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Somalia: Information about Al-Shabaab, including areas of control, recruitment procedures and affiliated groups

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Al-Shabaab [also known as, among other names, Al-Shabab, Harakat Al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin, or the Youth] is a militant Islamist group (CFR 10 Aug. 2011; BBC 9 Aug. 2011) that came to prominence in Somalia in 2006 (BBC 17 Oct. 2011; *The Guardian* 16 Aug. 2011). It has been designated a terrorist organization by the Government of Canada (Canada 7 Mar. 2010) and by the United States (US 26 Feb. 2008).

Areas of Control

Until August 2011, Al-Shabaab reportedly controlled six of Mogadishu's 16 districts, including Bakara Market (UN 9 Aug. 2011). In August 2011, it announced that it was withdrawing from Mogadishu for tactical purposes (BBC 17 Oct. 2011; *The Guardian* 16 Aug. 2011). In September 2011, however, the UN Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN) reported that, although the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) claimed to be in control of Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab was still considered a threat and had not left the city completely (UN 7 Sept. 2011). Interviews with government officials and experts conducted by IRIN and the BBC suggest that Al-Shabaab could switch to guerrilla tactics in Mogadishu, rather than leave the city completely (ibid.; BBC 9 Aug. 2011). In October 2011, Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a suicide truck bomb that exploded outside government buildings in Mogadishu and killed at least 65 people (*The Guardian* 4 Oct. 2011; Reuters 4 Oct. 2011).

Al-Shabaab reportedly controls "most" of the south (*The Guardian* 16 Aug. 2011; BBC 17 Oct. 2011; UN 9 Aug. 2011) and centre of Somalia (BBC 17 Oct. 2011; UN 9 Aug. 2011). According to IRIN, this includes the regions of Bay, Bakool, Lower Shabelle, Lower Juba, Gedo, and Jowhar (ibid.). A UN Secretary-General report found that Al-Shabaab maintained a "significant presence" in Gedo and Juba between April and August 2011 (UN 30 Aug. 2011, para. 18). It also stated that "limited gains" were made by anti-Shabaab militias, including Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama'a (ASWJ), in the same time period in Galguduud and Hiraan (ibid.).

Recruitment

Numerous sources have reported on the recruitment of children by Al-Shabaab and other insurgent groups (US 2011; UN 9 Nov. 2010; AI 20 July 2011), which has been described as "widespread" among both boys and girls (Human Rights Watch 14 Aug. 2011, 28) and "systematic" (AI 20 July 2011, 23; UN 30 Aug. 2011, para. 33). According to testimony collected by Amnesty International (AI), the recruitment of children is particularly intense in Mogadishu, Brava, Kismayo, Baidoa, the Sako district (Middle Juba), and the Gedo region (20 July 2011, 24). A report by the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Somalia states that, while Al-Shabaab is very active in the southern and central regions of Somalia, it is also recruiting children in Puntland and Somaliland (UN 9 Nov. 2010, para. 27). It also finds that children are recruited in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Somalia and refugee camps in Kenya by all parties to the conflict (ibid., para. 24). The same report estimates that "several thousand" children are active among insurgent groups (ibid., para. 21). Human rights organizations found that recruitment of children intensified in 2010 and 2011 as Al-Shabaab was launching major military offensives against the TFG (Human Rights Watch 14 Aug. 2011, 27; AI 20 July 2011, 22). Sources report that children as young as eight (US 2011, 395; AI 20 July 2011, 23) or nine years of age (UN 9 Nov. 2010, para. 28) have been recruited. Amnesty International finds that most child recruits are between the ages of 12 and 18 (AI 20 July 2011, 23). Children are reportedly recruited for various purposes, including using firearms and improvised explosive devices, undertaking assassinations, and performing suicide missions (ibid., 29-31; UN 9 Nov. 2010, para. 21). There are also reports that girls have been recruited for cooking and cleaning (AI 20 July 2011, 32; UN 9 Nov. 2010, para. 26), logistical support and intelligence gathering (ibid.; US 2011, 396), and for sexual servitude or forced marriage to Al-Shabaab fighters (ibid.; UN 9 Nov. 2010, para. 26; AI 20 July 2011, 33).

