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## AI – Amnesty International

## Somalia: Zero accountability as civilian deaths mount from US air strikes

Civilian casualties continue to mount from the US military's secret air war in Somalia, with no justice or reparation for the victims of possible violations of international humanitarian law, Amnesty International warned as it released details of two more deadly air strikes so far this year.

US Africa Command (AFRICOM) has conducted hundreds of air strikes in the decade-long fight against the armed group Al-Shabaab, but has only admitted to killing civilians in a single strike that took place exactly two years ago today. This lone admission was prompted by Amnesty International's research and advocacy.

“The evidence is stacking up and it's pretty damning. Not only does AFRICOM utterly fail at its mission to report civilian casualties in Somalia, but it doesn't seem to care about the fate of the numerous families it has completely torn apart,” said Deprose Muchena, Amnesty International's Director for East and Southern Africa.

“We've documented case after case in the USA's escalating air war on Somalia, where the AFRICOM thinks it can simply smear its civilian victims as 'terrorists,' no questions asked. This is unconscionable; the US military must change course and pursue truth and accountability in these cases, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law (the laws of war).”

**Two new cases in February alone**

Amnesty International unearthed evidence that AFRICOM killed two civilians, and injured three more, in two air strikes in February 2020.

After both strikes, AFRICOM issued press releases claiming it had killed an Al-Shabaab “terrorist,” without offering a shred of evidence of the victims' alleged links to the armed group.

By contrast, Amnesty International found no evidence that the individuals killed or injured were members of Al-Shabaab or otherwise directly participating in hostilities. The organization interviewed the victims' relatives, community members and colleagues; analysed satellite images, photo and video evidence from the scene of the strikes; and identified the US munitions used.

On 2 February, at around 8pm, a family of five was sitting down to dinner in the city of Jilib, in Somalia's Middle Juba region, when an air-dropped weapon – likely a US GBU-69/B Small Glide Munition with a 16-kilogramme warhead – struck their home. Nurto Kusow Omar Abukar, an 18-year-old woman, was struck in the head by a heavy metal fragment from the munition and killed instantly. The strike also injured her two younger sisters, Fatuma and Adey, aged 12 and seven, and their grandmother, Khadija Mohamed Gedow, aged around 70.

The girls' father, Kusow Omar Abukar, a 50-year-old farmer who was in the house during the strike, described the attack to Amnesty International: “I never imagined it was going to hit us. I suddenly heard a huge sound. It felt like our house had collapsed. ... The sand and the smoke filled my eyes.”

In the middle of the afternoon on 24 February 2020, a Hellfire missile from another US air strike hit the Masalanja farm near the village of Kumbareere, 10 kilometres north of Jilib, killing 53-year-old Mohamud Salad Mohamud. He was a banana farmer and Jilib office manager for Hormuud Telecom, and he left behind a wife and eight children.

[SOURCE] [SOURCE] [IMG | SOURCE: | ALT: ID card for Mohamud Salad Mohamud, 53, killed in a US air strike on his banana farm in Somalia's Middle Juba region on 24 February 2020. He left behind a wife and eight children.] [IMG | SOURCE: [https://www.amnesty.org/remote.axd/aineupstrmediaprd.blob.core.windows.net/media/22923/269595.jpg?center=0.5%2c0.5&preset=proportional\\_639](https://www.amnesty.org/remote.axd/aineupstrmediaprd.blob.core.windows.net/media/22923/269595.jpg?center=0.5%2c0.5&preset=proportional_639) | ALT: ID card for Mohamud Salad Mohamud, 53, killed in a US air strike on his banana farm in Somalia's Middle Juba region on 24 February 2020. He left

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Mohamud Salad Mohamud's identification card with Hormuud Telecom.

A senior Hormuud official expressed disbelief that Mohamud Salad Mohamud had been targeted, since he had previously worked for international humanitarian organizations and had been arrested several times by Al-Shabaab: “When I heard the news of his death, I thought he was killed by Al-Shabaab. I have never imagined he would be killed by [the] US or by the Somali government. This was very strange. I don't know how to explain it.”

These two air strikes were among a string of 20 retaliatory attacks US forces carried out in Somalia after an Al-Shabaab assault on a US airbase in Manda Bay, Kenya, in early January. AFRICOM's commander, US General Stephen Townsend, vowed to “relentlessly pursue those responsible” for the attack, which killed a US soldier and two contractors, and destroyed five aircraft, including two rare and valuable spy planes.

“Nothing can excuse flouting the laws of war. Any US or Somalia government response to Al-Shabaab attacks must distinguish between fighters and civilians and take all feasible precautions to avoid harm to civilians,” said Abdullahi Hassan, Amnesty International's Somalia Researcher.

### No reparation for family in El Buur

The recently bereaved civilian families in Middle Juba region join many more Somali civilians who have lost loved ones to US air strikes but have seen no accountability or reparation to date.

In one key example, on 1 April 2018, a US air strike hit a vehicle driving from El Buur, north of Mogadishu.

