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Background

The Federal Government of Somalia, the current transitional government, was established in August 2012. In January 2016, Somali political leaders agreed that a permanent government would be voted into power during the August 2016 elections. In 2015, transitional authorities continued the contentious effort to form a federal state, and interim regional administrations still struggled to establish authority.

Provisional Constitution

The Somali government continues to review the provisional constitution, which includes a number of provisions inconsistent with religious freedom. The constitution explicitly prohibits apostasy and names the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the main source of the law within the country.

Societal and Governmental Intolerance

Somalis are almost all Sunni Muslims. Christians in Somalia are persecuted by their family and their community. Somali clerics and al-Shabaab have stated that Christianity, Christians, and churches are antithetical to Somalia. The Somali government also has shown an intolerance toward Christians. In 2013 and 2015, government officials announced, and later rescinded, a ban on Christmas celebrations in the country.

In a new development, Shi'a Muslims were harassed in Somalia during the reporting period. On December 23, government authorities arrested and deported two Iranian nationals, accusing them of proselytizing. In January 2016, the Somali government ended relations with Iran. On January 12, a Somaliland judge fined and imprisoned two Pakistani nationals for propagating Shi'a Islam.

Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab (also known as the Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin, Shabaab, Mujahidin al-Shabaab Movement, Mujahideen Youth Movement, or Mujahidin Youth Movement) came to prominence in Somalia as the military wing of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2006. Its stated goals are to turn Somalia into an Islamic state, build a greater Somalia including areas in neighboring

countries with large ethnically-Somali populations, and spread its strict version of Islam. Since 2007, al-Shabaab has fought both Somali and regional forces in its campaign to control Somalia, at times holding large territories in the central and southern regions of the country.

In February 2012, it pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda. In 2015, divisions emerged within al-Shabaab over its allegiance to al-Qaeda, with a splinter group seeking to join forces with the Islamic State and the Levant (ISIL). On October 22, senior al-Shabaab leader Sheikh Abdiqadir Mumin and some 20 of his followers pledged allegiance to ISIL. In response, al-Shabaab arrested and executed some of these ISIL sympathizers, maintaining its allegiance to al-Qaeda.

During the reporting period, the security situation in central and southern Somalia remained highly volatile. Al-Shabaab executed frequent attacks on the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), the Somali national army, and civilians in central and southern Somalia and also perpetrated sporadic attacks in the Puntland autonomous region. In Mogadishu, al-Shabaab bombings killed Somali government officials, international representatives, and Somali civilians. The group assassinated federal government officials and their allies whom it viewed as non-Muslims or apostates. In addition, al-Shabaab continued to brutally enforce its extremist interpretation of Islamic law, killing Christians and those accused of "sorcery." The militants also lashed individuals accused of rape and adultery.

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