



## INDEPENDENT EXPERT ON SOMALIA EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER PROPOSED EUROPEAN UNION POLICY ON SOMALI REFUGEES

The United Nations' Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Somalia, Mona Rishmawi, called today on the members States of the European Union (EU) not to adopt an asylum policy that "could put the human rights and fundamental liberties of Somalis under further jeopardy".

Mrs. Rishmawi said EU Ministers scheduled to meet on 15 and 16 October at Tampere, Finland, will have before them a draft Plan of Action for Somalia which considers that, while there is no central government in Somalia and most of the country is engulfed in conflict, there are some "peaceful" areas. The draft plan, although acknowledging that the absence of a central government means "there exists in practice no national guarantee for protection of human rights on the basis of international law and Constitution", recommends that the EU enter into "constructive dialogue" with the authorities in different regions, particularly in the north, "to agree on arrangements for identification and documentation of returnees to respective areas". The plan would not grant recognition of these regions.

Mrs. Rishmawi, mandated by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to examine the human rights situation in Somalia, expressed alarm at the plan, which, she said, would make it difficult for Somalis to seek asylum in EU States.

"In the absence of recognized structures in Somalia that the international community could formally call upon for human rights protection, Somalis should not be forced to return to Somalia", she stated.

The number of Somalis seeking asylum in EU countries is very small in comparison with those who are hosted in countries neighbouring Somalia, Mrs. Rishmawi continued. Millions of Somali refugees live in refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen.

The Independent Expert said the plan had, none the less, some positive aspects, and she welcomed such recommendations on improving the human rights situation in Somalia as providing support for the work on the country by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). She recalled that following her recommendation, and with the support of the Commission on Human Rights, High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson has appointed a human rights officer to be based within the office of the UN humanitarian coordinator in Nairobi to work on Somalia. The officer will:

- monitor the human rights situation in Somalia;

- "mainstream" and integrate a human rights perspective into the work of all the UN agencies regarding Somalia;
- provide technical assistance in the field of human rights;
- support Somali human rights NGOs;
- raise awareness in the area of the administration of justice; and
- assist the Independent Expert in her mission.

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