

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

AFR 52/005/2009  
19 June 2009

## Somalia: End indiscriminate shelling in Mogadishu

Amnesty International today reiterated its calls to all parties to the armed conflict in Somalia to immediately end indiscriminate attacks that cause civilian deaths and injuries, following the killing of at least 13 worshippers when a mosque was hit by a mortar on 17 June in Mogadishu.

It is not clear whether armed opposition groups or pro-government forces were responsible for the mortar attack. All parties to the conflict use mortar and artillery shelling as methods of warfare, area weapons which cannot accurately target military objectives in densely populated civilian areas. Entire districts of Mogadishu have been repeatedly shelled and destroyed with the intensification of conflict since the beginning of 2007.

The repeated use of mortars in densely populated areas of Mogadishu and other indiscriminate attacks by all parties to the conflict is evidence that they are all violating international humanitarian law. While some parties to the conflict have expressed concern about the plight of civilians in Mogadishu, none has taken necessary and effective measures to spare the civilian population, including refraining from using mortar and artillery shelling.

The mosque, situated in the Karan district in northern Mogadishu, was reportedly hit at dusk, around 6pm, as worshippers were leaving after prayers. There was intense fighting on 17 June in other areas of Mogadishu, as pro-Transitional Federal Government (TFG) forces, reportedly reinforced by African Union troops, shelled positions of armed groups in the area of Bakara market with mortars and artillery. Five children were also killed in Hodan district as a mortar hit the balcony under which they were sheltering from the fighting.

This is the second time that a Mogadishu mosque has been hit by a mortar since the start of a military offensive by the Hisbul Islam and Al-Shabab armed groups against pro-Transitional Federal Government forces on 7 May this year. On 10 May, a mortar hit a mosque near the Presidential Palace, killing at least 14 worshippers, during attacks by armed groups on government positions.

Since the beginning of this offensive, particularly in the capital Mogadishu, dozens of civilians have been killed and several hundred wounded. Up to 122,000 civilians are displaced on the outskirts of the city, according to UN figures. Those displaced included some 40,000 who had recently returned to Mogadishu, hoping for better security with the appointment of a new President for the TFG, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. Tens of thousands of civilians are said to still be trapped in Mogadishu, unable to flee because of insecurity and lack of money to pay for transport. Hospitals in Mogadishu have reported being overwhelmed by the number of wounded in need of treatment. Insecurity has also further jeopardized the access of aid agencies to civilians.

The conflict is showing no sign of abating. Yesterday the TFG Minister of Security was killed in a suicide car attack, claimed by al-Shabab, on the hotel where he was staying in Beletweyne, a

Somali city near the border with Ethiopia. 20 persons are said to have died in the attack, including several TFG officials.

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