

Amnesty International UK

MEDIA BRIEFING

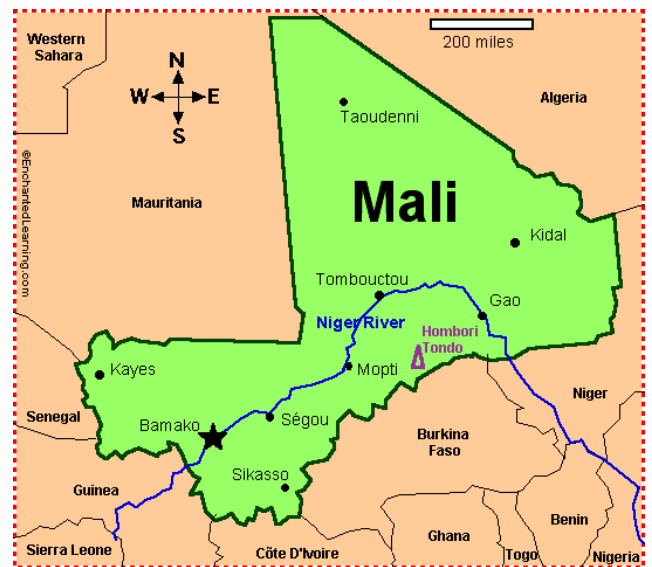
MALI UNREST 2012 – 2013

This five-page briefing provides a brief account of Mali's history, charts the human rights violations which occurred in 2012 during the unrest to the north of the country, and sets out Amnesty International's calls upon both the Government of Mali and the international community. This document also details the militant groups operating in the North of the country.

Introduction

Starting in the northern towns of Mali (Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu), Islamic insurgents have made their way across Mali. They have grabbed territory in central Mali, and are currently moving closer to the capital, Bamako.

- Armed conflict broke out in northern Mali in January 2012.
- Foreign military intervention began on 11 January 2013 as French troops carried out aerial bombardments.
- Street battles between French ground troops and Islamist rebels began on Weds (16 Jan).
- Over 400,000 people have been displaced in the North of Mali by the unrest according to the UN.



The militant groups have moved further past the 'narrow waist' of Mali

Brief country history

- Mali gained independence from France in 1960
- In March 2012 the democratically elected President Amadou Toumani Touré was removed from office in a [military coup](#) by a group called the *National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State*. The Malian army is currently dominated by this military junta, which remains heavily influential in political life.
- Following the March 2012 military coup, which triggered economic sanctions and a blockade by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) against Mali, a deal was signed on **6 April 2012** that saw the head of the military junta, Captain Amadou Sanogo, cede power to the current President [Dioncounda Traoré](#).

- Despite the deal signed in April, trouble continued to engulf the north of Mali. In April northern Mali Islamist extremist group, Ansar Dine, took control of the northern towns of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu.
- Islamist groups who seized control of towns in the north of Mali (notably Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu) imposed a “reign of terror”, introducing punishments such as amputations, flogging, and stoning to death for those who oppose their interpretation of Islam.
 - In July an unmarried couple were reported to have been stoned to death in the northern town of Aguelhok.
 - Islamist groups have also [enforced behaviours](#) such as dress codes for women and men, the banning of all music except religious music and forbidding people of opposite sexes if unmarried to sit next to each other on a bus or to walk together.

UN Security Council Resolution 2085

In December 2012, The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2085 to authorise the deployment of international military force (African-led International Support Mission in Mali or **AFISMA**) for a year.

The UN-approved AFISMA was tasked with:

- contributing to the rebuilding of the Malian Defence and Security Forces
- supporting the Malian authorities in “recovering the areas in the north under the control of terrorist, extremist and armed groups
- reducing the threat posed by “terrorist groups”

In addition, it will be responsible for

- supporting the Malian authorities in their primary responsibility to protect the population
- to create a secure environment for the civilian-led delivery of humanitarian assistance and the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Amnesty reaction to the UN SC Resolution 2085

In December 2012, [Amnesty International expressed concern at international armed intervention](#), warning of an “increase in human rights violations”, including

- indiscriminate attacks,
- arbitrary detentions,
- torture,
- extrajudicial executions, and
- use of child soldiers by both sides, could become even more widespread.

Amnesty called on the UN to ensure that any military force is bound by **effective safeguards for civilian protection and that human rights monitors are sent to observe the conflict closely**, with particular attention given to government-supported militias.

France's military intervention in January 2013

The French intervention was launched at the request of the Malian government under their bilateral defence agreement.

The African force **AFISMA** (authorised by UNSC resolution 2085 last December) is being set up with contingents from Nigeria, Niger, Burkina and Togo.

