



This paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to help you to respond to any concerns generated in communities as a result of the coverage in the media of the CT issues set out in the media coverage summary. It is not intended to provide detailed briefing about Government policies, and explaining these issues to the media is the role of relevant departmental press offices.

What is happening in Somalia?

There has been ongoing intense conflict in Somalia between Al Shabaab and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Al Shabaab currently occupies much of southern and central Somalia and fighting has been especially intense around the capital, Mogadishu. Earlier this year, the African Union and the TFG claimed to have forced Al Shabaab out of the capital, following years of heavy fighting. However, there are indications that Al Shabaab has not given up on the city, including a suicide attack which killed over 70 in the capital in October.

This is happening against a backdrop of a severe famine in the wider region. Famine has been declared in six areas of Somalia so far and may spread in the coming months. Tens of thousands of people have died so far, half of them aged under five.

What is Al Shabaab?

Al Shabaab is a terrorist organisation with affiliations to Al Qa'ida. It has its roots in groups which have fought against the internationally recognised Somali governments and it continues to fight today. It controls much of southern and central Somalia, imposing strict Sharia law.

While Al Shabaab has a core membership, much of its 'support' is gained by forcible conscription and the exploitation of people's economic desperation. It is responsible for considerable violence in Somalia, including a bomb attack on 4 October outside the Ministry of Education that killed nearly 100 people. It has also recruited child soldiers and enforced brutal punishments and executions, which have been reported by human rights organisations like Amnesty International.

What role is Kenya playing?

Many refugees are making their way to Kenya and other neighbouring countries; over 50,000 Somali refugees have been registered in Kenyan camps since July. There has also been violence in Kenya, including bomb and grenade attacks in Nairobi and kidnappings. A Kenyan man who has pleaded guilty of one of the attacks claims to be a member of Al Shabaab.

Following a number of attacks which crossed into its territory, neighbouring Kenya sent its military forces to Somalia, to help combat Al Shabaab. The Kenyan authorities have publicly said that they are acting in cooperation with the TFG. Al Shabaab has now declared 'war' on Kenya, while trying to rally support from sympathisers in both countries.

Is it safe to travel to Kenya and Somalia?

The Foreign Office currently advises against any travel to Somalia or to within 60km of its borders. As regards Kenya, the Foreign Office suggests avoiding the poorer districts of Nairobi and those regions of the country which are within 150km of the Somali border, including the popular tourist destination, Lamu. The latest travel advice can be found on the Foreign Office website at www.fco.gov.uk.

Does the conflict affect UK citizens?

Al Shabaab has been actively recruiting in Somalia and the surrounding regions and there have been incidents of people from the UK travelling to the area. The recent arrests of two UK teenagers who tried to

cross into Somalia via Kenya, is an example. Al Shabaab has targeted young people in particular, so it is possible that vulnerable young people here may be influenced by the conflict.

The UK Government works with police and communities to help protect people from terrorist influences, including Somali diaspora communities. Police and local authorities are able to intervene in cases where they feel someone is being radicalised or drawn into extremism.

What is the UK doing to help the famine relief efforts?

The UK is contributing to humanitarian efforts.

UK aid to famine-affected areas now stands at £128.44 million since 1 July and the Disaster Emergency Committee and its partners have raised over £72 million through their East African Crisis Appeal in that time. UK aid includes food, vaccination and clean water programmes.

How can individuals donate money safely?

You can donate to the East African Crisis Appeal. This appeal is supported by the Disaster Emergency Committee, which is working with the Department for International Development and partners such as UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Non-Government Organisations to coordinate humanitarian efforts.

The East Africa Crisis Appeal website can be found at www.dec.org/appeals/east-africa-crisis-appeal