

About 18,000 Somalis fled violence in Mogadishu in July: UN

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The UN humanitarian agency said Saturday that some 18,000 people have been forced to flee Somali capital, Mogadishu this month, reversing a trend where those displaced from the restive capital had been returning.

The UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in its weekly update that the volatile situation coupled with higher transportation costs have prevented many people from leaving Mogadishu.

"Nearly 18,000 people have fled ongoing insecurity and sporadic violence in Mogadishu in the month of July," OCHA said in its weekly updated on Saturday.

"The high costs of transportation, the increased number of roadblocks, insecurity and harassment along the roads might have hampered even more people from leaving Mogadishu," it said.

The UN humanitarian agency said the renewed fighting between the transitional government forces backed by the Ethiopia and insurgents have displaced 2,900 people from public buildings.

The UN has asked the transitional government to halt the evictions and to help provide basic services and find alternative solutions for these displaced people.

Early this week, the UN refugee agency appealed for 48 million U.S. dollars to cater for the rising number of Somali refugees in the Horn of Africa region and people displaced in-country triggered by the ongoing conflict in Mogadishu.

The program will run till end of 2008 with additional protection and assistance benefiting newly arrived Somali refugees in Kenya, Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti and those internally displaced in Somalia.

The UN agencies say about 20,000 people have returned to Mogadishu in the months of June and July, but more than 20,000 people have fled the daily violence during that period and the pace is rising.

Only 125,000 of the approximately 400,000 civilians who fled the heavy

fighting that raged in Mogadishu between February and May have returned to the capital, according to figures compiled by UNHCR and its partners.

The opening of the National Reconciliation Congress on July 14 has been followed by a series of deadly attacks targeting locations where the conference, which was suspended for several days, is taking place.

The attacks have wounded and killed innocent bystanders, including children, and prompted scores of others to flee.

The conference is intended to be another step toward establishing a functioning central government in a country that has been without one since 1991.

It is one of 15 attempts to reconcile Somalia's complex matrix of clans, sub-clans and political interests, and the first to be held on Somali soil.