

**“THEY EXECUTED SOME
AND BROUGHT THE REST
WITH THEM”**

**HUMAN RIGHTS
VIOLATIONS BY SECURITY
FORCES IN THE SAHEL**

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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INTRODUCTION

Amnesty International has documented serious human rights violations committed by the security forces of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso in their respective territories during military operations between February 2020 and April 2020. The violations included at least 57 cases of extrajudicial executions or unlawful killings, and at least 142 cases of enforced disappearances. They were committed in a context where the three countries have scaled up their military operations to fight armed groups responsible for multiple attacks against security forces, and for serious human rights abuses against the population.

Amnesty International has documented 199 incidents in Mali (Niono, Ségou region), Burkina Faso (Ouahigouya, Nord region; and Djibo, Sahel region), and Niger (Ayorou department, Tillabéry region). The organization conducted 33 interviews by phone and in-person¹ with witnesses, victims and their relatives, and local leaders from these regions. The interviewees were identified through referrals by civil society organizations and community leaders. Interviews with civil society leader were conducted in French, while those with witnesses, victims and their relatives were conducted in Fulfulde and were done with the support of a translator. All the interviewees were anonymized and to protect them from intimidation and possible reprisals, Amnesty International decided not to disclose any other information that could lead to the identification of the informants. The organization also collected information pertaining to these incidents, including lists of disappeared/arrested individuals drafted by local groups soon after the incidents, as well as pictures of the dead bodies of the victims and the alleged emplacement of mass graves. Amnesty International could not verify that all the allegations in these documents occurred but several victims and their relatives interviewed by the organization, corroborated the allegations. Many of the incidents described in the paragraphs below were also denounced by the Human Rights Division of the MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) and human rights organizations².

Armed groups such as the GSIM (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims) and the ISGS (Islamic State in the Greater Sahel) are conducting attacks on the territories of Mali, Niger and

¹ The testimonies were collected through phone and in-person interview between 30 March and 10 May 2020 with respondents in Mali (Bamako, Niono and Diabaly), Niger (Ayorou and Niamey) and Burkina Faso (Ouahigouya, Ouagadougou and Djibo). Some of the respondents were still based in the toponyms in this document. Due to the real risks of reprisals against the informants, we have decided to anonymize them all to preserve their safety

² For the incident of Djibo in Burkina Faso, see Human Rights Watch, Burkina Faso, Security Forces Allegedly Execute 31 Detainees, 20 April 2020, www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/20/burkina-faso-security-forces-allegedly-execute-31-detainees

MINUSMA, 'Note sur les tendances des violations et abus de droits de l'homme (1^{er} janvier-31 mars 2020)', Division des droits de l'homme et de la protection, avril 2020

Burkina Faso. These two groups have committed repeated human rights abuses in the border regions of these three countries and beyond³.

In response to these attacks, the G5 Sahel countries⁴ committed to their partnership during the Pau Summit⁵ (13 January 2020) and made public their willingness to scale up their military operations. However, these operations have been characterized by serious human rights violations against their population, including extrajudicial executions and other unlawful killings. In Mali and Burkina Faso, where there is a non-international armed conflict, several of these deliberate killings of civilians may amount to war crimes.⁶ These violations were usually perpetrated following losses of the security forces against armed groups and/or during military operations.

Amnesty International urges the governments of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to investigate all these incidents and other serious human rights violations allegedly perpetrated by their security forces, along with the abuses committed by the different armed groups in their territories. Amnesty International exhorts the Sahelian governments to ensure those responsible are prosecuted in fair trial before their justice systems, and to implement all legal measures to prevent the repetition of these abuses.

These investigations are essential considering the scale of human rights violations that may have been committed by security forces in the region. In Mali, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) documented during the first quarter of this year (January-March 2020), 101 extrajudicial killings, 32 cases of enforced disappearances, 32 cases of torture and inhuman treatment by the Malian security and defense

³ Human Rights Watch, 'Burkina Faso: Armed Islamist Atrocities Surge: Targeted attacks, executions kill over 250 civilians', 6 January 2020,

www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/supporting_resources/burkinafaso_armed_islamist_atrocities.pdf

"Combien de sang doit encore couler? Atrocités commises contre des civils dans le centre du Mali, 2019", 10 février 2020, www.hrw.org/fr/report/2020/02/10/combien-de-sang-doit-encore-couler/atrocites-commises-contre-des-civils-dans-le

⁴ The G5 Sahel is a regional organization formed in February 2014 by Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad to address their joint security and development needs. Since April 2017, a joint force was formed by the G5 Sahel to address the security challenges in their border regions, in partnership with the French-led Operation Barkhane

⁵ The Pau summit was convened on 13 January 2020 to assess the security situation in the G5 Sahel region, along with the partnership between France and these five countries. In their final declaration, they agreed to strengthen their security and development partnership and to intensify their efforts, especially in the Liptako-Gourma region. See Élysée, "G5 Sahel : conférence de presse des Chefs d'État à l'issue du Sommet de Pau", 13 January 2020, www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/01/13/sommet-de-pau-declaration-conjointe-des-chefs-detat

⁶ War crimes are defined as violations of international humanitarian law (treaty or customary law) that incur individual criminal responsibility under international law that take place during an international or non-international armed conflict. They include willful killings and also "internationally directing attacks against the civilian population as such or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities". To the extent that these serious human rights violations occur in nexus with the non-international armed conflicts in Mali and Burkina Faso they also amount to war crimes. For a more thorough discussion on what qualify as war crimes or crimes under international law, see International Criminal Court, *Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, 2011, www.icc-cpi.int/resource-library/documents/rs-eng.pdf

forces⁷.

