

PRESS CONFERENCE

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Impunity in Somalia was a major factor maintaining a long-running “genocide in motion” in that Horn of Africa country, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General emphasized to correspondents at a Headquarters news conference this afternoon.

“People who have killed, displaced and maimed are still around, whether in Somalia, Nairobi or in their new country home,” Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah said, adding that many who stayed inside Somalia to continue the violence had put their families in safe havens outside the country.

Mr. Ould-Abdallah, who was in New York for consultations at Headquarters, stressed that it was the willingness of anti-Government forces to keep fighting, whether for profit, power or other reasons, that was devastating the country, not the threat of an Ethiopian return or the illegitimacy of the authorities.

The Government might be weak, he said, but it had as strong a claim to legitimacy as most African Governments; overturning it by force would defy Security Council resolutions.

Before last year’s Djibouti Agreement, which facilitated the departure of Ethiopian troops, it was claimed that the foreign presence was prolonging the conflict, he said. After they withdrew, however, the fighting had continued, and he knew of no evidence of continued Ethiopian presence.

“This is a diversion from the real problem,” he said. “Somalis have to stop killing Somalis and reject any alibis.”

As for the support of Eritrea for the Islamist group al-Shabab, he said that there was much talk of such involvement, but there was no way for him to monitor that situation or to know the truth of such a claim. Asked about other foreign rebel fighters, he said the rebel leaders

had extended a welcome to such fighters and there was wide information available on them.

When asked what safeguards were in place to make sure international payments to trained police forces in Somalia were not engendering abuse to civilians, Mr. Ould-Abdallah stressed how few trained police there were — 2,700 — in that large country in which civilians were being killed every day. Even those police had not been paid for 18 months.

To suggest that they should not be supported was irresponsible, he maintained. “The problem we face today is anarchy and disorder, and not to pay trained policemen because a few of them may have stolen or may have abused is unacceptable,” he said.

On piracy, Mr. Ould-Abdallah said that the international presence was beginning to show results, because the pirates had to go further afield for their quarry, over 100 pirates had been captured, and their financiers knew they were being watched.

It was important that it be a truly international effort, he said, demonstrating to Somalis that there was international attention being paid to their tragic situation and showing that such efforts could actually work.

Asked about law of the sea issues, he said he was not aware of any connection between Norwegian oil companies and the joint submission for the delineation of the continental shelf made by Somalia and Kenya, assisted by Norway.

He said he did know, however, that Norway had helped other African countries with their submissions, and that Somalia’s was very similar to the ones made by France, Ireland, the United Kingdom and Spain.

Outlining upcoming political activities on Somalia, Mr. Ould-Abdallah said that he planned to be in London for an 8 June meeting with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, after which he would convene in Rome the International Contact Group on Somalia, of which he is the Chair, although that meeting might be postponed.

He also described contacts with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an Africa regional economic group, which he said could play a role in the Somali crisis similar to that played by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in the crises in Liberia and Sierra Leone.