Just over a year later, [AFRICOM publicly admitted](#) that the strike had killed a woman and young child. It was its sole admission of civilian casualties in an air war in Somalia that has lasted over a decade. Despite the family of the victims of this strike contacting the US Mission to Somalia in April last year, at the time of writing, neither US diplomatic staff nor AFRICOM had reached out to them to offer reparation.

### US ramps up air strikes

In the first three months of 2020 alone, US forces have conducted a total of 32 air strikes in Somalia, according to the monitoring group [Airwars](#). This is double the pace of 2019, when AFRICOM conducted a record 63 strikes in the country.

Since Amnesty International's ground-breaking March 2019 report [The Hidden US War in Somalia](#), the organization has carried out in-depth investigations into eight US air strikes that killed civilians in Somalia's Lower Shabelle and Middle Juba regions. Along with the El Buur strike, they killed a total of 21 civilians and wounded 11. In every case AFRICOM has failed to contact the families of the deceased.

“The US military should not be allowed to continue to paint its civilian victims as ‘terrorists’ while leaving grieving families in the lurch. Much more must be done to reveal the truth and bring justice and accountability for US attacks which killed so many Somali civilians, some of which amount to apparent violations of international humanitarian law,” said Abdullahi Hassan.

[SOURCE] [SOURCE] [IMG | SOURCE: | ALT: Map of US air strikes in Somalia investigated by Amnesty International - Feb 2020] [IMG | SOURCE: [https://www.amnesty.org/remote.axd/aineupstrmediaprd.blob.core.windows.net/media/22922/somalia\\_feb2020.jpg?center=0.5%2c0.5&preset=proportional\\_639](https://www.amnesty.org/remote.axd/aineupstrmediaprd.blob.core.windows.net/media/22922/somalia_feb2020.jpg?center=0.5%2c0.5&preset=proportional_639) | ALT: Map of US air strikes in Somalia investigated by Amnesty International - Feb 2020] [IMG | SOURCE: [https://www.amnesty.org/remote.axd/aineupstrmediaprd.blob.core.windows.net/media/22922/somalia\\_feb2020.jpg?center=0.5%2c0.5&preset=proportional\\_639](https://www.amnesty.org/remote.axd/aineupstrmediaprd.blob.core.windows.net/media/22922/somalia_feb2020.jpg?center=0.5%2c0.5&preset=proportional_639) | ALT: Map of US air strikes in Somalia investigated by Amnesty International - Feb 2020]  
Map showing US air strikes in Somalia where Amnesty International found evidence of civilian casualties. © Amnesty International. Basemap sources: HOTOSM, UNDP

## CASE STUDIES – ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

2 Feb 2020

On the evening of 2 February 2020, the US military conducted an air strike on a house in the city of Jilib in Somalia's Middle Juba region, killing one civilian woman and injuring an older woman and two children. The family of five, who lived in the home, had just sat down for dinner after the Isha prayer, about 8pm, when at least one munition struck their residence. The carish home, made of wood, sticks and mud, was significantly damaged in the blast.

Nurto Kusow Omar Abukar, 18 years old, was struck in the head by a heavy metal fragment of the munition and killed instantly. Her two younger sisters, Fatuma and Adey, aged 12 and seven years, were injured by the blast. Fatuma was struck in the clavicle and the chest and is still in hospital. Adey was hit in the ear and returned home after treatment. Their grandmother, Khadija Mohamed Gedow, aged approximately 70 years old, was hit in the knee and sent to hospital, where she remains unable to walk. The mother of the three girls was away at the time of the attack.

Kusow Omar Abukar, the father of the three girls, was the fifth member of the family present during the attack. He is 50 years old, a farmer, and, according to his relatives, not a member of Al-Shabaab. **“I never imagined it was going to hit us, he said. “I suddenly heard a huge sound. It felt like our house had collapsed. There was a huge sound and a bright flash and a huge smoke. The sand and the smoke filled my eyes,”** Kusow Omar Abukar was uninjured in the blast.

Prior to the strike, witnesses heard the sound of an aircraft above Jilib, but reported that there was no sign of fighting in the area at that time. Al-Shabaab fully controls Jilib, and members of the group live in homes in the city. It is plausible that AFRICOM was targeting a nearby residence that might have contained Al-Shabaab members. Analysis of satellite imagery taken before and after the strike shows damage to several structures in the Waaberi section of Jilib between January and March 2020, a time period in which AFRICOM acknowledges conducting seven air strikes in the city.. In addition, an Amnesty International weapons expert analysed verified photographs of ordnance scrap from the scene, and determined that the munition used was most likely an American GBU-69/B Small Glide Munition. No US or Somalia government officials have contacted Kusow Omar Abukar nor his family, via phone or other means, to offer compensation or medical assistance.

Mohamed Osman Abdi, the nephew of Khadija Mohamed Gedow, is an editor at a state-run news agency. When he heard the news that his cousin's family was hit by the air strike, he used his government connections to try to find out what happened. Somali officials referred him to AFRICOM statements, that one terrorist was killed in the strike. The next day, Mohamed raised his concern for his family at a communications workshop in Mogadishu, [publicized on Twitter](#) and attended by officials from the Federal Government of Somalia and regional states, AMISOM, and AFRICOM, including members of the Military Information Support (MIS) team. The subject of the meeting was unifying messages related to counterterrorism operations in Somalia, so all agencies conveyed the same information. When Mohamed asked why they were communicating incorrect information, that Al-Shabaab was targeted in an airstrike in Jilib when in reality his cousin's daughters were injured and killed, an unidentified American official offered condolences and then changed the subject.

