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THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN SOMALIA

ISSUE

It continues to be difficult to assess the human rights situation in Somalia in the absence of any central authority. However, in light of the continued fighting in Somalia between the various factions and sub-clans, especially after August/September, it would appear that there has been little improvement in the human rights situation in Somalia in 1995.

BACKGROUND

Since the collapse of the state of Somalia in 1991 following the overthrow of the repressive regime of Siad Barre, there has been no recognized government. In the absence of any central authority there have been three centres of power: the South, which remains highly unstable and prone to endemic clan violence; the Northeast, which has been relatively calm; and the Northwest (Somaliland) which has a separatist administration (the self-declared "Somaliland Republic") contested by other clan factions, giving rise to frequent skirmishing.

In Somalia, large populations remained displaced and continued to live in fear because of continued skirmishes between armed factions and associated reports of human rights abuses. These included reports that militias and bandits committed extrajudicial killings or intimidated, detained, raped or kidnapped individuals. Human rights, particularly the right to security of the person, were commonly violated by all the actors in Somalia, including by UN peacekeepers. From 1994 and throughout 1995, Canada, Belgium and Germany opened investigations or prosecuted some of those investigated for human rights abuses in their national courts.

After the withdrawal of United Nations armed forces in March 1995, there was a tenuous calm in Somalia until August/September 1995 when renewed fighting resulted in large numbers of civilians being killed deliberately or by random firing. Nearly all the international NGOs evacuated their international staff in early 1995 because of the security situation. Those remaining behind are subject to kidnapping or temporary detention (over 20 UN Agency workers in Baidoa) by various militias. An Italian doctor was killed in December. As well, two relief aircraft were temporarily impounded in Northwestern Sudan. While international relief organizations, in particular the UN Agencies, try to maintain assistance to the beleaguered population, there have been reports of increasing malnutrition levels in some regions.

Press freedom is theoretical. Most Somalis obtain news from foreign news broadcasts (shortwave radio). What little print media that exists consists of small news flyers, usually published by the various factions. Several nominally independent publications are published anonymously and are critical of the faction leaders. General Aideed's militias arrested two Somali journalists reporting for international news agencies in August and September 1995

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