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Somalia: Security and protection crisis continues despite peace deal

Somalia still faces serious security challenges with far-reaching implications for the civilian population, despite the conclusion of a UN-facilitated peace process that culminated in an agreement between an alliance of opposition parties and the Transitional Federal Government to establish the Government of National Unity.

The peace agreement led to the election in Djibouti of a new president for Somalia by Somali parliamentarians in January 2009, and also to the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from the country. However, despite the initial optimism, opposition groups and radical Islamist groups that control most of Somalia's South-Central Region have refused to recognise the new government and continue to wage war to dislodge it.

Despite UN agencies reporting the return of significant number of internally displaced people (IDPs) to Mogadishu from February to April, fresh fighting there in May has led thousands to flee again. Elsewhere, people are being displaced as fighting continues between Islamist groups that support the new government and those who oppose it. IDPs continue to face hardships and humanitarian agencies face limits to their access due to the targeting of their staff. The UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia has also voiced concerns about the funding situation.

Map of Somalia



Source: United Nations Cartographic Section
 More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

Background

Up to 1.3 million Somalis remained displaced in early 2009 following many years of conflict in the country. Almost 800,000 of them had been displaced since December 2006, when the Ethiopian government, with the backing of the USA, ordered troops into Somalia in support of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The Ethiopian government aimed to counter the expanding influence of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which it feared would support insurgency groups in the Somali Region of Ethiopia (Chatham House, April 2007). The American government saw the ICU as an arm of Al Qaeda in Somalia and reportedly suspected that some ICU members were harbouring non-Somali terror suspects in the capital Mogadishu (Chatham House, April 2007, p.5).

Conflict involving these forces and also established and new insurgent Islamist militias subsequently escalated in Mogadishu and in much of the South-Central Region. This round of fighting was the most intense since the civil war of the early 1990s; up to 16,000 civilians were killed in 2007 and 2008 (Reuters, 10 December 2008) and thousands more injured, with human rights violations committed by all sides in the conflict. At the end of December 2008, up to 1.3 million Somalis remained displaced and some 40 per cent of the population was in need of humanitarian aid.

In January 2009 in neighbouring Djibouti, the TFG and one wing of the opposition grouping known as the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia (ARS-Djibouti) signed a peace agreement that gave birth to the Government of National Unity (GNU),

and Somali parliamentarians elected a new president at UN-sponsored peace talks (BBC, 31 January 2009; UN News, 31 January 2009; Economist, 26 February 2009) that also culminated in the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops from Somalia (BBC, 13 January 2009). However, despite these developments, fighting between government forces and opposition groups continued (IRIN, 12 May 2009; VOA, 12 May 2009; BBC 13 May 2009). Several armed groups including Al-Shabaab and Hizb-al-Islamiya vowed to fight on after the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops, and even target troops of the small African Union peace-keeping force known as AMISOM (BBC News, 24 April 2009; VOA, 8 May 2009).

IDP numbers and new displacement

While it has been difficult to gather reliable data because of insecurity, UNHCR estimates of January 2009 indicated that some 350,000 IDPs were settled in the Afgooye corridor, some 30 kilometres south-west of Mogadishu, in very difficult conditions. Other areas hosting larger numbers of IDPs included Somaliland, with 80,000; Puntland, with 100,000; Galgadud, with 120,000; Banadir, with 280,000; Hiraan, with 35,000; and Gedo, with 30,000 (UNHCR, January 2009).

Even though some 70,000 people returned to Mogadishu between January and April 2009 because of the lull in fighting, about 40,000 people fled again due to fresh fighting in May 2009 between forces loyal to the GNU and opposition groups which claimed the lives of more than 135 people (UNHCR, 20 May 2009). According to a UNHCR spokesperson, among the newly displaced were families that had recently returned home following a period of relative peace in Mogadishu.

The rate of displacement has rapidly increased as the fighting has escalated.

Many of those displaced from Mogadishu have headed towards the Afgooye area; others have moved to other parts of the city. The most badly affected areas are the north Mogadishu neighbourhoods of Yaaqshiid, Wardhiigleey and Hawl Wadaag (UNHCR, 15 May 2009).