In a [press release](#) on the day of the strike, AFRICOM claimed to have killed “one (1) terrorist,” with no civilian casualties. Soon after, the Al-Shabaab friendly website SomaliMemo, published a [news item](#) saying an airstrike in Jilib killed a disabled girl and wounded her mother and sister. Neither initial report is correct.

On 20 March, Amnesty International presented evidence to AFRICOM of civilian casualties in this case. At the time of this writing, Amnesty International has not received a substantive response to the allegation.

On March 23, Amnesty International presented the Federal Government of Somalia with evidence of civilian casualties in this case. At the time of this writing, Amnesty International has received no reply to the communication.

#### 24 Feb 2020

In the middle of the afternoon on 24 February 2020, a US air strike killed a civilian man named Mohamud Salad Mohamud, age 53, at his Masalanja farm near the village of Kumbareere (coordinates 0.577, 42.717), approximately 10 kilometres north of Jilib in Somalia's Middle Juba region. Mohamud Salad Mohamud was a prominent businessman, banana farmer, and the Hormuud Telecommunication Company's Jilib office manager. He left behind eight children and a wife.

According to relatives and colleagues, Mohamud Salad Mohamud was in Mogadishu for approximately three weeks prior to the attack, for work and medical check-ups, and returned to Jilib on 23 February, just a day before he was killed. He worked for Hormuud Telecom and was based in

the Jilib office for the past 14 years. A medical report from Darusalam Hospital, where Mohamud Salad Mohamud went for treatment while he was in Mogadishu, was reviewed by Amnesty International and confirms that he was in the city at that time.

Abdiaziz Salad Mohamud, a younger brother of the victim, told Amnesty International that he had met with his brother at the Hormuud office in Jilib on the day he was killed. He said that his brother told him that he was in good health after his visit to Mogadishu and that he was planning to go and see his Masalanja farm later that day. At around 3:45pm, Abdiaziz Salad Mohamud heard what he thought was a blast coming from the direction of the Masalanja farm. He got worried because two planes had been hovering over the town that day and he knew his brother Mohamud was at the farm. ***“My other brother Faysal and I called the only worker on the farm and asked him what happened, he said they were under attack, he was hiding and could not see Mohamud,”*** Abdiaziz told Amnesty International.

Abdiaziz and his younger brother Faysal Salad Mohamud took a motorbike and rushed to the farm immediately. He described to Amnesty International what he saw at the scene of the attack. ***“When we arrived at the farm, we saw blood all over the place, especially near the irrigation canal and near the banana trees. His body was cut into pieces. I recognized his face and his left leg. I collected the pieces of his body parts and flesh and put them into a sack. It was just shocking. Two planes were still hovering over us as I collected the remains of his body.”*** Mohamud Salad Mohamud was buried in Jilib the following day in a funeral attended by many residents.

Amnesty International reviewed photographs that appear to show portions of Mohamud Salad Mohamud's body, including his face so his identity could be confirmed. In addition, Amnesty International's weapons expert reviewed a video of the scene of the attack, identifying fragments of an American AGM-114 Hellfire missile.

A Rahaweyn clan elder told Amnesty International that he knew Mohamud Salad Mohamud for 23 years and that he was a civilian and one of the most productive individuals in his clan who had worked for humanitarian organizations. Amnesty International has confirmed his previous employment at a major international NGO. Two senior Hormuud officials who were interviewed by Amnesty International confirmed that he had worked for them since March 2006 and that he was not a member of Al-Shabaab, noting that Mohamud Salad Mohamud was actually arrested by Al-Shabaab three times for not complying with their orders. ***“I was travelling back from Lower Shabelle that afternoon when I heard the news of his death, I thought he was killed by Al-Shabaab. I never imagined he would be killed by US or by the Somalia government. This was very strange. I don't know how to explain it,”*** he said.

In a [press release](#) on the day of the strike AFRICOM said it carried out an airstrike in the vicinity of Jilib and claimed to have “killed one (1) terrorist.” Similarly, the Somalia government issued a [statement](#) the same day saying the strike “killed one Al-Shabaab militant.”

Despite subsequent [media reports](#) suggesting the man killed in this airstrike could be a civilian, relatives and colleagues of Mohamud Salad Mohamud said they were not contacted by any official from the US or Somalia government to explain what happened or offer compensation.

On 20 March, Amnesty International presented evidence to AFRICOM of a civilian casualty in this case. At the time of this writing, Amnesty International has not received a substantive response to the allegation.

On March 23, Amnesty International presented evidence to the Federal Government of Somalia of a civilian casualty in this case. At the time of this writing, Amnesty International has received no reply to the communication.

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#### ecoi.net summary:

No reparation for civilian victims of air strike carried out by the US; 2 civilians killed in 2 air strikes in February 2020



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