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Somalia: Fear of renewed displacement as rise of Islamists heightens tensions

The take-over by the Islamist Court Union (ICU) of Mogadishu and large parts of Somalia's centre and south have added a high degree of unpredictability to an already very precarious political situation. The effect on humanitarian activities for over two million vulnerable people, including an estimated 400,000 people internally displaced by drought and conflict remains very uncertain. The internationally-recognised Transitional Federal Government lacks authority even in the town of Baidoa, where it has been based since February 2006. It has requested regional organisations to send in a Peace Support Mission – a plan fiercely opposed by the ICU.

Somalia is still suffering heavily from the effects of the 2006 drought, with malnutrition rates extremely high in many areas of the south. Renewed conflict would have a devastating effect on any small recovery achievements made so far. Over the past half year, the international community made some small progress in accessing central and southern Somalia. Supported by national NGOs, they managed to provide drought relief to some areas. But overall, the living conditions of IDPs have not improved over the past 15 years. Effective coordination of the international community's activities and the negotiation of humanitarian access remain of crucial importance. Somalia being one of four pilot countries for implementing the cluster approach as part of the UN's humanitarian reform process, special attention is being given to coordination activities at Nairobi and field level, and the inclusion on an equal footing of national and international NGOs. A credible and well-coordinated approach to humanitarian activities may convince donors to provide more funding to agencies and NGOs – a crucial precondition for tackling the enormous humanitarian challenges in Somalia.

Map of Somalia



Source: United Nations Cartographic Section, July 2004

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Background and political development

The rapid takeover by the Islamic Court Union (ICU) of Mogadishu and large parts of Somalia's centre and south in June 2006 has taken most Somali and international actors and observers by surprise. The potentially considerable national and regional implications of this new power balance are very difficult to foresee.

The ICU initially brought some stability to the parts of south and central Somalia under its control, after 15 years of state collapse, which had started with the 1991 rebellion against General Mohamed Siad Barre's 21-year dictatorship. An ill-judged UN peacekeeping mission from 1993 to 1995 (UNOSOM II) ended in fiasco, contributing to the segmentation of the Somali population and lasting discrediting of the UN system.

In 2004, after 13 failed peace initiatives, a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Parliament were established in Nairobi, Kenya, with Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, a former warlord and leader of the self-declared autonomous region of Puntland, as president. In June 2005, the new parliament and government returned to Somalia, where they divided between Jowhar and Mogadishu until reuniting in Baidoa in February 2006 (UNSC, 20 June 2006).

While the transitional government and parliament began constructive discussions, events in Mogadishu during the first half of 2006 created a completely new power structure. On 4 June 2006, after over three months of intermittent fighting against warlords grouped in the

Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism (ARPCT), allegedly backed by the United States, the ICU took control of almost all of Mogadishu and substantial parts of southern Somalia, including Jowhar. After a very brief rapprochement between the TFG and the ICU, marked by formal mutual recognition and the signing of a ceasefire agreement in Khartoum on 14 June 2006, relations between the two groups became increasingly tense, with each side accusing the other of not respecting the agreement. With the nomination of the radical Sheikh Dahir Aweys as head of the ICU, sidelining the moderate ICU speaker Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad, the ICU defied the first general impression that they would apply a moderate interpretation of Islamic Sharia law. This leadership arrangement may also indicate ideological tensions within the ranks of the ICU, which may erupt in ICU-internal conflict in the near future (BBC, on Garowe Online, 9 July 2006). In September, the ICU announced that they rejected the Transitional Federal Charter and intended to rule Somalia under Sharia law (Shabelle News, 7 September 2006).

The African Union and the regional Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) support the TFG's plea to deploy 8,000 troops on a Peace Support Mission to Somalia (IGASOM) by the end of September, contingent on a partial suspension of the already porous 1992 UN arms embargo (IRIN, 14 September 2006). The involvement of foreign troops is fiercely opposed by the ICU and a large part of the Somali population in the ICU-controlled areas. Most observers fear that revising the embargo might legitimise and increase the already heavy

inflow of illegal arms, with Ethiopia supplying the TFG and Eritrea believed to be supporting the ICU (ICG, 10 August 2006; UNSC, 4 May 2006). Ethiopian troops are reported to have entered Somalia, ready to fight back any ICU military offensive around Baidoa and Galkayo (UNSC, 4 May 2006).