“They [the security and defense forces] arrived [in the village] around 5 pm shooting in the air, and arresting villagers. Many people fled or stayed in their houses after the soldiers arrived. They combed the houses, extrajudicially executed 8 villagers and took the rest with them when they left”, “Ibrahim”⁸

UNLAWFUL KILLINGS AND ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN MALI

Amnesty International has documented several cases of extrajudicial executions, unlawful killings and enforced disappearances in Mali between February and March 2020. All the documented incidents occurred in the communes of Diabaly and Dogofry, in the cercle of Niono, in the region of Ségou. They were committed by the security forces as the military scaled up their operations in the wake of attacks by armed groups active in the region. Since Mali is in a state of non-international armed conflict, deliberate killings of civilians and attacks targeting civilians may constitute war crimes.

Four days after the 26 January attack against the gendarmerie camp in Sokolo in which at least 20 gendarmes died⁹, the Malian authorities launched a new military operation “Maliko”, on 30 January to replace Operation Dambé¹⁰.

In the framework of Operation Maliko, Malian soldiers intervened in **Kogoni-Peulh** (commune of Sokolo, cercle de Niono) on 3 February 2020. According to several witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International, Malian soldiers killed one herder at the outskirts of the village and arrested two villagers that day¹¹. One of the witnesses reported: “When the soldiers arrived, they started shooting. Many villagers fled, those close to the mosque sounded the alarm and many others fled to the bush, outside of the village. The herder was among the second group, but he was not able to reach the bush. I was also among those who fled. I was able to escape but not him”.¹² Other informants corroborating the testimony of the witness said that the herder

⁷ MINUSMA, ‘Note sur les tendances des violations et abus de droits de l’homme (1^{er} janvier-31 mars 2020)’, Division des droits de l’homme et de la protection, avril 2020, para 21, page 6

⁸ The name has been changed to respect the interviewee’s anonymity

⁹ RFI, ‘Mali: après l’attaque de Sokolo, réunion d’un conseil de défense’, 27 January 2020, www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20200127-mali-attaque-sokolo-r%C3%A9union-conseil-d%C3%A9fense

¹⁰ République du Mali, *Décret no 2020/0034/P-RM du 30 Janvier 2020 instituant l’opération Maliko*, 30 January 2020

¹¹ Telephone interviews with local leaders from Niono and with residents of Kogoni-Peulh, 6, 7 and 10 April 2020

¹² Telephone interview conducted with resident of Kogoni-Peulh, 6 May 2020

was killed while he was driving his cattle, in an attempt to flee from the soldiers.¹³ The killing of the herder by the Malian appears to be an unlawful killing and may amount to an extrajudicial execution by the soldiers of an unarmed individual. Amnesty International urges the Malian authorities to investigate this incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

On 4 February, Oumar Diallo, an elected official was petitioned by the inhabitants of Kogoni-Peulh to inquire with the military about the fates of the two villagers that were arrested the day before, and to negotiate for their release. As he went to Ségou with another villager, they were arrested by soldiers while in Diabaly and detained in the military camp of that city¹⁴ where they were allegedly ill-treated. Four days later, they were transferred to Ségou where Oumar Diallo died either during the transfer, or on arrival at the camp.

A witness told Amnesty International: “He [Oumar Diallo] was tasked by the villagers with querying with the soldiers about the whereabouts of the two that were arrested on 3 February. Since he was an elected official, we believed that he was less at risk and that’s why we asked him to go along with another villager. They were on their way to Ségou when they were intercepted near the bridge in Diabaly and detained in the camp by the soldiers”¹⁵. Another witness involved in the collection of the body of Oumar Diallo and his burial, interviewed by Amnesty International said this: “Some days after their arrests and detention in Diabaly, Oumar Diallo and “Sidi”^{16*} were being driven by the soldiers to Ségou. They had been ill-treated in Diabaly and were both blindfolded while on the way. Soldiers were discussing among themselves during the transfer whether Oumar Diallo was still alive on the road. In Ségou, he was found to be dead. I was among the people that buried him in Ségou. We wanted to bring his body back to Kogoni-Peulh to bury him there, and we sought the involvement of several local officials to intercede with the soldiers. But the soldiers said no, and we had no choice but to bury him in Ségou. On his corpse you could see traces of ill-treatment he received”¹⁷

“Sidi”* and the two villagers that were arrested by the Malian soldiers in Kogoni-Peulh on 3 February, were released a month later by the military. Two informants told Amnesty International that they, along with Oumar Diallo who died during his detention, were all beaten while detained in the military camp of Diabaly¹⁸. The Malian authorities must investigate the

¹³ Telephone interview conducted with residents of Kogoni-Peulh and with witnesses to the burial of Oumar Diallo, 10 May 2020