The UN endorsed France's military intervention on Monday 14 Jan although troops had already begun air strikes on Friday 11 January, and were supported by British military aircraft. The UN's Ban Ki-moon said he hoped the intervention would help restore "Mali's constitutional order and territorial integrity". <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21021132>

Abuses committed during conflict in Mali

Amnesty International welcomed the decision taken by the International Criminal Court to investigate crimes committed in Mali in 2012 during the unrest, describing it as a '[key step](#)' towards justice'.

- Since the beginning of the armed conflict in northern Mali in January 2012, Amnesty International has documented crimes under international law committed by all parties to the conflict.
- Tuareg and Islamist armed opposition groups have committed human rights abuses, including torture and killings of captured Malian soldiers, rape of women and girls and recruitment of child soldiers. They have also attacked and destroyed cultural and religious sites.
- Malian security forces have also committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.
 - The extrajudicial executions of Tuareg civilians, indiscriminate shelling of a Tuareg nomadic camp and killing livestock which the nomadic population rely on for survival.
 - In September 2012 a group of 16 Muslim preachers comprised of Malian and Mauritanian nationals were arrested and then executed by the Malian military in Diabaly.
- Crimes are not confined to the north of the country. Amnesty International has also documented cases of torture, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and attacks against political leaders, journalists and other people who expressed dissent peacefully in the south, where the capital Bamako lies.
- Malian soldiers have been responsible for extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and torture.

- In March and April 2012, Mali's security forces responded to the uprising by bombing Tuareg civilians, and arresting, torturing and killing Tuareg people apparently (according to Amnesty) only on ethnic grounds. Amnesty warned that international military intervention risks triggering further ethnic conflict in a country already riven by attacks on Tuareg and other lighter-skinned people.

Amnesty International is calling for:

- The international community to ***urgently*** send human rights monitors to Mali, and they must have the material and human resources to do their job.
- The international community and Mali's neighbours to be prepared to deal with the humanitarian and relief consequences of the accelerated fighting, and ensure those displaced have access to safety, food, shelter, and other basic needs.
- All necessary steps must be taken by international forces to protect civilians, provide civilians with sufficient warning of offensive operations, and to resist any indiscriminate bombing and shelling.
- The international community must ensure that it is not complicit in future human rights violations and atrocities through collaborative or joint operations by international forces with Malian forces who are responsible for crimes. This includes abuses of the sort that have already been perpetrated: indiscriminate attacks on civilians, the targeting of civilians based on ethnic identity, sexual violence, the use of child soldiers, extrajudicial killings, and torture.
- The international forces, in addition to their steadfast adherence to civilian protection and international humanitarian law must ensure that the Malian authorities investigate and prosecute – in accordance with internationally recognised standards of fair trials – any crimes committed by any armed personnel in Mali.
- As mandated in UNSC Resolution 2085, the intervention must support fully the work of the International Criminal Court.

Who's Who in the North:

Azawad National Liberation Movement (MNLA)

The MNLA was established in October 2011 from the merger of several previous Tuareg groups. In particular, it includes Tuaregs who had fled to Libya and then returned to Mali after the fall of Colonel al-Gaddafi. It declares itself to be "a revolutionary movement fighting for the right to have auto-determination for Azawad." The MNLA asserts that it is a secular movement.

January 2013

Ansar Dine / Ansar Eddin

The group Ansar Dine (which means “Defenders of the religion” in Arabic) was created in December 2011. Unlike the MNLA, Ansar Dine does not challenge the territorial integrity of Mali and declares its intention to impose the Shari’a across the whole country.

Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Deriving from the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was created following its allegiance on September 11, 2006 to Osama Bin Laden. They settled in the North of Mali, encountering no resistance from the Malian government. AQIM has fighters of various nationalities amongst its ranks, in particular Algerian, Mauritanian, Senegalese and Malian. Moreover, reports indicate the presence in the region of Boko Haram combatants (an Islamic group active in Nigeria), which has established links with AQIM.

The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)

MUJAO was created, at the end of 2011, from a defection from the ranks of AQIM. The movement claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, at the end of October 2011, in the Tindouf region (Southwest Algeria) of three humanitarian workers (two Spaniards and one Italian) and then the kidnapping of seven Algerian diplomats on 5 April 2012 in Gao.

Arab militias

For years, the Malian government has delegated security tasks to an Arab militia in Timbuktu. In April 2012, a political official of this city told the Amnesty International delegation about the origins of this group: “The Arab militia is the creation of the Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré to fight against armed Tuareg groups. It is equipped by the Malian government and trained by members of the Malian army.”

Songhay militias

There are two Songhay militias (black populations living along the Niger River) called **Ganda Koy** (“Masters of the earth” in Songhay) and **Ganda Izo** (“Sons of the country”). The patriotic movement, Ganda Koy, was created by former members of the Malian army during the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s. After the peaceful settlement of the Tuareg rebellion in the mid-1990s, most members of the Ganda Koy were integrated into the Malian army or administration or returned to civilian life, but members of these groups continue to harass Tuaregs.

ENDS

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