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PRESS RELEASE

(For immediate release)

AMISOM troops on outskirts of Al-Shabaab stronghold

Mogadishu-May 23rd 2012: The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces have made significant progress in the last 24 hours towards Afgoye town. Afgoye has been for a long time a stronghold of the Al-Qaeda backed Al-Shabaab insurgents and is a strategic junction for routes to the north, west and south of Somalia.

“Operation Free Shabelle” started yesterday with the objective of bringing security to the 400,000 people of the Afgoye corridor, and area north-west of Mogadishu with the largest concentration of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the world.

A senior Al- Shabaab commander yet to be identified and his escort were killed yesterday during the fighting. His two escort vehicles and a saloon car in which he was travelling were also destroyed.

In public announcements to the displaced people in the north-west of the city, AMISOM has been encouraging them to stay in their current places of residence and not to stray from their homes. The AMISOM troops have been specifically avoiding entering the built up areas and camps around the main road to Afgoye.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (Deputy SRCC) for Somalia, Honorable Wafula Wamunyinyi said; “We are encouraging the inhabitants near Afgoye to remain where they are for the time being. Soon, once the security situation has stabilized, we hope to see that people will have the opportunity to return to their homes in Mogadishu and humanitarian services, provided by the international community, will be available to them.”

AMISOM forces also pushed from their positions in Maslah capturing Al Fitr town 5 kilometres to the north of the capital. Ongoing operations of the African Union Mission in Somalia seek to

push Al-Shabaab forces further from the capital, supporting the Somali drive towards peace and recovery of the country.

The Force Commander of AMISOM Forces Lieutenant General Andrew Gutti, said: “The operation continues to make strong progress. Al-Shabaab terrorists are on the run. They know they are losing ground, and losing friends around Somalia. We encourage the people of Afgoye town to expel the foreign elements that lurk in their midst. They too can share in the trading and construction revival that Mogadishu has been enjoying.”

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