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Mogadishu Death Toll Rises After Reprisals

By REUTERS

MOGADISHU, Somalia, Nov. 10 (Reuters) — Residents found at least 17 more bodies here on Saturday, bringing the number of people killed to about 60 after two days of reprisal attacks by Ethiopian soldiers.

The Ethiopian military has been attacking insurgent strongholds here in the capital after at least three dead Ethiopians were dragged through the streets after being killed in battles with rebels on Thursday.

Although no fighting was reported Saturday, Ethiopian soldiers patrolled throughout the capital, where they and their allies in the interim Somali government are battling a persistent revolt by hard-line Islamists.

The rebels were ousted from Mogadishu in late December 2006, but since then the government and Ethiopia have struggled to rein in the anarchy besetting the city. Insurgent attacks occur regularly and occasionally flare up into major bouts of fighting that have sent hundreds of thousands fleeing.

“We were trying to collect at least 17 dead bodies, but Ethiopian tanks and troops moved toward us so we ran away,” said Omar Ahmed, a resident of Mogadishu’s Blacksea neighborhood.

Ethiopians struck that area and others on Thursday and Friday, and more than 43 people died in barrages of gunfire and tank shells as the battle raged.

“Ethiopian troops attacked several neighborhoods seeking their dead soldiers. Some of the dead bodies of Ethiopians were dragged through the streets of Mogadishu, and this was wrong,” said the deputy Somali police spokesman, Abdullahi Ibrahim Omar.

Rights groups have criticized the Ethiopian troops for failing to distinguish between civilians and insurgents, but residents say it is difficult to tell in a city where most men have firearms.

[Human Rights Watch](#)’s Africa director, Peter Takirambudde, said in a statement that the international community needed to step in to stop the bloodshed in Mogadishu. “The international community should condemn these attacks and hold combatants accountable for violations of humanitarian law, including mutilating captured combatants and executing detainees,” he said.

The mayor of Mogadishu, Mohamed Dheere, who for years was an influential warlord with Ethiopian backing, told local news media on Saturday that the insurgents were to blame for the reprisals. “The Ethiopians are responding to attacks from the Shabaab,” he said, referring to the militant wing of one of the ejected Islamist groups.

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