
SOMALIA

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Population: 8.2 million (4.2 million under 18)

Government armed forces: not known

Compulsory recruitment age: information not available

Voluntary recruitment age: information not available

Voting age: 18¹

Optional Protocol: not applicable

Other treaties ratified: none applicable

The recruitment and use of child soldiers significantly increased, with thousands of child soldiers involved in all parties to hostilities which escalated in 2006. Intense fighting resulted in large numbers of civilian deaths and injuries, among them many children, and massive displacement.

Context

Somalia remained without a central government. The Transitional Federal Government (TFG), created from 2002–4 peace talks in Kenya, was based in Baidoa town in the west of the country. Although recognized by the UN it was unable to extend control beyond Baidoa or to establish itself in the capital, Mogadishu, until early 2007, following attacks by Ethiopian forces backing the TFG. The self-proclaimed Regional State of Puntland controlled the north-east and remained nominally part of Somalia. The TFG opposed the de facto independence of Somaliland in the north-west.² In September 2007 fighting broke out between Somaliland's armed force and Puntland's militia over an unresolved dispute relating to territory in Sool and Sanaag.³

The Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), a complex union of clan-based sharia courts, dominated by the Hawiye clan based in Mogadishu, emerged as the major force opposed to the TFG in 2006.⁴ The UIC seized control of Mogadishu in June 2006 after four months of fighting against the reportedly US-backed coalition of Mogadishu-based armed factions known as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT). The fighting disproportionately affected children, as much of it took place in residential areas of Mogadishu, although UIC control subsequently improved security in Mogadishu for a short period.⁵ The UIC subsequently extended its control over much of southern and central Somalia with the exception of Baidoa.⁶

In December 2006, Ethiopian government forces intervened in Somalia in support of the TFG and, with the backing of the US government, ousted

the UIC within a few days.⁷ In early January 2007 the United States announced that it had carried out an air strike against suspected terrorists with al-Qaeda links fighting alongside the UIC near Afmadow. The attacks reportedly resulted in civilian casualties, including children.⁸ Following the establishment of Ethiopian and TFG troops in Mogadishu in January 2007, attacks on Ethiopian and TFG forces by insurgent groups increased. In late March, Ethiopian forces launched a major offensive, using rocket bombardments and shelling of entire neighbourhoods to dislodge insurgent forces and occupy strategic locations. Hundreds of civilians died trying to flee or while trapped in their homes, and tens of thousands fled the city. Four days of heavy fighting ended with a brief ceasefire which broke down in late April, when Ethiopian forces launched a second major offensive to capture additional areas of north Mogadishu, again shelling and bombarding civilian neighbourhoods. The TFG declared victory on 26 April, but attacks by insurgent forces resumed within days.⁹

After the fall of the UIC, high levels of insecurity and criminal activity returned to southern and central Somalia. Hostilities continued, with Ethiopian forces and the TNG fighting insurgent groups, including remnants of the UIC. Some 1,200 civilians were killed and several thousand were injured between October 2006 and late 2007. An estimated 35 per cent of the victims were children.¹⁰ The TFG began to disarm UIC remnants and militias in Mogadishu in March 2007.¹¹ However, the security situation in Mogadishu deteriorated in April as anti-government groups began staging hit-and-run attacks, using improvised explosive devices and suicide bombings against the TFG and Ethiopian forces. The latter retaliated with indiscriminate shelling and rocket fire, much of which fell on residential areas of the city.¹²

The recruitment and use of children by all parties to the hostilities, including the TFG, the UIC, their allied militias, the ARPCT and various other clan militias, increased in 2006 and 2007.¹³ The rape of women and girls, including gang rape by soldiers and other militias in Mogadishu, was reportedly common.¹⁴

