

Somalia: Mogadishu Remains Risky Despite Al Shabab Withdrawal

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Although the al Shabab militant group has withdrawn from Mogadishu, the Somali capital is still a dangerous place, including for aid workers. Despite that, many Somalis are traveling to the city hoping to find food and water in a country hit by drought and famine.

Doctors Without Borders, also known as MSF, is one of the many humanitarian groups caring for the Somalis.

“MSF activities are organized around different hospitals and clinics...where we managed to negotiate access,” said Duncan McLean, programs manager for the group. The children who arrive in the city after traveling for many days by foot are described as being in a very weakened state.

“We’ll very quickly put them under treatment on both the therapeutic foods and appropriate antibiotics and so on. And then depending on the day, the time of day even, it can be quite manageable to being extremely overloaded with the number that will be turning up,” he said.

MSF also has medical teams north of Mogadishu in areas controlled by al Shabab. Many war wounded and road accident victims are being treated.

“So when you have a major clash, shelling incident, an increase in fighting, a very quiet moment will quickly become the area with major triage and influx of wounded,” said McLean.

Mogadishu

While the withdrawal of al Shabab has allowed greater access to parts of the city, the Somali capital cannot be called safe.

“In Mogadishu we have access in the sense that we have Somali and international teams on the ground that are working in the various camps, displaced camps around the city,” he said. Those teams carry out vaccination and therapeutic feeding programs, along with basic medical consultations to check for cholera and acute water diarrhea.

While he describes the access as good, he remains cautious since it’s only been a few weeks since al Shabab left north Mogadishu. The militia is battling the U.N. and AU backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

McLean said, “It has left a security vacuum of sorts. And so, even, say, during the height of the conflict in Mogadishu, as dangerous as that city was, there was a clear front line even if there might be various targeted killings and bombings within TFG areas.”

Now pro-government forces have a much wider area to control without any additional troops. That allows other armed groups to act more freely.

“There are also private militias related to different clans and so on. And working in those circumstances I actually find almost as dangerous, if not more dangerous, than when there was a front line running through the city. Nonetheless, we do have access with extreme caution,” he said.