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Barawe residents hail end of al-Shabaab's reign of terror

By Fuad Ahmed in Mogadishu

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Barawe (http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2014/10/06/feature-01) residents, who had endured the harsh and oppressive rule of al-Shabaab for more than six years, are for the first time speaking out against the group's cruel reign.

"If I am to list the hardships we experienced under al-Shabaab I would not be able to do it in a few hours," said Barawe resident Fay Mudey, a 41-year-old mother of six.

"Al-Shabaab used to forcefully marry many girls

(http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/06/21/feature-01) from Barawe. They used to forcefully recruit children

(http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2012/01/16/feature-01) , and force us every day to come out of our houses in order to watch as they cut off people's hands and feet," she told Sabahi.

"We were even forced to watch the stoning to death of a living person

(http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/newsbriefs/2014/09/30/newsbrief-02) , " said Mudey, recalling the recent killing of 33-year-old Safiyo Ahmed Jumale, a woman residents say al-Shabaab accused of polyandry and executed without any proof.

"Those acts disturbed us a lot, and God has freed us from al-Shabaab's unlawful rule

(http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2014/06/11/feature-02) , " she said.

Mudey said now residents are happy to have the liberty to use technology such as **televisions**

(http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/11/06/feature-01) and **smartphones**

(http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2013/11/14/feature-01) , which al-Shabaab banned a year ago, to stay connected with the outside world.

"Just like the people who live in Mogadishu, we are free to do everything," Mudey said. "Everyone who was hiding a smartphone and was afraid of al-Shabaab seeing it is now able to watch anything on it, and we even watch music [videos]. We watch television and children play football."

The town was captured October 6th by Somali National Army and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops without much resistance from al-Shabaab militants who fled the town a day ahead.

Before making their exit, however, al-Shabaab terrorised residents one more time, with local leader Mohamed Abu Abdalla warning residents during a sermon October 5th that the militants would return to fight the infidels and all those who supported them.

Citizens hopeful despite shaky security

Despite the ominous sermon, residents welcomed the arrival of Somali and allied forces and say they hope to receive emergency humanitarian assistance and basic health services that have been non-existent during al-Shabaab's rule.

"I am happy for the freedom God has given us today since he has lifted al-Shabaab's oppression from us," said Mumin Salah Arab, a 50-year-old traditional elder from Barawe.

Residents are in dire need of assistance to recover from al-Shabaab's brutal rule, he said.

"These people need food and medical aid. Some of them cannot work because al-Shabaab illegally cut off their hands and feet and they have not received any [medical] help from anyone yet," Arab told Sabahi.

The people who endured the group's savagery are too traumatised and cannot speak to the media because they fear al-Shabaab's reprisal, he said, adding that the reason the group mutilated their hands and feet in the first place was to punish them after they were seen to be against al-Shabaab's ideology.

"As the city's traditional elders, we personally know the [identities] of the people whose hands and feet were cut off by al-Shabaab, but [we will not name them] because there is worry that al-Shabaab will target them again," he said.

For instance, al-Shabaab militants beheaded 70-year-old Barawe elder Mohamed Qambi Thursday night (October 16th), according to Somalia's Wacaa. The elder, who had resided in Barawe for the past 20 years, was taken out of his home and his body dumped in the middle of the town.

Jowhar reported that Qambi was one of the traditional elders who met with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/newsbriefs/2014/10/13/newsbrief-04) when he visited the town on October 11th.

The incident came just after Somali security forces conducted a sweep of Barawe to rid the town of al-Shabaab remnants Thursday morning, Somalia's RBC Radio reported.

"The security forces carried out the latest security operation meant to assure that Barawe is safe for the civilians," said Lower Shabelle Governor Abdikadir Mohamed Nur. "At least one dozen of young suspects were arrested. We are now questioning them."

For his part, Barawe district commissioner Shair Abdi Elmi said he spoke with the president about the humanitarian crisis in Barawe when he visited the town last week.

"Barawe residents now feel they have complete freedom, but they need humanitarian assistance such as water, which is in very short supply, and food," Elmi told Sabahi. "In the healthcare area, there are only a few pharmacies that sell some medicine and a small number of shops that sell food."

Elmi told Sabahi they are waiting for a response from the president who promised that the government would "provide the basic needs immediately".

"We are also calling on the international agencies and Somalis in the diaspora to assist their brothers and sisters in Barawe however they can," he said.