

France's Kouchner calls for urgent UN force in Somalia

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ADDIS ABABA

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said Friday the United Nations should urgently send a peace force to Somalia, where he suggested such a deployment would be easier than in Sudan's Darfur.

"The urgency is great," Kouchner told AFP after meeting Somali Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. "In Somalia, we could intervene and retrieve the situation a little."

Kouchner said it would be easier for the UN to act in Somalia than in Darfur -- the western region of Sudan where civil war has raged since 2003 -- because there would be no restrictions on where the UN troops came from.

Khartoum has said that only African peacekeeping troops can be deployed by the UN if it intervenes in Sudan.

Violence has been escalating in Mogadishu, where Islamist insurgents are launching attacks almost daily on the government, which is supported by Ethiopian troops and African Union peacekeepers.

Uganda has deployed at least 1,500 troops in Mogadishu, a vanguard of around 8,000 troops the African Union is struggling to assemble to help Somalia's weak government.

A bloody power struggle has enveloped Somalia since dictator Mohamed Siad Barre was ousted in 1991.

The UN Security Council last month gave a cool response to a call from Gedi for the immediate deployment of a UN peace force in his strife-torn country.