



AFRICA/SOMALIA - Two statements of the responsible of Shabaab suggest a crisis in the fundamentalist movement

Mogadishu (Agenzia Fides) - The radical Somali Islamist group Shabaab seems to be weakened by recent military and diplomatic developments and are internally divided. On the military side, with the conquest of Afgoyee in Afmadow, the forces of AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) and that of the government are approaching the strategic port of Kismayo, whose capture will cut access to supplies by sea to Shabaab. On the diplomatic front, the Istanbul Conference (May 31-June 2) representatives of 54 Countries, together with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, have ratified the timing of the end of the Somali transition, which forecasts the election of the new Head of State on August 20. The renewed international commitment has been censured by Shabaab spokesman, Sheikh Ali Mohamoud Raghe, alias Sheikh Ali Dhere, who has accused NATO of taking part in the war in Somalia alongside Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Burundi and Djibouti, whose forces support the Somali Transitional Government. The spokesman of the fundamentalist group went on to say that this huge military coalition is to defeat only a small fraction of the Somali society. "Al-Shabaab represents less than 5% of the Somali society," underlined Sheikh Ali Dhere with the intent to present one's own group as a victim of powerful international forces, but at the same time offering the right to easy criticism: "why do Shabaab, if they are a minority, intend to impose their will on the majority of the Somali society? ". In areas controlled by them, Shabaab have imposed a regime based on the strict interpretation of the Sharia, which with time has alienated the support of the majority of the inhabitants. A reality that has created divisions within the fundamentalist movement, as demonstrated by the request for forgiveness made by Ali Mohamed Hussein, former leader of the Shabaab in the Banadir region, which through Radio Mogadishu (controlled by the transitional government) has apologized to the population for the violence committed. Hussein could take advantage of the amnesty offered by the government to the fundamentalists who laid down their arms, creating an important precedent. In any case, according to local commentaries, Hussein's radio sortie shows that there is a crisis of confidence within the fundamentalist movement. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 04/06/2012)