In the last days of September 2006, the situation became increasingly unstable. ICU militia took over the southern port city of Kismayo, allegedly to guard it against foreign forces – while hundreds of Ethiopian troops were seen moving into Baidoa, in support of the TFG (IRIN, 25 September 2006; Mail and Guardian, 25 September 2006). An assassination attempt on Interim President Yusuf on 18 September, and the killing of an Italian nurse one day earlier in Mogadishu prompted the UN to relocate its staff from south and central Somalia.

Puntland and Somaliland

Puntland, in the north-east of Somalia, declared itself an autonomous region in 1998, under the leadership of Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, the current president of Somalia. While the region is considered more secure than south and central Somalia, the political situation remains tense, adding to the constant threat of natural disasters such as drought and floods. Urban migration of IDPs and impoverished pastoralists has put considerable strain on Puntland's towns. Bossaso has become infamous for being the hub from which thousands of Somalis and Ethiopians try to make their perilous way across the Strait of Aden into Yemen (UNHCR, 1 March 2006).

The Republic of Somaliland in the north-west declared its independence from So-

malia in 1991 but has not been recognised internationally. Somaliland has been the most successful in establishing peace and moving towards reconstruction. It has its own constitution and conducted presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2005.

Somaliland has reintegrated a part of the almost one million returned refugees from Siad Barre's repression against a rebel movement and Somaliland's civilian population in the late 1980s. But many returnees still live in squalid makeshift settlements in urban areas alongside IDPs. Combating poverty remains a great challenge for the Somaliland authorities, and the social services, especially regarding health and education, are scarce and expensive, and thus do not reach the poor and minorities, including IDPs. National legislation regarding IDPs is still in preparation. It is unclear whether, in line with its claim for independence, the legislation will consider people displaced from south and central Somalia as refugees or IDPs. It is also not clear what the operational implication would be either way.

Tensions between Somaliland and Puntland over the disputed regions of Sool and Sanaag are ongoing, in the absence of a political solution (UNSC, 20 June 2006, p.6).

Numbers and new displacements in 2006

Since the 1970s, Somalia has drifted from one emergency to another: civil and inter-state wars, fragmentation, repression and famine. The current conflict, which has claimed up to half a million

lives, has centred on control over power and resources, notably land, water, the livestock trade and aid, following the collapse of the central government in 1991. Warlords have deliberately displaced people from other clans, looted their belongings and destroyed their livelihoods and infrastructures. The southern farming minorities have been worst affected by these practices (UN, 18 November 2004, p.9). At the height of fighting in 1992, up to two million people were internally displaced and another million had fled to neighbouring countries (UNICEF, 10 December 2003). The most ravaged regions are the southern and central areas and the main ports of Mogadishu and Kismayo.

Those having fled to Somaliland and Puntland have mingled with the urban poor and returning refugees. Occasional settlement surveys indicate much fluctuation among the population (OCHA, 20 June 2005). The vast majority of IDPs in Mogadishu fled drought and inter-clan fighting in rural areas of south and central Somalia (UNICEF, October 2005).

During the first three months of 2006, hundreds of thousands of people, mostly pastoralists, were displaced by drought. Prompted by the drought, the UN set up a population tracking system, which currently has 25 partner organisations from both UN and NGOs. In March alone, the movement of some 300,000 people was observed. New IDP settlements developed around Wajid, which turned into an important centre for relief delivery. After a good rainy season in April and May, many displaced have started to return home, to cultivate their land or restock their herds (OCHA May 2006 update; UNSC, 20 June 2006, p.10). But UN

agencies caution that the long-term effects of the drought are not over, and that livelihoods have severely depleted, which will mean aid dependency until 2007 (FSAU, 25 August 2006).

The violent fighting in Mogadishu claimed hundreds of lives and forced tens of thousands to flee their homes, adding their number to the estimated 250,000 IDPs already living in Mogadishu. As fighting intensified, around 20,000 people left Mogadishu, moving to towns in the region. Many of them did not receive any assistance and opted to return to Mogadishu after the fighting subsided (OCHA, May 2006 update; UNSC, 20 June 2006, p.9). Over 22,000 Somalis have crossed the borders to neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia (OCHA, August 2006). According to UNHCR, Somalis kept reaching Dadaab's refugee camps in Kenya throughout September, fearing a renewed outbreak of violence in the near future (Xinhua, 16 September 2006). Those movements are the most important ones in ten years, stretching Dadaab's capacities to the limits (Reuters, 29 September 2006).

