

UN Security Council authorizes fight against Somali piracy

The UN Security Council Monday unanimously voted to authorize states to enter Somalia's territorial waters to fight piracy, which it said has become a threat to international and regional peace and security.

The 15-nation council allowed states to use 'all necessary means' to 'repress acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea' that have gotten bolder recently with more ships being captured by pirates off the coasts of Somalia.

The resolution authorized states with naval vessels operating in the region to enter territorial waters of Somalia 'for the purpose of repressing acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea, in a manner consistent with such action permitted on the high seas with respect to piracy under relevant international law.'

The council proclaimed that acts of piracy off the Somali coasts and on the high seas have become threats to international peace and security in the region. It invoked Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to authorize the fight against piracy, which in fact allows states to use force.

It called on naval vessels and military aircraft of states operating on the high seas and airspace off the coast of Somalia to be 'vigilant' of piracy acts and armed robbery and try to deter those acts.

The authorization to fight piracy is good for six months.

States are called to cooperate with the transitional government in Mogadishu, which admitted helplessness in fighting piracy off its coasts. The authorization would apply only to the situation in Somalia.

The council called on states to cooperate with each other and with the International Maritime Organization, share information about acts of piracy and provide assistance to vessels threatened by or under attack by pirates or armed robberies.

African maritime officials said Somali pirates last week seized three cargo ships flagged to Gibraltar, Turkey and the Netherlands.

Piracy is rife off the Somali coast, which is close to key shipping routes. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) says 31 hijackings and attempted hijackings were reported last year.

Andrew Mwangura, the head of the East Africa Seafarers' Assistance Programme, told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa that pirates Wednesday captured the Gibraltar-flagged MV Lehmann Timber, which is run by Germany's Kehdingerland GmbH, and the Turkey-flagged MV Aream.

No information on demands from the pirates, the ships' crews or their cargo was available.

Mwangura said the two ships were captured in the same area as Dutch cargo ship MV Amiya Scan, which was seized Sunday along with its nine Russian and Filipino crew.

In April, pirates captured a luxury French yacht and attempted to ransom its crew members. French

troops recovered the hostages and captured six of the pirates, although another six are believed to have escaped.

The IMB Wednesday issued an alert for the region, warning that pirates were using automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades to stop ships. The body has also advised vessels not scheduled to call on Somali ports keep at least 200 nautical miles from the Somali coast.

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