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the military camp of Diabaly was recently transferred to the Malian authorities by MINUSMA in October 2019, as part of the UN mission’s support to reinstating state authority and the redeployment of the Malian military in the national territory. See Olivier Salgado. ‘Point de presse de la MINUSMA du 31 octobre 2019’, 31 Octobre 2019, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/point-de-presse-de-la-minusma-du-31-octobre-2019>

¹⁵ Telephone interview conducted with relative of Oumar Diallo, 10 April 2020 and 6 May 2020

¹⁶ The name has been changed to respect the witness’ anonymity

¹⁷ Telephone interview with residents of Kogoni-Peulh and with witnesses to the burial of Oumar Diallo, 6 April and 10 May 2020

¹⁸ Telephone interview conducted with residents of Kogoni-Peulh and with witnesses to the burial of

circumstances of the arrests of the four individuals that were arrested on 3-4 February in relation to the events of Kogoni-Peulh, verify their conditions of detention and whether they were ill-treated or tortured, and bring the perpetrators to justice if so.

The violations by the security forces were not limited to Kogoni-Peulh. On 7 February, soldiers conducted a patrol in the village of **Massabougou** (commune of Dogofry) in the afternoon. According to corroborating information collected by Amnesty International, the security forces combed the houses, arrested 22 individuals and killed 8 others who were later buried by the villagers¹⁹. It is evident from the testimonies received that these killings were unlawful and may amount to extrajudicial executions. According to residents and people from Massabougou²⁰, six of the twenty-two detainees were left in the camp of Diabaly and have been unaccounted for. The remaining sixteen that were arrested in Massabougou were transferred to Ségou, and later to Bamako²¹. One of the witnesses described the situation as follows: “They [the security and defense forces] arrived [in the village] around 5 pm shooting in the air, and arresting villagers. Many people fled or stayed in their houses after the soldiers arrived. They combed the houses, extrajudicially executed 8 villagers and took the rest with them when they left”²².

Two days later, on 9 February, Malian soldiers launched an operation in the village of **Safaribougou** (commune of Diabaly). Information gathered by Amnesty International confirm that soldiers killed three individuals in Safaribougou: the imam Yero Ba in his home, the village chief Bouré Ba and his son Moussa Ba. The latter two were arrested in their homes and killed outside of the village. All three individuals were later buried by residents of Safaribougou. One of the witnesses reported the following scene: “The soldiers arrived in Safaribougou via Diabaly and Alatona. The imam was killed in his house while he was teaching Quranic students. They arrested the village chief Bouré Ba and his son Moussa Ba in their house and drove them outside of the village where they were killed by the soldiers. The military went on their way afterwards but the villagers who had fled at their arrival and were hiding in the bush retrieved the bodies of the village chief and his son.”²³ The violations in Safaribougou occurred hours after the death of three gendarmes, following an attack against their camp in Alatona on 9 February at dawn.²⁴

Amnesty International considers these incidents as unlawful killings and at least the deaths of

Oumar Diallo, 6, 10 April 2020 and 6 May 2020

¹⁹ Telephone interview with residents of Massabougou on 7 April 2020 and 6 May 2020. Amnesty International is in possession of the names of the individuals

²⁰ Telephone interviews with residents of Massabougou, on 7 April 2020 and 6 May 2020

²¹ Telephone interview with residents of Massabougou, 6 April and 27 April 2020

²² Telephone interview with resident of Massabougou, 7 April 2020

²³ Telephone interview with witness of incidents in Safaribougou, 7 April 2020 and 6 May 2020

²⁴ Kader Maiga, Niono: trois gendarmes tués et plusieurs blessés dans une attaque à Alatona, Agence malienne de presse (AMAP), 9 February, <https://amap.ml/niono-trois-gendarmes-tues-et-plusieurs-blesses-dans-une-attaque-a-alatona/>

Bouré Ba and Moussa Ba as extrajudicial executions. All these deaths must be investigated and all those suspected of criminal responsibility must be brought to justice.

On 11 February, another military patrol intervened in **Souraka-Singo (also known as Sinko-Rangabé)**, in the commune of Dogofry (cercle de Niono), in the region of Segou where they killed five unarmed people and arrested two others.²⁵ All of the five victims were unarmed and did not pose a threat to security forces according to witnesses. Four of them were killed in their homes by the soldiers. Witnesses interviewed said they were all buried on the same day at dusk by the villagers. Amnesty International believes that these killings must be investigated by the Malian authorities and those suspected of criminal responsibility must be brought to justice in fair trials. The two individuals that were arrested, including the village chief, were detained in Ségou and later transferred to Bamako. They were released a month after their arrests.

A witness told Amnesty International: “The soldiers arrived in the village between 11 am and 12 pm. All the villagers escaped except five individuals that were killed. They arrested two other individuals, including the village chief whom they brought with them”²⁶. Another witness told Amnesty International that they “were warned [by phone] about the arrival of the soldiers in Souraka-Singo by residents of other villages through which they passed”²⁷. Most of them fled for safety except the ones that were killed or arrested.

