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Subject: Kidnappings: Kenya to pursue militants in Somalia (AP)

NAIROBI (AP) - Signaling a stepped-up campaign against Somali militants, Kenya's top security chiefs said Saturday that Kenyan forces will pursue militants into Somalia, a response to a spate of attacks in which four Europeans have been kidnapped and one killed since September.

Following the kidnappings of two Spanish aid workers Thursday and the abductions of British and French women in recent weeks, Minister of Internal Security George Saitoti said Kenyan forces will pursue al-Shabab militants into Somalia.

"For the first time our country is threatened with the most serious level of terrorism," Saitoti said.

The plan to pursue fighters inside Somalia signals a huge change in Kenya's approach to the security threat posed by the lawless state of Somalia. While the African countries Uganda and Burundi each have thousands of troops fighting al-Shabab militants in Mogadishu, Kenya has not actively engaged in the fight.

Al-Shabab has already carried out one devastating suicide attack in Uganda _ killing 76 people last year _ and Kenya's decision to increase military engagement against the militants could open it up to more attacks inside its borders.

Gunmen on Thursday entered the world's largest refugee camp, Dadaab, and snatched two Spanish women working for the aid group Doctors Without Borders. Dadaab is filled with nearly a half million Somali refugees fleeing conflict and hunger. Tens of thousands of Somalis have swelled the camp's ranks in the last three months after fleeing famine.

Saitoti said Saturday that because of the kidnappings, the border with Somalia would now be closed.

"We have now closed the border and we have no apologies as far as that is concerned," he said. "You will recall yourself that when a very large number of refugees were coming from Somalia because of the drought there we did agree to receive them in fulfillment of our international obligation. We did of course warn the international community that while Kenya was willing to take these people there were inherent risks."

One such risk is that Kenyan officials have almost no way of telling apart legitimate refugees and al-Shabab militants posing as hungry Somalis.

A spokesman for the U.N. refugee agency noted Saturday that the border has officially been closed for three years, so it wasn't immediately clear if Saitoti's announcement signaled a new policy or a reiteration of the old one.

The head the Spanish office of Doctors Without Borders said Friday in Madrid that the group has had no contact with their workers after they were seized Thursday. Juan Antonio Bastos identified the women as Montserrat Serra i Ridaó, 40, from Girona in northeast Spain and Blanca Thiebaut, 30, from Madrid.

The U.N. temporarily suspended all non-lifesaving aid operations in the Dadaab refugee camp following the kidnappings, a spokeswoman said. Hundreds of staff are confined to their offices, forcing the cancellation of services like education, counseling and relocation of families until further notice.

Security has long been a concern at Dadaab, where representatives from various factions seek to recruit

disaffected young male refugees as fighters. Aid workers live in guarded compounds surrounded by high barbed-wire walls, and the U.N. requires its staff to travel in the camps with armed escorts.

On Oct. 1, Somali gunmen took a wheelchair-bound French woman from her home near the resort town of Lamu. Somalis also abducted a British woman from a Kenyan coastal resort in September. Her husband was killed in the attack.

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