

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
25 May 2021

Original: English

Letter dated 12 May 2021 from the Permanent Representatives of Ireland, Mexico and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ireland and Mexico, as Co-Chairs of the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council, and in close cooperation with the United Kingdom, would like to share the summary note of the meeting of the Informal Expert Group on the situation in Mali (see annex).

We would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

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Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to the United Nations



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Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council

Summary of the meeting on the situation in Mali held on 29 April 2021

On 29 April 2021, the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security of the Security Council convened a meeting on the situation in Mali. The members received a briefing by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Political Affairs, and Acting Head of MINUSMA, who was accompanied by colleagues from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the United Nations country team. The meeting concluded with an overview of key recommendations provided by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and additional observations shared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Questions from Council members

Members of the Security Council asked questions about the decrease in representation by women in public offices; collaboration by the country team with the African Union to support women civil society leaders in the political transition; the status of women's observatories; the role of women in resolving intercommunal conflicts; support by MINUSMA for the participation of women in the upcoming elections; and the involvement of women in constitutional and electoral reforms, climate action and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Other questions were focused on lessons learned from the previous national action plan on women and peace and security; the incorporation of a gender perspective in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process; the economic empowerment of women; and reasons for the increase in conflict-related sexual violence and recommendations on how to address impunity for those violations. Council members also asked about the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) and the use of gender analysis in its operations.

Main points raised in the meeting

- Since December 2016, more than 60 women representatives from civil society have given briefings to the Council at country-specific meetings, but only one of them was from Mali.
- Following the military coup of 18 August 2020, women played a key role in mediating between the parties. A high-level consultation was organized with the African Union and the African Women Leaders Network, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Executive Director of UN-Women and representatives of other United Nations entities, to listen to the priorities of women for the transition. As a result, the country team, in partnership with the African Union, developed a joint programme to support women's civil society organizations during the political transition, including with capacity-building activities on specific reform issues.
- The participation of women on the Agreement Monitoring Committee increased to 31 per cent in the past year, meeting the 30 per cent quota for representation

by women that had been recommended at the high-level workshop held in January 2020 on the inclusion of women in the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. There are now 9 women among the 29 members of the Committee, with the delegations of the Government, the Platform coalition of armed groups and the Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad each including 3 women. At the fifth high-level meeting of the Committee, held on 11 February 2021 in Kidal, participants agreed to increase the number of women from 9 to 12 and to include another 12 women in its four subcommittees. UN-Women, MINUSMA and the Folke Bernadotte Academy are jointly providing support to the newly appointed women, in cooperation with the Government of Mali and with the financial backing of Norway.

- The Strategic Orientation Committee, a new consultative body launched by the Prime Minister in April 2021 to address concerns about inclusiveness and bring together civil society, members of academia, political parties and other actors, has only 10 women among its 50 members.
- With the appointment of the new transitional Government, participation by women decreased from 23 to 16 per cent, which failed to meet the 30 per cent quota prescribed by Mali in its Act No. 2015-052. There is only one woman among 20 regional governors (5 per cent). After the most recent appointments of interim authorities, in April 2021, there are 43 women among 220 members (19.5 per cent) for the Ménaka region and 67 women among 236 members (28.4 per cent) in the Taoudenni region. The increased militarization of the political space and the fragility of the transition tends to further limit participation by women.
- In the elections held in March and April 2020, the representation of women in parliament increased to 27 per cent, compared with 8 per cent in the previous legislative elections. Support from the international community for women in political parties contributed to this positive outcome. MINUSMA, in partnership with United Nations Development Programme, will provide logistical advice and support during the upcoming electoral process.
- Under the leadership of the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family, and with support from MINUSMA, UN-Women, other United Nations entities and the international community, the Government of Mali adopted the country's third national action plan on women and peace and security, which covers the period from 2019 to 2023 and was signed by the Prime Minister on 12 November 2020.
- The United Nations reported a rise in conflict-related sexual violence in 2020, driven mainly by increased insecurity and an increased presence of terrorist groups in the central region. MINUSMA recorded 29 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2020, affecting 21 women and 8 girls, including rape, gang rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery. It also recorded 68 cases of children conceived as a result of rape. In the first quarter of 2021, MINUSMA recorded two cases of conflict-related sexual violence. Underreporting is believed to be very high, owing to prevailing insecurity, fear of reprisals, lack of protection for victims and witnesses, stigma, lack of adequate holistic services for survivors and mistrust in the judicial system. Information from service providers indicate a far higher case load, with 27,000 cases of sexual and gender-based violence recorded since 2012. One-stop centres in Mopti and other locations function as a way for women and girls to receive medical and psychosocial support, legal advice and follow-up economic support.
- Progress in the investigation and prosecution of conflict-related sexual violence has been extremely limited, owing to capacity constraints and lack of political

will. Despite concerted advocacy by MINUSMA and civil society organizations, 115 cases of conflict-related sexual violence, perpetrated during the Islamist occupation and the Tuareg rebellion in the north, are still pending before the tribunal of Commune III in Bamako.

