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## **PRESS RELEASE**

*(For immediate release)*

### ***African Union Troops Cross Shabelle River and Secure Afgooye Town***

**Mogadishu-May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012:** AMISOM troops have today crossed the Shabelle River and secured all the major roads leading into and out of Afgooye town. The town is strategically located 30km from the capital, Mogadishu, and governing routes to the port town of Marka, as well as the towns of Baidoa and Jowhar.

Leaders of the Al Qaeda-affiliated terror group, al Shabaab are believed to have fled the town, which was their main base in the region and where they were known to have been extorting revenues from farmers, traders and pastoralists.

On Monday, AMISOM launched a joint military operation with the Somali National Army, code-named 'Operation Free Shabelle' with the objective of securing the Afgooye corridor, home to the world's largest concentration of internally displaced people. Operations are still ongoing to secure the market town of Elasha Biyaha. Harabsca, a trading centre located 26km from Mogadishu, has also been secured.

The Special Representative of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (SRCC) for Somalia, Ambassador Boubacar Gaoussou Diarra said: "Securing the town of Afgooye is a great achievement for the Somali government and the Somali people. This will not only make possible the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the population, but will go a long way in consolidating the country's peace process."

AMISOM Force Commander, Lt. Gen. Andrew Gutti, applauded the AU troops for taking all the necessary precautions to prevent harm or injury to civilians. "The soldiers have conducted this operation in an exemplary manner," he said. "During the operation, AMISOM troops specifically avoided entering the built up areas and camps around the main road to Afgooye."

Earlier in the week, the UN Humanitarian Coordination for Somalia, Mark Bowden stated that the UN had "no reports of significant movements of people from Afgooye corridor" as a result of the operation.

The SNA will now conduct security operations inside the town to remove any remaining terrorist elements and to ensure it is safe.

The Force Commander appealed to all those Al Shabaab militants who are still hiding in the liberated areas to surrender and join the peace process. He assured them of safety should they choose to abandon the Al Qaeda-backed al Shabaab and join other Somalis in rebuilding their country.

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