Another informant corroborated the testimony of the first witness: “When the soldiers arrived in Souraka-Singo, they found one Diassi Diallo in his home where they killed him. Diassi Diallo is the brother of the village chief of Souraka-Singo who was one of the individuals arrested by the soldiers and then detained in Bamako. Another victim, Boubou Diallo, was killed in his home, after he presented himself to the soldiers who had called him before them”²⁸. This account was echoed by several witnesses and relatives of the victims interviewed by Amnesty International²⁹. Two other victims, Hassim Zouboye and Housseyni Dicko were killed in the village. The last victim, Bahaidé Khoureychi, a councillor to the village chief was also killed but Amnesty International couldn't determine whether he was extrajudicially executed or unlawfully killed.

One of the two individuals arrested reported to Amnesty International: ‘I had left my house to buy fish when I was stopped on the way by soldiers who asked me to follow them. They asked me where the jihadists were. I told them that I did not know them and that I had nothing to do with them. That I will not be able to recognize them even if I saw them. They then insulted me and wanted me to say that I did know the jihadists, but I did not vary in my words because I

²⁵ Telephone interview with witnesses of the events in Souraka-Singo, 27 April, 6 May 2020

²⁶ Telephone interview with witnesses and residents of Souraka-Singo, 6-7 April 2020.

²⁷ Telephone interview with witness of Souraka-Singo incident, 06 May 2020

²⁸ Telephone interview with residents of Souraka-Singo, 27 April and 10 May 2020

²⁹ Telephone interviews with residents of Souraka Singo, 7 and 27 April 2020

was only telling the truth”³⁰.

“I was arrested with another villager and we were driven from Souraka-Singo to Niono, then to Ségou and to Bamako”, he continued. “I have no reason to lie or misrepresent the facts. We were not tortured during our arrest or in detention, but since I am old, being tied up and transported blindfolded was painful for me. They searched me but they couldn't find anything to blame me for. In Bamako, we were detained in Camp 1³¹. This is what everyone calls this camp. I spent 25-26 days there before being released and told not to leave Bamako and to make myself available to justice.” The witness stressed that he did not have a lawyer during these proceedings, and he did not receive any official document, following his release³².

Five days after the events in Souraka-Singo, security forces committed other violations in the village of **Belidanedji** on the morning of 16 February. According to information received from witnesses, security forces arrested five unarmed individuals in Belidanedji before shooting them to death. These five villagers were later buried by the villagers after the departure of the soldiers. During the same operation, soldiers also arrested eighteen other individuals. Witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International stated that they could not find information about the fates of the individuals that were arrested in Belidanedji, despite investigations towards the soldiers of the Diabaly camp and requests for local elected officials to support their search for the arrested.³³ Amnesty International considers the eighteen villagers that were arrested in Belidanedji as victims of enforced disappearances by the Malian army. Malian authorities must investigate these incidents and where victims remain in unlawful detention ensure that that they are immediately released unless they are handed over to the lawful authorities and brought before a court charged with a recognizable criminal offence. All those reasonably suspected of criminal responsibility for these enforced disappearances must be investigated and brought to justice. All of the victims were natives of Belidanedji except one of the victims of extrajudicial executions, a rice trader from Diabaly who was in the village.³⁴

One relative of the victims said to Amnesty International: “When the soldiers arrived in the village, most people fled to escape from their fury. But they arrested several villagers and executed four of my relatives. Afterwards, they seized some of the fertilizers, the supplies and

³⁰ Telephone interview with witness of Souraka-Singo, 27-28 April 2020; 6 May 2020

³¹ Camp 1 is very likely the gendarmerie camp in Bamako, of the same name where state security detainees are often held

³² Telephone interview with individual arrested following incident in Souraka-Singo, 6 May 2020. The other individual arrested along with the witness during the intervention of the security forces in Souraka-Singo was also released

³³ Telephone interview with survivor of Belidanedji incident, 9 May 2020. Amnesty International is in possession of the name of the five individuals that were buried (four villagers and the trader from Diabaly) along with the list of people arrested by the soldiers, whose fates stand unknown.

³⁴ Telephone interview with residents of Belidanedji, 13 April 2020 and 25 April 2020

many other wares in the market”³⁵

Another survivor of the incident said to Amnesty International: “Around 11 am, a military convoy arrived in the village. The women that first saw it sounded the alarm. I was discussing with three friends when we heard the alarm and we all fled because we heard about what happened in other villages days earlier. I hopped on a Jakarta motorcycle (along with two others) and we dashed to the bush 6 kms from Belidanedji.

Afterwards, I learnt that four men Hamidou Ousmane, Sambaré Amadou and his father Amadou Boura, along with Laya Hama were arrested by the soldiers. They were all in the house of Oumarou Barry where there was a naming ceremony for a newborn. When they heard what was going on, most of the guests fled for safety, leaving the house. Hamidou Ousmane, Sambaré Amadou, Amadou Boura and Laya Hama hid in a room of the house instead of fleeing for the bush. A fifth one, Bouba Sangaré hid under a pile of straw in the house. He was the only one to escape; the remaining four having disappeared since then”.³⁶ According to several witnesses, the soldiers seized some of the traders’ wares, including dozens of bags of rice and fertilizer. This concurs with a Facebook publication of the Malian army,³⁷ announcing the seizure of supplies in “Beeli” destined to “terrorist groups”. Witnesses stated that they did not receive any updates about the fates of the villagers that were arrested following the army intervention in Belidanedji³⁸.