Exact figures on how many people fled to Somaliland and Puntland are not available, but new arrivals have been noted in Somaliland, which already hosted an estimated 40,000 IDPs, and Puntland where up to 70,000 IDPs lived already before the recent outbreak of the violence in South and Central Somalia, with over 28,000 in Bossaso, and important numbers in Garowe and Galkayo (OCHA, 23 August and 28 August 2006). The Puntland authorities started stemming the high number of people arriving on its grounds, by cracking down on human smuggling activities to Yemen, and by

announcing it would not allow southern Somalis on its territory anymore, for fear that they would bring instability to Puntland (IRIN, 13 September 2006; Shabelle News, 26 September 2006).

Clan- and drought-related tensions in the extremely food-insecure areas of Galgaduud and south Mudug have created large concentrations of IDPs and disrupted regional and inter-regional trade (FSAU, 25 August 2006).

The total number of displaced persons in need of assistance is estimated at 400,000. This estimate includes drought- and conflict IDPs. A current profiling project should shed better light on actual numbers and the IDPs' protection needs.

Protection issues

Due to very limited humanitarian access, most IDPs have largely been left to their own devices, and documentation on living conditions and protection issues remains scarce. Real improvement has not happened, due to growing numbers of IDPs in settlements, persisting insecurity, insufficient international presence and chronic under-funding of humanitarian and long-term recovery and reconstruction programmes.

IDP protection continues to be a major gap in the operational response, despite well-functioning inter-agency protection coordination mechanisms at Nairobi level. Problems of implementation are mostly due to the enormous needs of basic services, the extremely difficult operating environment and the continuous lack of experienced professionals on the ground (IDD, 16 June 2006).

Nutrition and health

Somalia will keep grappling with the effects of the 2006 drought until well into 2007, and a possible outbreak of a wider conflict would have a devastating effect on the already extremely precarious humanitarian situation. In total, 425,000 people are in a Humanitarian Emergency, and 880,000 in an Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis, as defined by the Somali Food Security Analysis Unit. Gedo, Middle Juba, Bay and Bakool are particularly affected by extremely high malnutrition rates. With livelihoods nearly collapsed in many areas, survival has become very difficult for many affected by the drought. The food security situation in the Central Region is deteriorating, leading to localised conflict. Somaliland and Puntland have recovered somewhat but remain in a state of Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis (FSAU, 25 August 2006; FSAU, June 2006).

Morbidity, mainly from diarrhoeal diseases (due to consumption of unsafe water) and malaria, increased in many places in south and central Somalia, and particularly in Bay region. Cases of measles were identified in several sites. Humanitarian food assistance, therapeutic feeding and supplementary feeding are meant to mitigate the precarious nutrition situation. The large majority of IDPs in Somalia do not have access to safe water and sanitation (OCHA, August 2006).

Shelter

Most IDPs face extremely poor and crowded living conditions in slum settlements, often paying rent or occupying public buildings, facing the threat of eviction. Humanitarian help in those settlements remains, at best, rudimentary, and many slum dwellers rely exclusively

on their own survival skills. Fires regularly leave thousands of IDPs homeless (IRIN, 10 May 2006). Efforts are under way in Bossaso to take advantage of the reconstruction process to reduce the risk of fire by using better building material and de-congesting the settlements (OCHA, August 2006, IDP factsheet).

Education

With around 25 per cent, primary school enrolment in Somalia is the lowest in the world, with only about one third of the pupils being girls. The attendance rate of IDPs is even lower, as most schools are private and many parents cannot afford the fees. The entire school system collapsed during the war and re-building it is difficult. Over the past few years, education has been one of the most chronically under-funded sectors in the Somalia UN Consolidated Appeal (CAP). UNICEF warns of a radicalisation of Somali youth, who may get drawn into militia activities as a way to make a living (Reuters, 21 September 2006).

