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PRESS RELEASE

(for immediate release)

AMISOM offers IHL training to senior officials of the Somali National Forces

Djibouti – October 29th, 2012: The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has opened a three day workshop on *Improving Understanding and Compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL)* for senior officials of the Somali Armed Forces.

The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) for Somalia, Ambassador Boubacar Gaoussou Diarra said while opening the workshop in Djibouti that Somalia is a signatory to the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1948 and therefore bound by both applicable treaty and customary IHL rules in addition to having a rich culture imbued with humanitarianism and respect for human dignity.

He said; “The Somali Armed Forces were once one of the largest and well trained in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, this capacity has been significantly lost over the past decades. Somalia’s Armed Forces currently consist of cadres of senior officers in need of refresher training in IHL and a large number of new recruits with limited or no training in IHL. This poses danger in terms of compliance with IHL and protection of civilians.”

Ambassador Diarra noted that commanders have important responsibilities in ensuring respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) which can only be realized if they are aware of their obligations under IHL. “In accordance with AMISOM’s mandate to build the capacity of the Somalia National Army including through assisting in the implementation of the National Security Stabilization Plan (NSSP), we are gathered here today to contribute to strengthening and professionalizing of the Somali Armed Forces by introducing the essential rules of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) binding on Somalia.” He said.

Ambassador Boubacar Gaoussou Diarra was particularly pleased that for the first time the workshop was being attended by senior officials of the Somali Federal Government.

The specific objectives of the workshop are; promoting understanding of IHL applicable to the conflict in Somalia in particular the rules of the law that are relevant to the commanders’ actual functions, Identifying gaps and challenges to compliance with IHL in the context of the conflict in Somalia and to identify and agree on strategies and actions to overcome the challenges.

40 officers from the Somali National Army and Somali Air Force, and officials from the Ministry of Defense are participating in the workshop. The Africa Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is providing technical support for the workshop through its Training for Peace (TfP) project.

The workshop was formally opened by the Djibouti Chief of Defense Forces, General Hasan Ali, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Djibouti.

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