

# Uganda promises to aid, protect Somalia

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Associated Press

**MOGADISHU, Somalia** - Uganda's top military officials promised to help train a national army for Somalia and help provide security for its government, a Somali official said Friday.

The Ugandans traveled to Somalia ahead of a planned African Union peacekeeping deployment, a day after Islamic extremists threatened suicide attacks against Ugandan and other foreign troops.

"We expect the troops to be here in two weeks," Hassan Abshir Farah, who represented the Somali government at one meeting, told The Associated Press.

Uganda's Defense Minister Crispus Kiyonga and Chief of Defense Forces Aronda Nyakairima said their forces would help train a Somali army and provide security to Somalia's transitional government, said Farah, who represented the Somali government at one meeting.

AU officials say they have more than \$44 million through donations from the European Union, U.S. and Britain to pay for the Somali peacekeeping mission. The AU force is planned to include 8,000 troops - with contributing governments compensated \$500 for each one, said Assane Ba, spokesman for the AU's conflict prevention department.

Somalia's government, backed by Ethiopian troops, drove out a radical Islamic movement that had gained control of the capital Mogadishu and most of the south. The U.N. Security Council on Tuesday unanimously approved its deployment.

Ethiopian troops have started to leave, to be replaced by the peacekeeping force, which will have to confront the growing violence that has plagued Mogadishu since the interim government took over.

Gunfire and shelling broke out between Ethiopian troops and gunmen in southern Mogadishu near the former defense ministry. Two people were killed and eight wounded, including two children, said Abdullahi Hassan Fidow, a resident in the area who said he saw the hit-and-run attack by 30 insurgents.

Insurgents have staged near-daily attacks since the Islamic militants were driven out, with Mogadishu's civilian population suffering the worst of the violence. Hundreds of families have begun fleeing the coastal city of 2 million people, and hospitals are struggling to cope with the daily influx of wounded.

Somalia has not had an effective national government since 1991, when warlords overthrew a dictator, carved the capital into armed, clan-based camps, and left most of the rest of the country ungoverned. A transitional government was formed in 2004 with U.N. help. Weakened by clan rivalries, it struggled to assert authority, leaving a vacuum the Islamic movement moved to fill.

The Islamic movement chased the warlords from Mogadishu last year and was credited with restoring order in areas of southern Somalia it controlled. But some Somalis chafed at its fundamentalist version of Islam and the U.S. and the Somali government accused it of harboring al-Qaida suspects.

Meanwhile, an Ethiopian official on Friday denied a report that U.S. troops used Ethiopia as a staging ground for attacks against al-Qaida leaders in Somalia last month.

The report in The New York Times citing unnamed American officials from several U.S. agencies said U.S. soldiers used an airstrip in Ethiopia to mount strikes against Islamic militants in Somalia.

"This is simply a total fabrication," Bereket Simon, special adviser to the Ethiopian prime minister, told The Associated Press.

The report went on to say that the U.S. and Ethiopia relationship included the sharing of intelligence on the militants.

U.S. officials earlier acknowledged two airstrikes over Somalia in January, but had given few details. The strikes were reported to have been conducted by U.S. forces based in another Horn of Africa country, Djibouti, though officials had not confirmed that.

U.S. ships had also patrolled off Somalia's coast in search of al-Qaida members thought to be fleeing Somalia following Ethiopia's December invasion.

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