Other reports have documented factional fighting leading to displacement in other parts of the country. According to the ICRC, conflict coupled with poor security conditions and widespread lawlessness has continued to lead to displacement of civilians (ICRC, 24 February 2009). The report claims that in central Galgadud region, several thousand people had to flee their homes earlier in 2009 because of heavy fighting. In January 2009, fighting between the Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a faction and the radical Al-Shabaab group led to the displacement of up to 80,000 people in central Galgadud, and made it difficult to deliver humanitarian assistance (IRIN, 5 January 2009). In April 2009, fighting between a faction allied to the ICU clashed with the Islamist Hizbul-Islam faction and led to displacement and loss of lives in Beletweyne (Garoweonline, 20 April 2009). The fighting in Beltweyne also greatly hindered humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations (UN News, 11 March 2009; IRIN, 21 April 2009).

Meanwhile, in the self-proclaimed autonomous region of Somaliland, clan fighting over land in Satiile settlement displaced hundreds of people in April 2009 (IRIN, 8 April 2009).

Humanitarian situation

Concerned about the escalating conflict and the dire humanitarian situation, aid organisations working in Somalia have warned of a renewed humanitarian emergency and difficulties in accessing fleeing civilians. A Refugees International report stated in April 2009 that Somalia remained the site of the world's worst humanitarian crisis (Refugees International, 3 April 2009).

In January 2009, a UN food security analysis found that more than three million Somalis (almost a third of the population) would remain dependent on humanitarian assistance for the whole of 2009 (UN News, 11 March 2009).

Somalia reportedly also has the highest levels of malnutrition in the world, with up to 300,000 children acutely malnourished (IRIN, 5 December 2008; ICRC, 24 February 2009). A significant percentage of malnourished children live on the streets and are separated from their parents. Meanwhile, according to UNICEF, more than 70 per cent of the population lack reliable access to safe water.

Instability caused by hostilities, abductions and fear of conflict continue to hinder delivery of vital humanitarian aid (UN News, 11 March 2009). The desperate situation of IDPs and others has forced the UN World Food Programme (WFP) to seek protection from Al-Shabaab in order to improve their access to food. According to WFP's Country Director in Somalia, the risk that 1.5 million or more people will die within six months "is very, very real" (Reuters, 14 May 2009).

Humanitarian assistance to IDPs has continued to be affected by the targeting of

humanitarian staff. In Merca, WFP had to halt food distribution following the killing of two of its staff in the town in January, which led IDP rations to be cut to almost nothing (IRIN, 6 March 2009). MSF-Holland was forced to suspend programmes in Galkayo because of threats to its staff (Garoweonline, 1 March 2009).

National response

The GNU and regional authorities have so far not responded to the needs of people currently displaced, although the new president committed to do so in an interview with IRIN on 12 February 2009. This is partly because of resource constraints and partly because the government is not in control of large areas of south and central Somalia. Indeed, where the government is present, as in parts of Mogadishu, returning IDPs have lacked access to medical care and shelter (IRIN, 14 April 2009; UNHCR, 14 April 2009; UN News, 15 April 2009).

A number of national and community-based organisations have provided assistance by partnering with international organisations or local businesses. The Somalia Red Crescent has offices in most parts of the country, and the Elman Peace and Human Rights Organisation has monitored and recorded human rights violations by both the government and the insurgents. However, their efforts have not had a significant impact.

International response

According to the Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia, the response to the \$900 million Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) appeal for Somalia had been “disappointing,” with only 35 per cent of it met

by May 2009 (UN News, 12 May 2009). The appeal seeks funding support for some 200 projects led by 14 UN agencies and 71 international and national NGOs.

Similarly, the CAP for 2008 was underfunded by 30 per cent. Throughout 2008, humanitarian operations struggled to address the widening crisis and support the growing number of vulnerable people in the country (UN News, 1 December 2008). Nonetheless, agencies distributed 84,000 tons of food to over two million people from June to August 2008 (UN News, 19 November 2008).

Peace Process

The UN, through its Nairobi-based Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), has been engaged in facilitating the peace process between the TFG and ARS-Djibouti since early 2008. Despite the peace agreement of early 2009, forces opposed to the new government have vowed to continue the conflict and also target the small AMISOM force in Mogadishu. True to their threat, these groups have engaged the government and AMISOM in regular battles (VOA, 11 and 12 May; BBC News, 24 April and 13 May 2009).

The GNU has promised to reach out to those groups opposed to it and has even introduced Sharia Law to appease them. However, as of May 2009, no agreement has been reached between insurgents and the government to end hostilities and as a result, fighting, loss of lives, and displacement continue unabated.

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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