Legal protection

In the absence of a functioning national judiciary system, human rights abuses, in particular against displaced members of minority clans – especially the Bantu – and women are rampant and often not accounted for. Traditional justice systems (*xeer*) and sharia law are recognised as legitimate and as mostly well-functioning. But while they may work well in the traditional context of a clan society, there is a risk that they become flawed where people cannot count on the traditional justice of their own clans or where minority clans are too weak to provide protection to their clan members.

An initiative involving traditional leaders in Somaliland concluded that women, children, minorities and foreigners were not sufficiently protected by traditional justice (DRC, 21 August 2004). This has direct negative implications for the majority of IDPs who can no longer count on their clan support. The Hargeisa-based Protection Working Group, chaired by UNHCR, is currently one of the few mechanisms in Somalia trying to assess and respond to violence against women (IDD, 16 June 2006). It remains to be seen if Islamic Courts, which so far have ruled within clearly defined clan contexts, will be able to impose a more generally applicable Sharia law, and whether their interpretation of Sharia will provide more protection to minorities and women.

Property issues, return and resettlement

Control over power and resources, notably land and water, is the main driving force behind conflict in Somalia, with strong clans having taken over fertile lands in the south and evicted the legitimate owners. Unresolved property issues are thus one of the core obstacles to IDP returns and must become a fundamental component of any meaningful reconciliation and reconstruction process, probably engaging traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. The general absence of land records will make this process particularly difficult (Interview, DRC, Nairobi, 6 September 2006; IRIN, 2 August 2005).

Property issues during displacement pose important restrictions on IDPs' possibilities of building sustainable livelihoods.

Since land tends to belong to specific clans, it is almost impossible for displaced people to own land. Renting a plot is expensive and insecure. IDPs, at the whim of landowners or gate-keepers, often face eviction from rented plots or from public (and increasingly private) buildings, especially in south Somalia.

Most IDPs live in or on the outskirts of towns. Therefore, the issue of land tenure for IDPs is largely related to urban planning. In Bossaso, a pilot project chaired by UN HABITAT focuses on moving small numbers of particularly vulnerable IDPs from overcrowded settlements to lots in allocated areas integrated into the growing city (UN OCHA, 19 May 2006). In Somaliland, the land problem is exacerbated by the need to absorb almost one million returned refugees. Plans for IDP resettlement within Hargeisa are being discussed with the local authorities and land has been identified. Permanent resettlement appears to be offered to Somaliland IDPs, as opposed to temporary solutions for IDPs from south and central Somalia (E-mail NRC, 21 September 2006).

In south and central Somalia, displacement is often of relatively short duration. The most recent fighting in Mogadishu in particular did not cause much long-term displacement. However, those people who do decide to flee to Puntland or Somaliland tend to spend years or decades in displacement and returns are very rare because of the continuing very difficult humanitarian situation in their places of origin. Therefore, efforts by the international community to find solutions for the displaced focus mainly on local integration or small-scale resettlement, for

example by helping pastoralists and farmers resume their traditional lifestyle.

Humanitarian access

Due to widespread insecurity, the international presence in south and central Somalia remains weak and inconsistent, and highly insufficient considering the enormous needs of the population, whose situation, by and large, has not improved over the past 15 years. In the absence of a functioning government, the UN and national and international NGOs are often the only service providers and interact directly with clan leaders and local authorities. Especially in the south, in a context of ever-changing local power structures and clan affiliations, negotiating access is difficult.

Nevertheless, international humanitarian activities in south and central Somalia have somewhat increased during the first half of 2006, due to the urgent need to bring assistance to the drought-affected populations, and efforts were made to convince local leaders to allow for humanitarian access (UNSC, 20 June 2006, p.7). Plans by international agencies to extend access to Mogadishu had to be put on hold in September with the staff relocation from south and central Somalia ensuing the suicide attack on President Abdullahi Yusuf (Shabelle News, 24 September 2006).

Access to Somaliland and Puntland is relatively safe, with the exception of the disputed areas of Sool and Sanaag regions. Because both Puntland and Somaliland insist on being the sole access point to those areas, operational delays

and increased expenses can occur (UNSC, 20 June 2006, p.6).

National and international response

There is no centrally coordinated national response to internal displacement. The TFG has no power basis to speak of and is unable to take on its duty to provide protection and assistance to its population. Instead, national and local authorities regularly criticise the lack of assistance provided by the international community. Somali NGOs and businessmen provide very important localised assistance.