Another incident occurred in the village of **Kourouma** on 11 March 2020. Three residents were arrested by security forces during the village market day. Since then, relatives told the organization that they have had no news about their fates or the charges pending against them despite queries to the military, to the governor, and to the Ministry for National Reconciliation. The victims of these violations were Hammadi Moussoulé, Babiné Hammadi Ba, a young Quranic student, and Abalo Ba, son of the imam of Wouro Atté³⁹. Following security incidents in January 2020, many villagers from Wouro Atté left their village to relocate in Kourouma, Sokolo and other urban centers of Mali.⁴⁰

One respondent described the incident to Amnesty International: “On 11 March, while Hammadi Moussoulé was performing the Asr prayer, two individuals came to his house. They asked him to confirm his identity, which he did and asked him to follow them. He told them that he would need to finish his prayer first. They put him afterwards in a military vehicle. His nephew Babiné Hamadi saw the scene and fled towards other houses in the village. The soldiers pursued him into the house where the imam of Wouro Atté and his family took refuge. The

³⁵ Telephone interview with “Abdoulaye”, resident of Belidanedji, 13 April 2020

³⁶ Telephone interview with “Hamidou”, resident of Belidanedji 10 April, 13 April and 25 April 2020

³⁷ Forces Armées du Mali, ‘Diabaly : saisie d’une importante quantité de vivres destinés aux bandes terroristes’ (Page Facebook), 18 February 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/ForcesArmeesMaliennes/posts/1579601968856049>

³⁸ Telephone interviews with residents of Belidanedji, 10 April and 13 April 2020

³⁹ Telephone interview with relatives of the victims of Kourouma, 30 March, 6 April and 10 April 2020

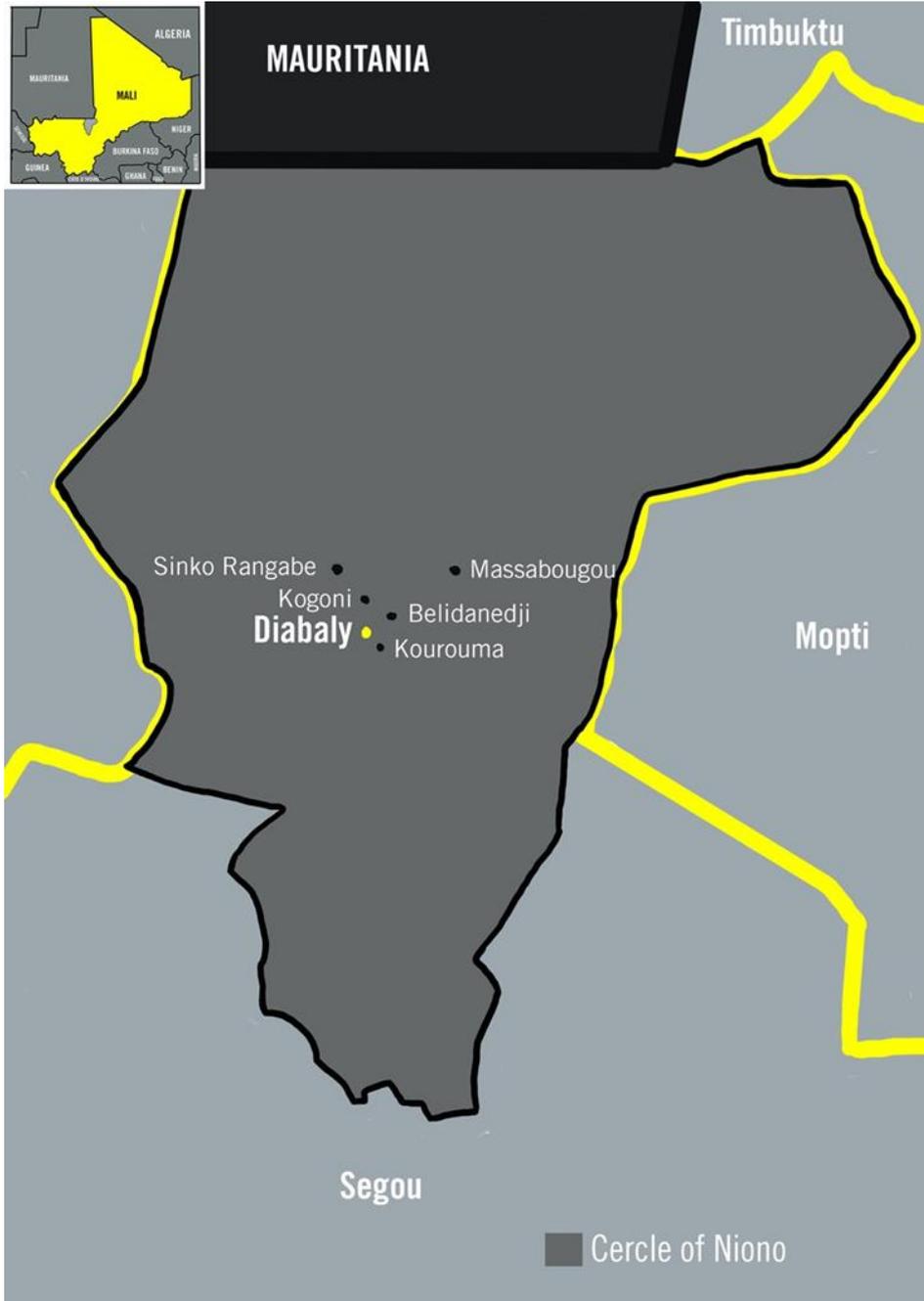
⁴⁰ Telephone interview with relatives of the victims of Kourouma, 6 and 8 April 2020

military picked him up there along with the son of the imam. They drove with all three of them from Kourouma,"⁴¹

