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Inter-clan clashes over the last week in Somalia's southern Lower Shabelle region have killed approximately 30 and have forced over 250 to take refuge in African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) bases, according to the organization.

Tensions have been rising between the Habargidir sub-clan of the Hawiye, and Biyomaal sub-clan of the Dir, who are competing for control of the fertile region.

This comes less than a year after AMISOM and the Somalia National Army pushed to drive Islamist organization Al-Shabab out of villages and towns in the region.

"The fighting affected the residents of El Wareegow, KM50 and Merka [about 100km south of Mogadishu]. We are concerned about the humanitarian situation because people do not have food. They need the war to be immediately stopped and access to aid made available," regional deputy-governor for social affairs, Omar Mohamud Ilmi, told IRIN. He said that 10,000 people have fled from villages and towns. This figure could not be independently verified.

The regional capital, Merka, has been hit hard. "The fighting has affected business. Most people are staying indoors and businesses are closed," Abdirahman Ibrahim Ali, a local journalist told IRIN by phone. "There are residents who fled to coastal villages of Jilib Marka, Gandarshe and El Ahmed."

On 9 June, Somalia's Prime Minister Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed called on all groups to initiate an immediate ceasefire, and authorized a high level delegation led by the Minister of Interior Affairs and the Minister of Defense to visit Merka to negotiate between factions.

"This country does not need any more bloodshed. The people who are dying are all brothers and sisters," he said.

UN Special Representative for Somalia, Nicholas Kay, also denounced the clashes.

"I call for an immediate end to hostilities. All parties must refrain from violent actions, make immediate efforts to de-escalate the situation and resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue and compromise." he said in a press release.

Access constraints

Transporting wounded people has been difficult, as clan militias have taken control of the main roads leading into and out of cities and villages, and are controlling access.

"I saw seven wounded people. One of them was a pregnant woman who was shot," said Sheikh Abdi, a Lower Shabelle resident, who fled the fighting with his family.

"Clan war is different from other sorts of conflicts because if you belong to either of the warring clans, you have to flee - even if you have never been part of the conflict," he told IRIN. "If the government and Al-Shabab are fighting, there is no specific and individual threat against you."

Mahamat Saleh Annadif, the African Union's Special Representative for Somalia, appealed for calm and called all parties to "refrain from violent actions, and make immediate efforts to de-escalate the situation and resolve their differences."

The two clans have fought over the region several times in the past, and while the Somali government has been able to mediate between the groups, a lasting ceasefire has never been achieved.