

Islamist militants attack UN compound in Mogadishu, killing 15

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USPA News - Militants attacked a United Nations compound in the Somali capital of Mogadishu on Wednesday, killing at least fifteen people before they were killed during a gun battle, officials said. The Islamist militant group al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.

The attack began at around 11:30 a.m. local time on Wednesday when a pickup truck rigged with explosives was detonated outside the gate of the UN Common Compound, located in the heart of Mogadishu and not far from the airport where thousands of African Union troops are based. Following the blast, several attackers entered the complex after which gunfire and more explosions were heard. The UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) said its staff members took refuge in secure areas as the assault continued and the gunmen became involved in a firefight with security forces. A total of 22 people were believed to be killed in the attack, including all seven attackers. The United Nations confirmed among the victims are three contractors, one international staff member and four Somali security guards. Medics said seven Somali civilians were killed in the bomb blast outside the compound. Defense equipment manufacturer Denel, which is providing support to UN peacekeeping efforts in Somalia, confirmed the three contractors that were killed were its employees. The victims, whose names were not immediately released, included two South African nationals and one Somali citizen. The Somali militant group al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for Wednesday's attack, which follows a year in which security in the country has somewhat improved. "Mujahideen units from the Martyrdom Brigade have stormed the UNDP compound near the airport in Mogadishu," the group said. The militants tried to justify their attack and called for the removal of the United Nations. "The UN, a merchant of death and a satanic force of evil, has a long inglorious record of spreading nothing but poverty, dependency and disbelief," the group said. "Serving U.S. goals, the UN is a monolithic block in the path towards the establishment of Allah's Law on Earth and must therefore be dislodged." Al-Shabaab is the militant wing of the Somali Council of Islamic Courts which took over most of southern Somalia in the second half of 2006. Despite efforts from the Somali and Ethiopian governments, the group has continued its violent insurgency in southern and central Somalia. Somalia has been torn asunder by factional fighting since 1991 but has recently made progress towards stability. In 2011, Islamist Al-Shabaab insurgents retreated from Mogadishu and last year new government institutions emerged, as the country ended a transitional phase toward setting up a permanent, democratically-elected government. The UN Security Council, which includes China, France, Russia, Britain, and the United States, said it was "outraged" by the deadly attack on Wednesday. "The members of the Security Council extend their condolences to the victims and their families, as well as to the people and the Government of Somalia," a press statement said. After the attack, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke by telephone with Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to express his concern and condolences. He also commended UN security guards and Somali security forces who engaged the assailants after they seized the compound. The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of UNSOM, Nicholas Kay, said he was "shocked and horrified" by the attack against the UN Common Compound which houses UN personnel working on humanitarian and development issues for the Somali people. "This was an act of blatant terrorism and a desperate attempt to knock Somalia off its path of recovery and peace building," he added. In Washington, National Security Council spokeswoman Caitlin Hayden said the U.S. strongly condemns Wednesday's "despicable" attack. "The attack targeted people and organizations working in partnership with the Somali Government to provide health services, clean water, sanitation, education, and economic opportunity - people striving to build a better future for the Somali people," she said. Hayden added: "Today's attack highlights the repugnant terrorist tactics al-Shabaab continues to use to stand in the way of efforts to ease the suffering of the Somali people. Whether by denying food and medical aid during one of the region's worst droughts, or by repeated attacks against fellow Somalis and soldiers helping to build a lasting peace, al-Shabaab has shown again and again that it stands on the side of death and destruction."

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