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SOMALI HUMAN RIGHTS DAY, 22 JULY 2004

Amnesty International once again sends its warm greetings to the Somali human rights community on the occasion of Somali Human Rights Day 2004.

We welcome and recognize the valuable efforts of Somali human rights defenders in all areas who work under the most difficult circumstances. To those gathered for the event in Mogadishu today; to the Dr. Ismail Jumale Human Rights Organization and other human rights groups in Somalia; to the activists attending a NOVIB human rights workshop in Nairobi today where Amnesty International is also represented; and to Somalis in the refugee diaspora who are committed to human rights – we send this message of support at this critical stage in the history of Somalia.

As the Somali National Reconciliation Conference in Nairobi reaches the final stage this month of a difficult and lengthy peace process to form an inclusive Transitional Federal Government and end 13 years of state collapse and factional violence, Amnesty International urges all Somali parties and individuals to make human rights a central element throughout the five-year transitional period.

The establishment of a new transitional government must make a real and immediate difference: it must mark an end to the constant pattern of arbitrary killings, kidnappings, rape and looting in many areas, often committed by faction militias with total impunity. The role of independent and active human rights defenders must be recognized and respected as vital to help preserve peace and security, and build a human rights culture to protect all citizens.

Somali citizens – particularly the vulnerable categories of women, minorities and children – must be given basic security and protection of their rights and freedoms. Even if there has been no accountability so far for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the past, new abuses must not be permitted under a new government. Those entrusted the responsibilities of government in the transitional period should make a clear and public commitment to promote and protect human rights. New conflicts between local communities, clans or regions must not be allowed to bring new violence and abuses, which would severely impact on the restoration of the state and progress towards the rule of law and justice for all.

Amnesty International is also appealing to the international community to give firm support for human rights and reconstruction in Somalia. But above all, it is for Somalis themselves to assert their human rights and make a better future for themselves and their children.

In solidarity and with our best wishes,

Michael Hammer,
Director, Africa Program