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Somalia appoints former al-Shabab militant as minister

Somalia has appointed former al-Shabab spokesman Muktar Robow as its new religious affairs minister. The group has been waging an insurgency against Mogadishu for 15 years.

DW.com (02.08.2022) - https://bit.ly/3JwNMu1 - Somalia has appointed a former spokesman and deputy leader of the al-Shabab Islamist group as religious affairs minister, Prime Minister Hamya Abdi Barre said on Tuesday.

The appointment comes months after Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected Somalia's president by lawmakers in May. Recently, Mohamud signaled willingness to negotiate with al-Shabab, saying that more than a military approach will be required to end the insurgency.

Who is Somalia's new religious affairs minister?

Muktar Robow served as al-Shabab's spokesman and deputy leader until he defected in August 2017.

"I disagreed with their creed, which does not serve Islamic religion," Robow said after defecting.

The United States had at one point offered a $5 million (€4.9 million) bounty for Robow's capture, a bounty which was removed at the Somali government's request. He was arrested in late 2018, shortly before he was scheduled to run for president of Somalia's southwestern Bay region.

The former al-Shabab militant had spent the last four years under house arrest after he fell out with ex-president Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, known as "Farmaajo."

Farmaajo's government accused Robow of organizing a militia in the southwestern Somali city of Baidoa. He was also accused of attempting to "undermine stability" in the country.

Prime Minister Hamya Abdi Barre was expected to name a cabinet within 30 days of his appointment on June 25. Barre said delays were due to the protracted election process that ended in May.

A 15-year-long insurrection

Al-Shabab has waged an insurrection against Somalia's central government for 15 years. The group was ousted from Somali capital Mogadishu in 2011.

Last week, scores of al-Shabab fighters and Ethiopian security forces were killed in clashes along the Ethiopian-Somali border.

Insurgents hold substantial amounts of territory in Robow's native Bakool region, which is located immediately north of Bay.

Al-Shabab is suspected of having links to Islamist organization Al-Qaeda. [The United States announced yesterday that it had killed Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri](#).

Photo: Muktar Robow has been appointed religious affairs minister. Ali Elmi/AFP