

Somalia; Ugandan Peacekeepers Overstretched - Report

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UGANDAN peacekeepers in Somalia are overstretched and lack vital assets, a new report by the African Union's peace and security commission has said.

The AU mission in Somalia (Amisom) won a new six months' mandate on Wednesday.

"The contingent is overstretched and lacks some vital assets. In addition, the absence of the envisaged air and maritime components has further compounded the difficulties facing the Mission," said the report discussed in last week's AU meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The report, however, pays tribute to the Ugandan troops for "a remarkable job and the sacrifice made" and the Ugandan Government for its commitment to the restoration of lasting peace and reconciliation in Somalia.

A force of around 8,000 African Union troops was meant to have been sent to Somalia at the start of the year but only around 1,500 Ugandan troops have so far arrived in Mogadishu, where they have been the subject of numerous attacks.

Nigeria, Burundi, Malawi and Ghana which promised to co-contribute have not sent troops. Burundi last week announced a delay in sending nearly 1,000 troops owing to lack of equipment. State Minister for Defence Ruth Nankabirwa said the troops also risk suffering fatigue.

"Yes that is true, the UPDF in Somalia is overstretched that is why we have limited ourselves to Mogadishu alone," she told Daily Monitor yesterday. "We are planning to draw a rotation programme to make sure that we replace the troops with fresher ones from here." The AU called on member countries to honour their pledges of troops and financial assistance.

Meanwhile, Reuters, quoting witnesses, reported yesterday that troops patrolling the Somali capital's biggest market in the hunt for Islamist insurgents came under fresh attack on Saturday when grenades were thrown at them, killing three people.

Somali government forces and allied Ethiopian troops have been a target of regular attacks in Mogadishu's Bakara Market, which is home to one of the world's biggest open-air weapons markets and is suspected of being a hideout for insurgents.

Two civilians and a policeman were killed in Saturday's grenade attack, the witnesses said. Residents often accuse the joint forces of firing indiscriminately in retaliation to an attack.

Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi has met with elders, business leaders and security officials to discuss ways of ensuring security at the market which supplies goods to others in the rest of the country, a government spokesman said.