Relatives interviewed by Amnesty International said that they have received no news about the fates or the whereabouts of the three forcibly disappeared persons, despite reaching out to the gendarmerie who denied the three individuals were under their custody.⁴² Amnesty International considers the three individuals arrested in Kourouma as subjected to enforced disappearances by the Malian army, and ask the Malian authorities to investigate these incidents and to account for all of them.

⁴¹ Telephone interview with relatives of the victims of Kourouma, 6 April 2020

⁴² Telephone interviews with relatives of the victims of Kourouma 30 March, 6 and 8 April 2020



Map of some of the villages of the cercle of Niono (Ségou region) where human rights violations have been documented.

EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS IN BURKINA FASO

Amnesty International has also documented serious human rights violations committed by the security forces of Burkina Faso in March and April 2020. Amnesty International considers the insecurity in Burkina Faso as a non-international armed conflict and the deliberate killings of civilians by any of the parties of the conflict, as susceptible to be war crimes. The two incidents documented by Amnesty International occurred in Ouahigouya and Djibo in a 10-day interval.

According to information received by Amnesty International, on 29 March 2020, Issouf Barry, local councillor in Sollé, Hamidou Barry, the village chief of Sollé, and Oumarou Barry, a member of the princely family of Banh were abducted in their homes in **Ouahigouya (Yatenga province, Nord region)**. According to a relative of one of the victims, the three individuals were arrested by individuals presenting themselves as the gendarmerie and wearing the uniforms of gendarmes⁴³. All three of them were IDPs who had relocated to Ouahigouya, the regional capital, from their original settlements, due to the insecurity⁴⁴. Two relatives of two of the victims told Amnesty International that the families inquired about their arrests at the gendarmerie in Ouahigouya, which denied knowledge of their whereabouts⁴⁵. Three days following their arrests, the corpses of Issouf Barry, Hamidou Barry and Oumarou Barry were found on 2 April by villagers at the outskirts of the city, on the road leading to Oula⁴⁶. Amnesty International received photos showing the dead bodies of Issiaka Barry and Oumarou Barry. The forensic analysis on the pictures done by Amnesty International shows that the victims died less than a day before their bodies were discovered on the road by villagers.

Amnesty International considers these deaths to be extrajudicial executions and call on the Burkinabè authorities, to investigate these incidents and bring all the perpetrators to justice.

According to an informant, Issiaka Barry, a relative of Oumarou Barry was allegedly forcibly disappeared in Ouahigouya by individuals presenting themselves as gendarmes in December 2019. His body was found on the outskirts of Ouahigouya a few days later. Both Oumarou Barry and Issiaka Barry were allegedly active in denouncing impunity in Burkina Faso and in advocating for justice, relative to the allegations of extrajudicial executions committed by the Burkinabè security forces in Kainh, Bomboro and Banh in February 2019⁴⁷.

⁴³ Telephone interview with three civil society leaders in Burkina Faso (30 March 2020) and with relatives of the victims' 31 March and 28 April 2020

⁴⁴ Telephone interviews with relative of the victim, 31 March 2020 and 2 April 2020 and telephone interview with civil society leader 30 March 2020

⁴⁵ Telephone interview with relatives of the victim, 31 March and 2 April 2020

⁴⁶ Telephone interviews with civil society leaders and relative of the victim, 2 April 2020

⁴⁷ Telephone interview and correspondence with civil society leader, 2 April 2020. On these incidents of February 2019, see Tiga Cheick Sawadogo, 'Droits humains et lutte antiterroriste : Le MBDHP révèle des

On 9 April, 31 residents of **Djibo (Soum province, Sahel region)** were arrested and then executed by the *GFAT (Groupement des forces anti-terroristes)*. The arrests occurred in several neighbourhoods of Djibo including Sector 4,7,8 and 9 of the city. The first arrests happened in the Sector 8 (Badinogou and Borbassi) of the city around 11 AM. At the end of the day, 31 residents of Djibo were arrested and then executed by the security forces of Burkina Faso. Ten of the victims were IDPs who had relocated to Djibo due to the insecurity: six of them came from Silgadji and four from Kobao⁴⁸.

