

United Nations, Oct 25 (AP) - The U.N. Security Council authorized the inspection of ships suspected of carrying highly prized charcoal from Somalia on Friday in a stepped-up effort to enforce a ban on charcoal exports and cut off a lucrative source of funding for the al-Qaida linked extremist group al-Shabab.

The council approved the British-drafted resolution by a vote of 13-0 with Jordan abstaining because of concerns about possible abuses in stopping ships "in one of the most sensitive regions of the world," and Russia abstaining because of objections to unspecified claims in the text.

The resolution also extends until Nov. 30, 2015 the mandate of the African Union force in Somalia and the partial suspension of an arms embargo that allows the delivery of military equipment to develop the country's security forces.

The key provision authorizes U.N. member states to inspect ships suspected of illegally carrying charcoal or weapons in Somali territorial waters and on the high seas off its coast and in the Arabian Sea and Persian Gulf. It requires the Somali government be notified of inspections and to inform Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who will then notify all 193 U.N. member states.

Charcoal from Somalia is prized in Gulf nations: Made from acacia trees, it's slow burning and gives a sweet aroma to the region's beloved grilled meats and to tobacco burned in waterpipes. Britain's U.N. Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant said that since the council banned charcoal exports from Somalia in February 2012 the trade in charcoal from the Horn of Africa nation has actually increased.

He said the U.N. expert group monitoring sanctions against Somalia estimates that al-Shabab kept up to one-third of the \$250 million from the annual charcoal trade.

"This funding stream for al-Shabab allows them to continue wreaking their misery on the long-suffering people of Somalia, and it has to stop," Lyall Grant said.

He said adoption of the resolution "shows the council is determined to take practical steps in response to tackling the threats from terrorism."

U.S. deputy ambassador David Pressman said the resolution targets "many of the most serious causes of instability and insecurity in Somalia."

Somalia has been trying to rebuild after establishing its first functioning central government since 1991, when warlords overthrew a longtime dictator and turned on each other, plunging the impoverished nation into chaos. Al-Shabab rebels were ousted from the capital, Mogadishu, in 2011 and have been pushed out of other key cities but they are not yet defeated and the government remains weak.

While renewing the partial lifting of the arms embargo, the Security Council criticized the Somali government for failing to notify the committee monitoring sanctions of deliveries of weapons and military equipment as required. It also noted "with concern" reports of diversion of arms and ammunition and expressed disappointment that the government hasn't started marking and registering weapons.

In February, U.N. experts monitoring the partial lifting of the arms embargo accused the government of "high level and systematic abuses" which have allowed weapons and ammunition to get into the hands of clan leaders, warlords and al-Qaida-linked militants.