Between February and May 2007, 400,000 civilians fled the conflict in Mogadishu.¹⁵ As of October 2007 there were approximately 850,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Somalia as a result of the conflict and of severe drought and flooding in 2006.¹⁶ There were hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees in neighbouring countries, in particular in Ethiopia and Kenya.¹⁷ UN Security Council Resolution 1744 (2007) authorized an African Union peacekeeping Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and a first contingent of 1,100 Ugandan troops arrived in Mogadishu in March 2007. They came under repeated attack by anti-TFG militias.¹⁸ In July 2007 the African Union Peace and Security Council

decided to extend the AMISOM mission for a further six months.¹⁹

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

Lack of clarity over legal provisions and inadequate systems of birth registration made it difficult to establish the exact ages of those who were recruited into each territory's forces.²⁰ According to one media report, TFG officials said that recruitment for a new national army had started in many regions of the country in mid-2005. The deputy Defence Minister stated that recruits, to be drawn from all the country's regions, would be located at the military bases of Mahadaay, Abqaale, Buq-Goosaar, Ceel-Gaal, Luuq-Jeelow, Waajid and other camps in the Lower Juba region. Reports indicated that recruitment and encampment of recruits had started in Puntland, with recruits reporting to Abqaale military camp near Gaalkacyo. A recruitment exercise also reportedly began in Kismaayo.²¹ The Somaliland constitution contained no minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces, but there were no reports of recruitment of children.²² It was not known whether Puntland forces recruited or used children.

Transitional Federal Government (TFG)

The TFG acknowledged that it had children in its ranks. Credible photographic evidence and eyewitness reports of TFG child soldiers revealed children as young as 11 years of age at checkpoints and under-18s in military uniform patrolling Mogadishu airport in January 2007.²³ Following fighting between the TFG and the UIC in December 2006, reports were received of UIC child soldiers injured, killed or detained by the TFG.²⁴

Armed groups

Union of Islamic Courts (UIC)

The UIC comprised mainly members of the al-Shabaab (youth militants), a militia of 500–700 fighters, largely drawn from the Hawiye and Ogaden clans.²⁵ The UIC was responsible for significant levels of forcible recruitment of children in the latter part of 2006, declaring publicly their intention to recruit from schools. Children were recruited from schools in Mogadishu and the Hiran region. Headmasters from a variety of Mogadishu schools were reportedly called to meetings in September 2006 in which they were each required to commit a quota of 300–600 adolescent children to military training programs of up to six months.²⁶ After the UIC seized control of Mogadishu in June 2006, some children between the ages of 10 and 16

were forcibly recruited for military training by the UIC in Dabble, near Kismayo, in Mogadishu and Hiran regions.²⁷ There were reports that the UIC used child soldiers in recruiting efforts and rallies.²⁸ A large number of child soldiers were reportedly abandoned when the UIC fled Mogadishu in December 2006.²⁹

Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT)

During heavy fighting with the UIC in March to June 2006, the ARPCT recruited numerous children, some forcibly, into its ranks, both in Mogadishu and the Hiran region. The ARPCT recruited street children and children from schools for its militia.³⁰

Armed militias

By June 2007 it was estimated that there were 50,000–70,000 members of clan militia and other armed groups operating in Somalia.³¹ In mid-2006 the armed group led by Abdi Qeybidid and Musa Sudi Yalalow recruited children as young as 13 in Mogadishu. There were also reports of several children as young as seven in armed groups in Galgadud, Dusamareb.³² Boys as young as 14 or 15 participated in militia attacks, and many youths were members of criminal gangs known as *moryaan* (parasites).³³

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

In November 2005, Puntland authorities embarked on the first ever DDR program with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), but it was not known whether children were included.³⁴ In September 2006 the UN country team visited Mogadishu and raised the issue of child recruitment. The UIC responded positively, acknowledging that child recruitment should be halted, but there was no evidence of any action taken to that effect.³⁵

In February 2007 UNICEF offered to support the TFG in developing a plan for the demobilization of children from its forces. A response and follow up to this offer was pending by October 2007.³⁶ The issue of child soldiers was to be addressed as part of the UN task force on DDR in Somalia.³⁷