- In 2019, MINUSMA, in collaboration with the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, undertook an assessment of the judicial response to incidents of sexual violence that occurred in 2012 and 2013 in Timbuktu, Gao and Bamako. It is expected that, in May 2021, the Malian counterparts will discuss and endorse the recommendations of that assessment.
- The Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict is expected to undertake a virtual visit to Mali at the end of May, in cooperation with the International Criminal Court, to focus on positive complementarity and the role of national judicial institutions. The last time the Special Representative gave a briefing to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution [2374 \(2017\)](#) concerning Mali was in April 2019, and some of the proposals made at that meeting, including to reflect sexual violence in the listing of a sharia court judge, remain pending.
- Over 50 per cent of girls have been married before the age of 18. While the minimum legal age for marriage is 18 for boys, it is 16 for girls, and even 15 with civil court authorization. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family, in collaboration with other governmental departments and civil society, has been working on a draft law on gender-based violence since 2017, but the consultation process was suspended after objections from the High Islamic Council. On a positive note, the current draft of the penal code now covers conflict-related sexual violence.
- In December 2020, women's rights groups sued the Government of Mali at the Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States for failing to criminalize female genital mutilation.
- The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has led to an increased risk for women and girls to be subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage, as well as to economic losses as a result of precarious employment and limited access to social services.
- MINUSMA has not undertaken a gender analysis of the operations of the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel, but the Deputy Special Representative expressed her intention to engage further in this regard.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made either by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group, the Deputy Special Representative and Acting Head of MINUSMA or the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.¹

(a) In the upcoming negotiations on the mandate of MINUSMA, the Security Council should retain all existing references to women and peace and security in both the preambular and operational paragraphs of its resolution [2531 \(2020\)](#). In the past year, the specificity and urgency of the calls by the Council in paragraph 3 of the resolution helped actors on the ground to make gains on participation by women;

¹ These recommendations are suggestions by United Nations participants in the meeting or from the background note prepared by the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group ahead of the meeting; they are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

(b) In addition, in a new mandate of MINUSMA the Security Council should consider including the following elements:

(i) Reiterate the gender-responsive benchmarks laid out in the transition road map by the Secretary-General and consider including a benchmark related to addressing impunity for sexual violence;

(ii) Welcome the increased representation of women on the Agreement Monitoring Committee and request that the Malian parties to the Peace Agreement increase the representation of women on its subcommittees and in other implementation mechanisms of the peace agreement as an urgent priority, including as co-chairs; that they support the operationalization of a women-led observatory; and that they strengthen the participation of women in all political processes during the transition and throughout electoral processes, as both voters and candidates;

(iii) Urge the transitional authorities to ensure the adoption of political and institutional reforms that will advance gender equality, in consultation with women's civil society organizations, welcome efforts aimed at reviewing the Constitution ahead of a referendum in October 2021 and urge the Malian authorities to strengthen the constitutional protection of women's rights in the process, as well as in the outcome document;

(iv) Encourage the Malian authorities to adopt legislation on sexual and gender-based violence, in compliance with international and regional conventions, and to establish specialized prosecutors and police and gendarmerie units dedicated to sexual and gender-based violence;

(v) Encourage all parties to address the disproportionate negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women in all strategies and programmes, including in post-COVID-19 recovery plans;

(c) The Co-Chairs and other Council members should engage in strategic high-level political diplomacy and advocacy in support of representation by women in the Government, in all transitional institutions and in the preparations for the elections scheduled for 2022;

(d) The Security Council should invite women from civil society to give briefings at upcoming meetings on Mali;

(e) When renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Mali later this year, the Security Council should call for the inclusion of the necessary gender expertise, in line with paragraph 6 of resolution [2242 \(2015\)](#) and paragraph 11 of resolution [2467 \(2019\)](#), and urge the Panel to integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue across its investigations and reporting. The Council should also consider inviting the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to a meeting of the sanctions committee to provide a briefing on her virtual visit to Mali;

(f) In the context of the visit of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to Mali, Security Council members should advocate with the Malian authorities in favour of accountability for sexual violence, including with regard to the need of a prosecutorial strategy, and consider providing financial support for the establishment of support services for survivors of sexual violence, including one-stop centres;

(g) When negotiating a potential resolution on United Nations support for the Joint Force of the G5 Sahel, the Security Council should reiterate the provisions on women and peace and security set out in resolution [2391 \(2017\)](#). If a new support office for the Joint Force is created, the Council should request that the new office

integrate a gender perspective throughout the delivery of its mandate and ensure gender balance in its staffing, in line with the system-wide strategy on gender parity.

The Co-Chairs thanked the Deputy Special Representative and all participants and committed themselves to following up on the important issues raised at the meeting.
