

Al-Shabaab in crosshairs of Somalia's anti-terrorism law
By Majid Ahmed, Sabahi
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In the coming days Somalia's parliament will debate a proposed anti-terrorism law that targets al-Shabaab and aims to restructure the country's national security and intelligence services in the fight against terrorism.

The Somali cabinet approved the draft anti-terrorism law on April 18th, four days after al-Shabaab operatives killed at least 29 civilians in a raid on the Benadir regional court complex.

The details of the proposed draft law have yet to be released to the public, but will be available once the debate in parliament formally begins.

"This is a very important piece of legislation that represents a key component of the government's strategy to fight terrorism comprehensively while taking responsibility of our own borders and the security of our people," Somali Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon said in a prepared statement issued after the draft was approved.

"We will prosecute a counter-terrorism campaign according to the most robust, transparent and credible laws that have the confidence of the Somali public and fully respect international human rights," Shirdon later said in a series of messages posted on his Twitter account.

"We are in the last stages of a military campaign against an enemy that has been reduced to terrorism and guerrilla operations," he said.

Punishing terrorists

The draft anti-terrorism law is part of the federal government's strategy to combat militant groups that are trying to destabilise the country, Deputy Minister of Information, Posts and Telecommunications Ibrahim Isaaq Yarooow said.

"In Somalia, we urgently need such a law, which makes it easier to eliminate the danger of terrorists that threaten the security of the country and endanger society and the nation," he told Sabahi.

"The new law includes lots of provisions specifically designed to fight terrorism as a phenomenon and punish terrorists that terrorise and mercilessly kill innocent civilians," he said. "This new law has become absolutely necessary and a priority at this stage due to the current security situation, so we hope that parliament will ratify this law as soon as possible."

Hassan Abdirahman, a former Ministry of Justice adviser, said the proposed anti-terrorism law bolsters Somalia's national security and stability. He urged the government to use all measures at its disposal to combat terrorism.

"No country can survive while it is threatened from within and Somalia is a country with internal threats as a result of the disease of terrorism," Abdirahman told Sabahi. "The Somali people have already been burned by terrorists who threaten the security of their country."

Mohamed Hussein, a Mogadishu-based political analyst, welcomed the counter-terrorism legislation but expressed concern about whether it could affect people's freedoms and rights.



Cars burn after al-Shabaab suicide bombers attacked the Benadir regional court complex in Mogadishu on April 14, 2013. (Mohamed Abdiwahab/AFP)

"Somalia needs an anti-terrorism law but such a law should not be used as an excuse to violate basic human rights and freedoms," Hussein told Sabahi. "I hope that the Somali parliament carefully reviews this new law."

Osman Mohamed Roble, a 47-year old cab driver in Mogadishu, said he hopes the legislation will help put an end to terrorist operations in Somalia.

"I think this is a very useful step because we need stricter laws to punish those responsible for explosions and suicide operations that kill innocent civilians," he said.

"All citizens should stand as one to face these terrorists. We have to help the brave security forces in their fight against terrorism by giving information on the whereabouts of terrorists in any part of the country," he said.

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