 70 per cent of these being carried out by armed men wearing government uniforms. Nearly a third of the survivors are reported to be under the age of 18.

“The inability and unwillingness of the Somali authorities to investigate these crimes and bring the attackers to justice leaves survivors of sexual violence even more isolated and contributes to a climate of impunity in which attackers know they can get away with these crimes,” said Donatella Rovera.

“Concrete action must be taken to ensure justice for the victims and to send a strong and unequivocal message that sexual violence cannot and will not be tolerated.”

Two decades of conflict and periodic drought have forced hundreds of thousands of Somalis from their homes into sprawling, overcrowded camps for displaced people where security is lacking and humanitarian conditions are dire. Though security conditions have improved, there are still over a million people displaced within Somalia today.