Numerous sources report that Al-Shabaab uses violence and the threat of violence to recruit children and youth (AI 20 July 2011; Human Rights Watch 14 Aug. 2011, 28; US 2011, 395) and punishes or threatens those who resist, as well as their families (AI 20 July 2011, 31-32; US 2011, 395). For example, the US Department of State reports on boys aged 15 and older in Kismayo, Baidoa and Merka being ordered to fight or be killed (US 2011, 396). Al-Shabaab has also reportedly physically prevented citizens from leaving a territory or the country (Human Rights Watch 14 Aug. 2011, 32; AI 20 July 2011, 28), a tactic that Amnesty International suggests is used to enable the recruitment of young men and boys (AI 20 July 2011, 28).

Al-Shabaab also reportedly uses coercion and incentives to recruit children and youth (ibid., 25; Marchal Mar. 2011, 40; UN 23 Mar. 2010, para. 9). Testimony collected by Human Rights Watch claims that Al-Shabaab "likes to take children between 12 and 16 years old because they don't know so much" (Human Rights Watch 14 Aug. 2011, 28). Dr. Roland Marchal, a senior research fellow at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) at SciencesPo, Paris, states that Al-Shabaab has a "definite policy of engaging isolated children in Islamic schooling institutions, either orphans or those children who are far away from their family" (Marchal Mar. 2011, 41). The US Department of State also finds that "vulnerable" children are targeted by Al-Shabaab for recruitment (US 2011, 395). According to some sources, money is used as an incentive for children and youth to join Al-Shabaab (UN 23 Mar. 2010, para. 9; AI 20 July 2011, 25; *Somalia Report* 21 June 2011). A UN report alleges that Al-Shabaab takes advantage of widespread poverty in IDP camps by recruiting children from poorer families with the promise of money (23 Mar. 2010, para. 9). *The Guardian* notes that Al-Shabaab pays its recruits better than the TFG (16 Aug. 2011), and Dr. Marchal says that Al-Shabaab fighters are paid monthly rather than yearly

(Mar. 2011, 42).

There are also reports that Al-Shabaab is forcibly recruiting adults, including older men (Human Rights Watch 14 Aug. 2011, 28; Marchal Mar. 2011, 40). Human Rights Watch reports that men found to be "loitering" are often conscripted (14 Aug. 2011, 29). According to Reuters, militia groups recruit "idle young men" in refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya (4 Apr. 2011). Dr. Marchal states that Al-Shabaab's recruitment policy is to "identify" not only "isolated youth," but "people inclined to be religious (often sympathizers of other Islamist groups ...)" and members of "minority clans" (Mar. 2011, 50). He notes that Al-Shabaab is not organized specifically along clan lines, unlike other armed groups (ibid., 47), a statement that is corroborated by the UN independent expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia (UN 23 Mar. 2010, para. 29). However, Dr. Marchal states that Al-Shabaab leaders "try their best to use [clan appeal] without being in thrall to it. ... When they attempt to take control of new territory, they put members of local clans in the forefront without involving them in coercive operations against the locals" (Marchal Mar. 2011, 49). The UN independent expert on the situation of human rights says that Al-Shabaab accommodates members of minority clans (UN 23 Mar. 2010, para. 29). Similarly, a regional analyst notes Al Shabaab's reliance on "historically marginalised or minority clans to build a base of support" (quoted in *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor* 3 Feb 2011, 4). Such groups may be interested in revenge (Marchal Mar. 2011, 50).

Affiliated Groups

A report from the UN independent expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia in March 2010 states that outside of Mogadishu, "alliances between and within armed groups changed constantly, resulting in a continuing volatile situation in south-central Somalia" (23 Mar. 2010, para. 45).

Hizbul Islam [also known as Hisbul Islam, Hizb al-Islam, Islamic Party] is an alliance formed in February 2009 by four Islamist groups (International Crisis Group 18 May 2010, 9; GlobalSecurity.org 13 May 2010) opposing the Transitional Federal Government (*Africa Confidential* 26 Aug. 2011; GlobalSecurity.org 13 May 2010). Unlike Al-Shabaab, it is reportedly a clan-based organization (ibid.; Marchal Mar. 2011, 47). Although fighting has reportedly occurred between Hizbul Islam factions and Al-Shabaab (*Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor* 3 Feb. 2011, 1; GlobalSecurity.org 13 May 2010), sources state that the two groups merged in December 2010 (*Africa Confidential* 26 Aug. 2011; Shabelle 20 Dec. 2010; *Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor* 3 Feb. 2011, 1).

Sources state that Al-Shabaab leaders are linked to the Al-Qaeda network (CFR 10 Aug. 2011; Marchal Mar. 2011, 43; BBC 17 Oct. 2011).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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