

SAA CID



Many families in Somalia often left divided

Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee from their homes due to fighting in the Somali capital, between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the armed factions opposing it.

According to the United Nation's refugee agency, UNHCR, further fighting in the first 2 months of 2010 has already led to a further 30,000 people being displaced from Mogadishu due to fighting. This continuing displacement is now into its 3rd year, and has left hundreds-of-thousands of people hanging onto the most marginal existence imaginable.

UNHCR says many of those displaced have fled into neighbouring countries, including Kenya and Ethiopia; but others, like Sahro Arwah Idow, have sought shelter in the nearby Afgoye Corridor in Lower Shabelle Region.

The 15-kilometre long Afgoye Corridor is home to more than 360,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), according to the latest assessments by UNHCR. The Afgoye Corridor is situated just to the south of Mogadishu City.

Sahro, a grandmother, fled from her home in Mogadishu in June 2009, following a gun battle between government forces and Islamic opposition factions in the Somali capital. Since then, she has not been able to trace 3 of her 6 grandchildren. Three of her surviving grandchildren were found safe after the fighting subsided. Sahro and her 3 grandchildren abandoned their home for the relative safety in the Elasha Biyaha, an area of the Afgoye Corridor, where many displaced families currently live.

Sahro's husband, Hassan Abdulaahi, 50, and his eldest son Ali Hassan, 32, were not at home when the rest of the family fled the fighting that broke out in the Karaan District of Mogadishu. Her husband works as a labourer and he had left home early in the morning. He was later reunited with his family after searching for them for several weeks.



Sahro outside of her house in Afgoye corridor

The most traumatizing experience the family is going through is the uncertainty of the whereabouts of their missing children. “We will not give up searching for our children, and one day we are waiting to see our children again.” says Sahro.

Faadumo Aliyow, a neighbour to Sahro, is yet another of the displaced parents who fled the fighting. Faadumo lost her husband in the shelling that occurred at Bakara Market in 2007. Bakara is the biggest market in Mogadishu. The 42 year old woman and her 7 children were forced to flee their home in Wardhigley District of Mogadishu when fighting became too intense for them to bear.



Neighbours Sahro (right) and Faadumo left, weaving sisal outside Faadumo's home in Afgoye

“We couldn’t endure the daily bombardments between the government troops and opposition any longer, and my children had difficulties sleeping at night,” says Faadumo. “I am a single mother and I work hard to fend for my children, because I am afraid my children will die of starvation,” she adds.

Surviving the chaos in Mogadishu for women like Faadumo is a daily struggle. “I usually get domestic work here, and I also weave traditional Somali mats and many other traditional

goods which I later sell at the market. I earn thirty to 40 thousand Somalia shillings [about \$1-\$1.3] as a profit per mat. But this small amount of money is not enough to sustain my family”.

The displaced families living in the IDP camps along the road of the Afgoye Corridor sometimes receive relief assistance from the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and other local organizations.

However, in January this year, WFP announced it was temporarily suspending its food distribution in most parts of south and central Somalia, due to threats on its staff, and other demands by armed groups. This has meant it is even harder for families such as Faadumo’s to survive.

“Opposition factions banned WFP and other Local Non-Governmental Organisations from distributing food at the displaced person camps, and this has left us without food, and there is growing tension in the camps”, says Faadumo.

Most of the displaced families living along the Afgoye Corridor depend on humanitarian assistance from aid agencies.

“We are appealing to the international and local NGOs to help us with food, plastic sheets and health facilities soon after the ban is lifted,” pleads Faadumo.