



Press Release

“They Say They’re Not Here to Protect Us”: New IRRI Report on AMISOM

(Kampala, 31 May 2017) International Refugees Rights Initiative (IRRI) today launched a [report](#) about civilian perspectives on the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), whose mandate has been recently renewed. This report is based on interviews with 62 Somalis and is the third in a series on civilian perspectives of peacekeeping forces in Africa.

The report highlights that many in Somalia hold views that are very critical of the peacekeeping mission, especially about its failure to protect civilians, about some of the troop-contributing countries and about peacekeeper abuses. Citizens struggled to understand the mission’s mandate and often had difficult relations with the mission.

“The AU and UN should ensure that protection of civilians is a central objective of the AU peace operation and that it has the capacity and resources to do so,” said Andie Lambe, Executive Director of IRRI. *“It should go without saying that the AU and the UN should ensure that the voices of citizens who live in the midst of the conflict are taken into account, which unfortunately does not appear to have been the case.”*

While the security situation in Somalia has improved over the years, citizens cited regular attacks, including against peacekeepers, as evidence of the AU mission’s shortcomings. While some appreciated the mission’s presence, many felt that AMISOM had made insufficient efforts to ensure protection of civilians, and criticised the mission for its failure to retain control over towns it had taken back from *Al-Shabaab*.

Interviewees expressed distrust of the foreign presence in their country, especially of troops from Ethiopia and Kenya. Other AMISOM contingents, such as those from Djibouti, were much better regarded, mainly because of their efforts to build community relations and provide services to nearby communities.

Many people interviewed knew that AMISOM is tasked to conduct offensive operations against *Al-Shabaab* and to protect government institutions, however, other aspects of the mandate were far less known. This lack of proper understanding of the mandate contributed to unrealistic expectations and severe criticism, especially by those living in areas with high levels of insecurity. Therefore, it is imperative that the mission steps up its efforts to engage with all citizens, which is key for its effectiveness.

Many interviewees testified about abuses committed by AMISOM forces, including sexual violence and incidents leading to the deaths of civilians. There was a strong correlation between the lack of

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support for the mission and the perception that perpetrators of abuses were not being held accountable. It is important that if efforts are being made to ensure accountability, this is communicated clearly to Somali citizens.

While interviewees held the opinion that ultimately the Somali security services should be responsible for providing security, they also acknowledged that they lack sufficient capacity and inclusivity. Views on AMISOM's departure differed. Some held the pragmatic view that their forces were not ready yet to take over, others wanted AMISOM to leave as soon as possible.

During a high-level conference in London on 11 May 2017, Somalia and its partners committed to increasing efforts to reform Somalia's security system, in advance of AMISOM's scheduled withdrawal in 2018. The UN Security Council then renewed the mission's mandate for three months and will carry out an in-depth review of the mission, jointly with the AU, to, amongst other things, work on the mission's exit strategy.

"AMISOM should not be withdrawn until the Somali security forces can ensure adequate protection for its citizens," Lambe said. "The Somali government and its international partners must follow-up on their commitments during the London conference and step up efforts to build inclusive, accountable and effective security institutions."

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- IRRI's other two reports are available:
 - "Protecting some of the people some of the time": Civilian perspectives on peacekeeping forces in [South Sudan](#) (2015)
 - "No one on the earth cares if we survive except God and sometimes UNAMID": The challenges of peacekeeping in [Darfur](#) (2016)