Amnesty International was able to corroborate the number of individuals that were arrested, the location of their arrests and their names, through interviews with witnesses, relatives of the victims and civil society organizations. A witness of the arrests in Badinogou told Amnesty International: “The soldiers came in a long convoy of pick-ups and motorbikes to Djibo from Tilléré in the west. That is how they came to Badinogou where they arrested several youths who were around a well, watering animals. They arrested and kept with them three individuals and released those who were under-age before continuing on their convoy to Badinogou where they arrested more people and to Firguindi (Sector 7). Hours later, we heard gunfire but dared not go and inquire until the military had left. I lost a paternal cousin and two maternal uncles that day.”⁴⁹

Several residents alerted the broader public and civil society organizations about the arrests and expressed their fears to Amnesty International and to their national audiences about the fates of the individuals as they occurred. In total, 31 individuals were arrested by the security forces before being executed. The bodies were collected by the families around dusk, southeast of Kourfayel, a village 7 kms from Djibo⁵⁰. On 20 April 2020, the government acknowledged the veracity of these extrajudicial killings, following a press release by Human Rights Watch, denouncing these violations. According to the government’s communiqué, the *Direction de la Justice Militaire* has been mandated to investigate on these allegations, since 10 April 2020⁵¹.

“They were just taken because they were at the wrong place at the wrong moment. They were watering their animals between 12pm and 1pm when they were arrested by soldiers. We went to Ayorou and then to Niamey, to find what happened to our relatives but we had no news and we couldn’t see them (...) Most of the times, when the soldiers arrest people in the bush, they are herders, and they often kill them and carry away the cattle. Most of the victims are Fulani and Bella”, “Hamman”⁵²

exécutions sommaires’, Le Faso.net, 14 March 2019, <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article88525>

⁴⁸ Correspondence with civil society leaders in Burkina Faso 9, 10 and 11 April 2020

⁴⁹ Telephone interview with relative of the victims of Djibo extrajudicial executions, 9 and 13 April 2020

⁵⁰ Telephone interview with Djibo resident and relative of victim of Djibo executions 9 April and 10 April 2020

⁵¹ WakatSera, ‘Burkina: la réponse du ministère de la défense aux accusations de Human Rights Watch’, 21 April 2020 www.wakatsera.com/burkina-la-reponse-du-ministere-de-la-defense-aux-accusations-de-human-right-watch/

⁵² The name has been changed to respect the interviewee’s anonymity

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES IN NIGER

The human rights violations in the Sahel are not limited to the Malian and Burkinabè armies. More than a hundred individuals were allegedly arrested and forcibly disappeared by the Nigerien army as part of Operation Almahou (based in Ayorou) between 27 March and 2 April, in the **department of Ayorou** (Tillabéry region). The border region separating Niger from Mali and Burkina Faso is particularly tense, with the presence of the so-called Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in that area. In December 2019 and January 2020, the Nigerien army positions were attacked by the ISGS in Inates (10 December 2019) and Chinégodar (9 January 2020) causing important casualties among their ranks⁵³.

Amnesty International interviewed 10 respondents, including local officials, civil society representatives in Ayorou, and relatives of the victims on the enforced disappearances at Ayorou (27 March-2 April) and Boni-Peulh (3 April 2020). The organization reviewed also two lists denouncing human rights violations committed by Nigerien soldiers. The first, drafted by local councillors, lists all the individuals that were allegedly arrested between 27 March and 2 April while going and returning to the Ayorou market and in their hamlets. The second drafted by community members in Ayorou and unsigned⁵⁴ list several incidents, the oldest dating from 2019, and the names of individuals allegedly arrested and executed by Nigerien soldiers. According to the first document, 48 individuals were arrested while on their way, and on their return to the market fair of Ayorou between 27 and 29 March 2020. 54 others were arrested during a second wave on 2 April, by security forces as part of their military operations.

Many witnesses related the circumstances of some of the arrests. One of them explained: “Four of my relatives were arrested during these incidents in Ayorou. The first two who were two brothers, were arrested by the military while they were leaving the market of Ayorou. The other two were arrested on 2 April when the military came to our hamlet, distant a dozen kms from Ayorou”⁵⁵.

Following the arrests, some of the villagers of the affected communes attempted to look for the fates of their relatives by reaching out to security forces. One of them said to Amnesty International: “we are still looking for their whereabouts, along with the 54 people that were arrested on 2 April. We went to the gendarmerie post in Ayorou, but we couldn’t get any news.

⁵³ Voice of America, ‘L’armée subit ses plus lourdes pertes à Chinégodar avec 89 soldats tués’, 13 Janvier 2020, www.voafrique.com/a/l-arm%C3%A9e-subit-ses-plus-lourdes-pertes-%C3%A0-chin%C3%A9godar-avec-89-soldats-tu%C3%A9s/5243097.html

⁵⁴ Amnesty International has talked with the members of the association that drafted the second list who said they did not sign it purposefully to avoid reprisals. Telephone interviews conducted with local leaders in Ayorou department, 11 and 24 April 2020

⁵⁵ Telephone interview with relative of victim of Ayorou incidents, 20 April 2020

They denied that they had arrested our relatives and did not help us about their whereabouts”⁵⁶. Another witness said that the violations led to a mass displacement of populations towards the urban centers. “Nowadays, Inates has been deserted by its residents and most of them have moved south, closer to the urban centres due to the insecurity”⁵⁷, said a local leader.

Many respondents told Amnesty International that in the following days of the arrests, potential mass graves were discovered in several places southeast of Ayorou, in Tagabatt Ikirbachan and Ingoul⁵⁸.