Developments

In December 2006 the UN Resident and Humanitarian Co-ordinator for Somalia formally reminded both the TFG and the UIC of their obligations to uphold international standards and laws concerning the recruitment of children into armed forces and groups, and to ensure the immediate release of any children.³⁸

In May 2007 the UN Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict in Somalia urged the TFG and UIC to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and to take necessary actions for the unconditional demobilization of all children. The report urged the TFG to take concrete steps to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol on involvement of children in armed conflict, and to halt the proliferation of small arms.³⁹

At a February 2007 ministerial meeting in Paris, representatives from Somalia and 58 other states endorsed the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups. The documents reaffirmed international standards and operational principles for protecting and assisting child soldiers and followed a wide-ranging global consultation jointly sponsored by the French government and UNICEF. At the meeting Somali government ministers requested assistance from the international community to address the problem of children in the TFG armed forces.⁴⁰

The UIC and the TFG were listed as parties recruiting or using children in situations of armed conflict in the December 2007 Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict.⁴¹

- 1 The Transitional Federal Charter of the Somali Republic, February 2004, www.mpil.de.
- 2 *Amnesty International Report 2007*; Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Shell-shocked: civilians under siege in Mogadishu*, August 2007.
- 3 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia, UN Doc. S/2007/658, 7 November 2007; confidential source, 2008.
- 4 International Crisis Group (ICG), "Can the Somali Crisis be Contained?", Africa Report No. 116, 10 August 2006.
- 5 HRW, above note 2.
- 6 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia, UN Doc. S/2007/259, 7 May 2007.
- 7 HRW, above note 2.
- 8 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 6.
- 9 HRW, above note 2.
- 10 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, A/62/609-S/2007/757, 21 December 2007.
- 11 HRW, above note 2; "Somalia: children, women most affected by fighting", IRIN, 12 January 2007.
- 12 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 6.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia, UN Doc. S/2007/658, 7 November 2007.

- 15 UNHCR News, "Renewed violence in Mogadishu sets thousands on the road once more", 20 July 2007, and "Thousands flee Mogadishu as fresh fighting erupts", 30 October 2007, www.unhcr.org.
- 16 United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Monthly Somalia Humanitarian Analysis Report for October 2007, 13 November 2007; UNCHR News, "Latest figures show 90,000 flee fighting in Mogadishu", 31 October 2007, www.unhcr.org.
- 17 UNHCR News, above note 16.
- 18 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia, UN Doc. S/2007/381, 25 June 2007.
- 19 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 14.
- 20 US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2006, Somalia, 6 March 2007, www.state.gov.
- 21 "Somalia: Start of new army recruitment", Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, 10 July 2005, www.kbc.co.ke.
- 22 US Department of State, above note 20.
- 23 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 6.
- 24 US Department of State, above note 20.
- 25 HRW, above note 2.
- 26 US Department of State, above note 20; confidential source, 2008.
- 27 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Developments in Somalia, www.un.org/children/conflict/english/somalia.html.
- 28 US Department of State, above note 20.
- 29 OCHA Somalia, IASC, Donors Summary of Meeting Held on 4 January 2007, <http://ochaonline.un.org>.
- 30 Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia, UN Doc. S/2006/418, 20 June 2006; Office of the Special Representative, above note 27.
- 31 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 18.
- 32 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 6.
- 33 US Department of State, above note 20.
- 34 UN OCHA, "Somalia: Puntland factsheet August 2006", 28 August 2006, www.reliefweb.int.
- 35 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 6.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 18.
- 38 Monthly report of the Secretary-General on Somalia, UN Doc. S/2007/115, 28 February 2007.
- 39 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 6.
- 40 "Government calls for assistance to rehabilitate child soldiers", IRIN, 2 February 2007.
- 41 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 10.