

Beat: Miscellaneous

HRW DENOUNCE NEW WAVE OF EXECUTIONS OF CIVILIANS IN MALI

BY ARMED ISLAMISTS

Paris, Washington DC, 16.03.2022, 00:45 Time

USPA NEWS - The Malian army and armed Islamist groups have allegedly killed at least 107 civilians in central and southwestern Mali since December 2021, Human Rights Watch said today. The victims, most allegedly summarily executed, include traders, village chiefs, religious leaders, and children. Mali's transitional government should conduct credible and impartial criminal investigations into these alleged killings, of which at least 71 were linked to government forces and 36 to armed Islamist groups, known as jihadists. Both sides should end the abuses and ensure respect for the laws of war, which are applicable to Mali's armed conflict.

The Malian army and armed Islamist groups have allegedly killed at least 107 civilians in central and southwestern Mali since December 2021, Human Rights Watch said today. The victims, most allegedly summarily executed, include traders, village chiefs, religious leaders, and children. Mali's transitional government should conduct credible and impartial criminal investigations into these alleged killings, of which at least 71 were linked to government forces and 36 to armed Islamist groups, known as jihadists. Both sides should end the abuses and ensure respect for the laws of war, which are applicable to Mali's armed conflict. "There has been a dramatic spike in the number of civilians, including suspects, killed by the Malian army and armed Islamist groups," said Corinne Dufka, Sahel director at Human Rights Watch. "This complete disregard for human life, which includes apparent war crimes, should be investigated and those found to be implicated, appropriately punished." The authorities should also facilitate independent investigations by Mali's National Human Rights Commission (La Commission nationale des droits de l'homme, CNDH) and the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Mali.

NEW WAVE OF EXECUTIONS OF CIVILIANS IN MALI Since Mali's current armed conflict began a decade ago, armed Islamist groups, separatist rebels, ethnic militias, and government security forces have killed hundreds of civilians. Most of the killings occurred in central Mali, which since 2015 has been the country's epicenter of violence, abuse, and displacement. Armed Islamist groups have also killed hundreds of Malian security force members, including 27 soldiers during an attack on Mondoro on March 4, 2022. While several members of armed Islamist groups have been tried for criminal offenses, almost no one from government or progovernment forces have been investigated, let alone held to account. The violence has displaced over 320,000 people. From January to March 2022, Human Rights Watch, which has monitored the situation in Mali since 2012, interviewed in person and by telephone 49 people with knowledge of eight incidents, including community leaders, traders, market people, medical personnel, and foreign diplomats. The incidents occurred between December 3, 2021 and early March 2022 in or near the towns, villages, or hamlets of Boudjiguiré, Danguèrè Wotoro, Feto, Nia Ouro, Petaka, Songho, Tonou, and Wouro Gnaga, in Mali's Ségou, Mopti, and Koulikoro regions. Local residents said that Islamist fighters shot at a bus taking traders to a market in Bandiagara in early December 2021, killing 32 civilians, including at least 6 children. Many of the victims were burned alive after the bus caught fire. "I found carnage... a scene one cannot imagine," said a witness. "Most of the dead were terribly burned, making it difficult to know whether they'd perished by gunfire, or because of the fire." Malian security forces committed the abuses during counterterrorism operations in response to the growing presence of armed Islamist groups largely linked to Al-Qaeda. Around March 2, soldiers allegedly extrajudicially executed at least 35 suspects whose charred bodies were discovered near Danguèrè Wotoro hamlet in Ségou region. This is the most serious allegation involving government soldiers since 2012. In Tonou, villagers said that soldiers allegedly summarily executed 14 ethnic Dogon civilians in apparent retaliation for the deaths of two soldiers nearby from an improvised explosive device (IED). "The soldiers dragged two elders in their 80's and four others to where the mine exploded, and executed them on the spot," one witness said. Human Rights Watch on March 4 sent a letter to the Malian government summarizing the findings in this report. In its March 11 response, the general secretary of the Ministry of Defense and Veterans Affairs said that the gendarmerie had opened investigations into the incidents in Tonou and Nia Ouro, which are ongoing. The ministry characterized the allegations of summary executions in Danguèrè Wotoro as "false and of a nature to discredit the FAMA" but said the army high command had nevertheless on March 5 opened an investigation into the incident. The ministry denied that the military was responsible for abuses in Feto, Wouro Gnaga, and Boudjiguiré, but said it was gathering more information on each to determine who was responsible.

All parties to Mali's armed conflict are bound by international humanitarian law, notably Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and customary laws of war, which provide for the humane treatment of captured combatants and civilians in custody. Individuals who commit serious violations of the laws of war, including summary executions and torture, should be prosecuted for war crimes. Malian authorities are also bound by international human rights law, which guarantees due process for criminal suspects. Mali is a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has opened an investigation into alleged war crimes committed in Mali since 2012.

The Defense Ministry should suspend military personnel implicated in serious abuses and ensure that gendarme military police, responsible for promoting discipline and safeguarding detainees' rights, are present in all military operations, Human Rights Watch said. "Malian judicial and military prosecutors should impartially investigate the alleged abuses by all sides," Dufka said. "The ICC also has an active investigation into Mali and remains the court of last resort when national authorities are unable or unwilling to investigate and prosecute the most serious crimes." Source: Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20212/hrw-denounce-new-wave-of-executions-of-civilians-in-mali.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Jedi Foster, Rahma Sophia RACHDI

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