Due to the current state of emergency in the Tillabéry region, local people dared not disturb the mass graves to identify the victims⁵⁹.

Amnesty International has also received information on the enforced disappearances by Nigerien soldiers of 13 herders who were watering their animals at Boni-Peulh, in the commune of Ayorou. The incidents allegedly occurred on 3 April around 12pm and relatives of the victims interviewed, stated that they have not received any news about their whereabouts following their arrests. One of them told the organization: “They were just taken because they were at the wrong place at the wrong moment. They were watering their animals between 12pm and 1pm when they were arrested by soldiers. We went to Ayorou and then to Niamey, to find what happened to our relatives but we had no news and we couldn’t see them”. He added: “Most of the times, when the soldiers arrest people in the bush, they are herders, and they often kill them and carry away the cattle. Most of the victims are Fulani and Bella”⁶⁰,

On 22 April, the Nigerien Ministry of Defence, stated that investigations will be conducted regarding the allegations in the department of Ayorou, after denying that civilians were killed in Ayorou⁶¹.

Beyond the incidents documented by Amnesty International, the Human Rights division of MINUSMA listed 34 extrajudicial executions committed by the Nigerien soldiers in Inekar (twenty-four victims), Anderamboukane (five victims) and somewhere between Anderamboukane (Mali) and Chinégodar (Niger) where five other people were extrajudicially executed, in February and March 2020.⁶²

⁵⁶ Telephone interview with resident, Ayorou department, 20 April 2020.

⁵⁷ Telephone interview with local leader from Ayorou department, 20 April 2020.

⁵⁸ Telephone interviews with residents, from Ayorou department, 20,21 and 24 April 2020

⁵⁹ Telephone interview with local leader from Ayorou department, 22 April 2020

⁶⁰ Telephone interview with relatives of victim of Boni-Peulh, 20 April 2020

⁶¹ ActuNiger, ‘Lutte contre le terrorisme : le ministre de la Défense dément des « massacres en masse de civils » par les FDS dans la zone nord de Tillabéri’, 22 April 2020, <https://www.actuniger.com/societe/16087-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-le-ministre-de-la-defense-dement-des-massacres-en-masse-de-civils-par-les-fds-dans-la-zone-nord-de-tillaberi.html>

⁶² MINUSMA, ‘Note sur les tendances des violations et abus de droits de l’homme (1^{er} janvier-31 mars

RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International is very concerned by the repeated abuses and human right violations committed by the armed groups and the security forces in the Sahel. In Mali and Burkina Faso where there is a non-international armed conflict, military operations have had a devastating toll on the protection of people in areas where they were conducted in reaction to the attacks by armed groups. The situation is also dire in Niger where, in the department of Ayorou, at least 115 villagers were forcibly disappeared by the army.

Amnesty International also denounces the lack of progress in the fight against impunity of the most serious crimes committed in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso by armed groups and army forces. The deliberate killings of unarmed civilians by security forces in Mali and Burkina Faso may constitute war crimes under international law and should be thoroughly investigated, with suspected perpetrators brought to justice in fair trials not subject to the death penalty. In Niger the enforced disappearances of civilians must be investigated and all arrested accounted for, and those criminally responsible brought to justice in fair trials not subject to the death penalty.

Given the seriousness of the incidents documented in this report, Amnesty International urges the authorities of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to;

- Carry out specific investigations on these incidents and prosecute those found responsible of violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Remove from duty, pending investigation and prosecution, any member of their security forces suspected of ordering or carrying out extrajudicial executions, unlawful killings and enforced disappearances.
- In concomitance with their military operations, deploy provost officers or members of the military justice during their military operations, to ensure the strict respect by their security forces of human rights law and international humanitarian law.
- Ensure that the rights of all the individuals arrested during these military operations are respected. All these procedures must be done under the scope of the law and detainees have the right to access their families, to lawyers and to be tried under a court of law. They must also be protected from torture and other ill-treatment during their detention. All detainees must be charged with a recognizable criminal offence or released.
- Ensure that all those that were forcibly disappeared by the security forces are accounted for.
- Establish clear institutional authorities and responsibilities for the prevention of human rights abuses in the conduct of military operations.

Amnesty International also calls on the regional and international inter-governmental institutions and human rights bodies, as well as third states to denounce the violations perpetrated by the Sahelian armies, and to call the governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and

2020)', Division des droits de l'homme et de la protection, avril 2020, para 26, page 6

Niger, to respect their international commitments.

Partner states and institutions of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger in their fight against armed groups, should

- Call on Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger to respect international humanitarian and human rights law in their fight against armed groups
- Provide assistance to Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to strengthen their capacity to fight against impunity for the most serious crimes committed by armed groups and army forces within their territory.
- Clearly define the scope and means of their partnerships with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger with the purpose of preventing further violations and fighting against impunity.

As a matter of urgency, the G5 Sahel must:

- Provide technical assistance to member countries in the case where they lack the capacity to investigate in an independent and transparent way, human rights allegations and abuses alleged within their territory.
- Expedite the implementation of the compliance framework on human rights and international humanitarian law in partnership with the OHCHR by all of its member states.

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