Since the withdrawal of UNOSOM in 1995, the international community working in Somalia has been based in Nairobi. The UN's operational presence has been fairly consistent in Somaliland and Puntland, but remains sparse in south and central Somalia. UN agencies make a continuous effort to increase the number of field staff and employed, as of August 2006, over 550 national staff and around 75 internationals within Somalia. Operations are being maintained largely through national staff. OCHA organised coordination meetings in a few sub-offices (OCHA, March 2006). ICRC has maintained access to most of the southern regions, through continued negotiations with local leaders (ICRC, 12 July 2006). Action Contre la Faim (ACF) continues to be operational with national staff in Mogadishu and since March 2006 in the area of Wajid (ACF, 30 June 2006). Concern Worldwide has its headquarters in Mogadishu. CARE International and Save the Children have numerous operations in Somalia. Médecins sans Fron-

tières has well-functioning operations in a number of places not covered by other NGOs or the UN (MSF, 2005).

Somalia is one of the four countries where the new cluster approach – a key element of the UN's humanitarian reform process – is formally being rolled out. This has led to the establishment, in January 2006, of a Nairobi-based Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), comprising seven UN agencies and seven NGOs and focusing on humanitarian aid. A parallel coordination structure exists within the Somalia Agencies Coordination Body (SACB), focusing on development aid. The streamlining of the two coordination bodies is ongoing.

Seven IASC clusters have been established – Protection, Health and Nutrition, Water and Sanitation, Agriculture and Livelihood, Food, Education, and Shelter. IDP Working Groups exist in Nairobi, Puntland (Bossaso and Garowe) and Somaliland (Hargeisa), but not yet in South and Central Somalia. As lead agency for the protection cluster, UNHCR has taken on a coordination and gaps analysis role with regard to the response to the internal displacement situation. In order for this approach to work, it was advised that UNHCR staff in Somalia must be well-trained to fully understand their cluster lead tasks (IDD, 16 June 2006).

The degree of coordination in Nairobi is at times not yet matched by similarly well-functioning coordination structures at field level. But such coordination will be required for the implementation of a number of current UN protection initiatives initiated in Nairobi, in line with the Joint IDP Strategy. The Population

Movement Tracking system, coordinated by UNHCR and engaging some 25 local NGOs, continuously monitors drought- and conflict-related movements, producing monthly updates. The first phase (desk study) of an IDP profiling project was successfully completed in August, with the actual profiling impending. A Protection Monitoring Network and a common advocacy strategy are being developed.

One big challenge remains effective and equitable collaboration between the UN and NGOs, as called for by the cluster approach. A large number of national and international NGOs operating in Somalia are organised in the NGO Consortium, but only very few engage with the UN on a coordination level, for example via the Protection and IDP Working Group, which is co-chaired by UNHCR and OCHA and forms the basis of the Protection Cluster. In many areas which the international community considers inaccessible, local NGOs provide aid to populations in need. While many of them could profit from capacity building, they already fulfil an essential protection role which the international community, in particular Novib (Oxfam), UNICEF and UNHCR, relies on and tries to support more (UNICEF, 7 July 2006).

A revised 2006 Regional CAP identified 2.1 million drought-affected people in need of assistance throughout 2006. As with earlier years, sectors providing long-term transitional interventions, such as education, economic recovery, infrastructure, justice and security, remained practically uncovered (IDMC, 10 January 2006). Such chronic under-funding is a serious obstacle to a successful reconciliation and reconstruction process in

Somalia (JNA, June 2006, p.27). Developing a credible early recovery strategy may be a way of encouraging donors to reconsider their current focus on short-term programmes and fund longer term CAP projects. The international community should develop real commitment to the recovery of Somalia, including through the CAP, and particularly in the relatively stable Puntland and Somaliland. In South and Central Somalia, its commitment should go beyond political motives of containing this highly instable region and focus on the humanitarian and human rights needs of the Somali population, to whatever extent possible given the volatile security situation. Without strengthened international commitment, it will be difficult for Somalia to emerge from its current state of instability and violence and for the Somali population to rebuild their lives shattered by years of conflict and drought.

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Somalia. The full country profile is available online [here](#).

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Note: All documents used in this overview are directly accessible on the Somalia [List of Sources](#) page of our website.

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

Media contact:

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 03

Email: jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701