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## **Somali Human Rights Day, Mogadishu, 22 July 2007**

### **Message from Amnesty International**

Amnesty International sends its warm greetings again this year to human rights defenders and their supporters in Mogadishu on the occasion of Somali Human Rights Day 2007.

We congratulate Dr Ismail Jumaale Human Rights Organization (DIJHRO) for organizing today's event in Mogadishu, together with the Peace and Human Rights Network (PHRN) and other civil society organizations and activists. We welcome this important yearly event which, despite all the problems and dangers, brings together people from all walks of life to share their human rights commitment. It is a noble cause to work and campaign, independently of political considerations, for the whole range of human rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These include women's rights, press freedom, minority rights, justice and the rights of people who have been displaced by conflict or forcibly evicted from their homes and livelihoods.

In the past year there have been major political upheavals in most parts of Somalia including heavy fighting in Mogadishu. There has been enormous violence against civilians in numerous incidents, particularly in March and April this year, when international humanitarian law - the Geneva Conventions - was repeatedly and severely violated. Amnesty International sends its condolences to the families of over 1,000 civilian men, women and children killed in indiscriminate shelling and mortar attacks in civilian areas. It extends sympathies to many more injured in the armed conflict and hundreds of thousands forced to flee from their homes. Sadly, this violence and displacement still continue. Members of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) have been assassinated and members of the African Union peacekeeping force (AMISOM) have also been killed. Civilians, however, have been the main victims.

Amnesty International calls on the TFG, Ethiopian troops supporting it and their opponents, to fully respect international humanitarian law and human rights. They should take all possible measures to protect civilians and not deliberately endanger them or cause deaths and injuries by indiscriminate attacks. They should assist and not obstruct humanitarian aid or prevent it going to the needy. They should not illegally detain prisoners or subject them to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, unfair trials or the

death penalty.

There are believed to be hundreds or more people currently detained secretly and incommunicado without charge or trial in Mogadishu allegedly for security reasons. A grossly unfair summary military trial led swiftly to two people being executed in public on 5 July. Amnesty International calls on the TFG to make every effort to establish an independent and effective justice system as soon as possible which would set the standard for replacing the past rule of the gun with the rule of law.

Amnesty International demands that there should be “no impunity” for members of any armed group, whether pro-TFG or anti-TFG, who have perpetrated war crimes, crimes against humanity or gross human rights abuses.

To human rights defenders gathered here and others elsewhere, we say we welcome the work you are doing to campaign for human rights, reconciliation and justice. You often face conditions of extreme danger, and heavy risks and insecurity even at the best of times. The legitimate rights of human rights defenders to advocate and work for justice are enshrined in international human rights law, and must be respected by all parties in Somalia. We urge those involved in the National Reconciliation Congress to listen to human rights activists and the universal message that there can be no lasting peace without human rights.

I cannot close without saying again that we were extremely saddened by the murder of a well-known human rights defender in Mogadishu on 14 March. As you all know, Isse Abdi Isse, the founder and director of KISIMA Peace and Development Association in Kismayu, was the victim of an execution-style killing while visiting Mogadishu for a UNICEF training. Like all previous killings of activists, the perpetrators, who may well be known, have not so far been brought to justice.

Finally, I send the best wishes of Amnesty International for your commemoration of Somali Human Rights Day 2007 and for a better year to come.

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