

AU seeks a lift to arms embargo, charcoal ban in Somalia

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November 1, 2012 (ADDIS ABABA) - The African Union (AU) on Tuesday urged the United Nations Security Council to review an arms embargo imposed two-decades ago on war-torn Somalia.

The Commission of the African Union (AU) and the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) jointly appealed a lift to the arms embargo to help the country rebuild its weak army, empower its security and defense sector.

The 54-member continental bloc stressed that a lift to the weapons ban is crucial if Somalia forces are to further defeat the al Qaeda-linked al Shabaab Islamist rebels and they sustain the recent military gains that saw liberation to a number of rebel's strongholds including the key port town of Kismayo which was recovered earlier this month.

The United Nations Security Council imposed the arms embargo on Somalia in 1992, to cripple the flow of arms to warlords who overthrew former dictator Mohamed Siad Barre plunging the east African country into an all-out civil conflict.

The AU further called on the UN council to boost additional support to for the civilian and maritime components of the peace keeping force (AMISOM) so as to successfully carryout its peace keeping mission per the priorities set by the Somali President and Government.

The UN Security Council on Wednesday voted unanimously for a week-long extension to the mandate of AMISOM. However the Council is expected to pass a resolution next week that would extend the mandate for a full year.

The Council, in its meeting today, however is said to have been divided on deciding to lift the arms embargo as well as to yesterday's calls by the AU that seeks an end to charcoal export bans against Somalia.

Charcoal is believed to be the main financial source of al-Shabaab and the UN in February banned charcoal exports to drain the funds reaching the radical group.

According to the Security Council's Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, in 2011 alone, al-Shabaab secured over \$25 million from Charcoal revenue.

AMISOM has been operating in Somalia since 2007 and currently there are some 12,000 troops deployed from Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti and Kenya who are helping Somali government forces in the battle against al-Shabaab.

Ethiopia, which is a key regional security ally of the US, has also military presence in Somalia particularly lending security hands to the African Union mission in central and western Somalia.

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