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Somalia: Armed groups must end threats and attacks on humanitarian workers

Amnesty International today condemned the recent threats against humanitarian workers in Somalia made by Muqtar Robow Abu Mansur, a leader and spokesperson of Al-Shabab.

Al-Shabab is an armed group, once connected to the Islamic Courts Union that is now in conflict with the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia and the Ethiopian military forces supporting them.

On Thursday 8 May 2008, Muqtar Robow was reported in Somali press as saying that Al Shabab “will kill American citizens in Somalia, even if they are journalists and aid workers”.

This threat was issued the day after a driver contracted by the World Food Program was killed by members of a militia after being stopped at a roadblock 30 kilometers north of Galkayo in Mudug region. This is the second driver contracted by the WFP to have been killed during a militia attack in Somalia this year. None of the militia is considered to be linked to Al-Shabab.

The Food Security Analysis Unit for Somalia has recently warned that the dire humanitarian situation in Somalia continues to worsen. The combination of drought and rising food prices, in addition to persistent insecurity and armed conflict, has pushed 2.6 million Somalis to the point where they require essential humanitarian assistance.

There is no excuse for attacks on humanitarian workers in any conflict, regardless of their nationality. Amnesty International calls on all armed groups to end attacks on civilians, including humanitarian workers, and to give assurances that their status as neutral non-combatants will be respected. Armed groups that are preventing humanitarian access during this period would be contributing to, and increasing, the risk of widespread starvation among the Somali people. If threats and attacks continue, the results could be catastrophic.

These threats and attacks by armed groups follow a U.S. air strike in Dusamareb on 1 May 2008 that reportedly killed at least 11 people, including Aden Hashi Ayro, a leader of Al-Shabab.

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