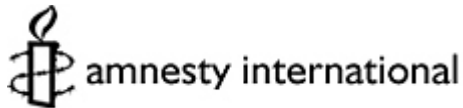


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Mogadishu's clean-up puts thousands of displaced at risk

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Over two decades of violence, drought and famine, hundreds of thousands of people have arrived in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, where many are living in makeshift shelters. Since open warfare has decreased, and a central government has been installed, they probably thought that life would improve.

But it hasn't. In recent months, government forces and other armed groups have been driving internally displaced people (IDPs) out of their improvised settlements, at times violently, without giving them an alternative place to go.

For Mohamed, the nightmare began in August this year, when armed forces arrived at his camp and told the residents they had three days to leave. Why? They were told that authorities wanted to develop the city. Things quickly deteriorated when some of the crowd started throwing stones and soldiers responded by shooting live ammunition.

"It was chaos. I was told my eight-year-old son Hassan had been shot by a stray bullet while he was playing inside our shelter. I went immediately, but he had already died," Mohamed told Amnesty International.

The killing was never investigated and Mohamed and his family moved to the Afgooye corridor, an unsafe area north-west of Mogadishu's city centre.

The United Nations estimates that around 369,000 of the more than one million internally displaced people in Somalia live in Mogadishu. Some 42,000 people have become internally displaced in Somalia just since the beginning of the year.

Most of them, like Mohamed, have simply been trying to escape the decades of conflict and periodic drought. Many are too afraid to go back home to areas controlled by al-Shabab, an Islamist armed opposition group whose strict interpretation of Shari'a law and harsh punishments can be a source of fear to the local population.

A tale of two cities

The Somali authorities say they are vacating land in Mogadishu in a bid to rebuild and develop the capital following more than 20 years of conflict.

What they are failing to acknowledge, however, is that most of those being forced off of public and private lands have nowhere safe to go.

On 14 August, an eight-year-old child and a mother of nine children were killed and several other residents injured, when members of the security forces opened fire in response to residents' protests against the eviction of a large settlement in the Hodan district, in the centre of Mogadishu.

Residents told Amnesty International that, three days later, the military came back to the camp with reinforcements and, without notice, started demolishing the shelters with bulldozers.

Sixty-year-old Fatima was at work in the local market when the bulldozers destroyed her home.

"It was early morning, around 8am, my children called me and told me our shelter had been destroyed. When I arrived, everything was destroyed. I sat on the ground. I didn't know what to do. I have lost most things. I reconstructed a makeshift shelter in the same area, I don't know what to do. I have no place to go," she said.

Another woman, who has lived in Mogadishu since 1992, told Amnesty International that after she was forced out of her home on 17 August she and her seven children were sleeping in the kitchen of a disused feeding centre in the Tarabunka district of the capital. They cannot stay there, but have nowhere else to go.

Barely surviving

Since January, the Somali government has been planning to relocate displaced people from across Mogadishu to a site in Daynille, north of the city. Officials said the relocation was related to the development of the capital and that it was the first step towards returning people to their places of origin.

However Daynille is highly unsafe and with little government control - so much so that it's a no-go area for police officers at night.

Since January thousands of displaced Somalis have been moved, but the lack of security at Daynille has meant relocation plans were put on hold, and many have moved to the Afgooye corridor. But there too, government control is weak, al-Shabab is active, and there are concerns other armed groups may become a source of greater insecurity for IDPs who are living there.

As many as 20,000 people are already believed to have moved to the Afgooye corridor with many more arriving every day as they are forced to leave their settlements in Mogadishu.

Living conditions in the new camps remain poor.

On the outskirts of the Masla-ha site, residents showed Amnesty International newly dug graves, where they said they had buried two four-year-old children who had died from diarrhoea some days earlier.

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