

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 16 May 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, 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.

*(Signed)* Pascale **Baeriswyl**  
Permanent Representative of Switzerland  
to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Lana Zaki **Nusseibeh**  
Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates  
to the United Nations

*(Signed)* Barbara **Woodward**  
Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom  
to the United Nations



## **Annex to the letter dated 16 May 2023 from the Permanent Representatives of Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

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

#### **Summary of the meeting on the situation in Mali, held on 28 March 2023**

On 28 March 2023, 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 for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), Daniela Krosiak, who was accompanied by representatives from the 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 provided by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

#### **Questions from Council members**

Security Council members asked for the implications that the different scenarios laid out in the recent strategic review of MINUSMA (S/2023/36) would have on women and girls, and how to avoid the worst outcome for them; suggestions to strengthen the language on women and peace and security in the next resolution on Mali, and especially on women's participation in specific processes; and stronger cooperation between the Mission and the panel of experts monitoring the sanctions regime to facilitate the listing of alleged perpetrators. Council members raised the matter of the need to ensure the protection of women and girls beyond the conflict-affected areas in the north and the centre, as well as the need for more data on the situation of women and girls in the areas controlled by terrorist groups. They asked for the United Nations plans to address the fact that the new draft constitution has no explicit references to gender parity, gender-based violence or the promotion of women's rights, efforts to prevent both online and offline violence against women candidates ahead of elections or the participation of women and girls in the prevention and response to climate-related shocks, and how the Mission was following up on reprisals against women peacebuilders, including Aminata Dicko, who had given a briefing to the Security Council in January 2023. Other questions revolved around the impact on women and girls of the impasse in the peace process, the extent of hate speech aimed at women in public life and the results of the investigation into alleged grave violations of human rights in Moura, central Mali, in March 2022. One Council member requested that all United Nations reports mention the Wagner Group by name rather than referring broadly to "foreign security personnel".

#### **Main points raised in the meeting**

- Since the previous meeting of the Informal Expert Group, in April 2021, the Security Council has adopted four resolutions, all including provisions on women and peace and security, and has received briefings by six Malian women from civil society. The most recent of these, Ms. Dicko, was subjected to threats and harassment after her briefing, and the Security Council met in February 2023 to discuss these worrisome developments.

- As laid out by the transitional authorities, several key electoral deadlines in 2023 will pave the way to a return to constitutional order, culminating in the holding of presidential elections scheduled for February 2024. Despite some delays, including the recent postponement of the constitutional referendum, the transitional authorities have reiterated that they remain committed to maintaining this electoral calendar.
- The transitional authorities have made some inroads into placing gender parity and inclusivity on the political agenda of the transition. Several decision-making bodies are now close to reaching the legislative gender quota of 30 per cent, as required by law since December 2015. For example, women make up 28.6 per cent of the members of the transitional assembly (compared with 9.5 per cent in 2013). Women also make up 20.7 per cent of ministers and ministers delegate. Additionally, four women were appointed by decree to the 15-member Independent Electoral Management Authority, making up more than a quarter of its members. Women make up 38 per cent of the members of the Peace Agreement Monitoring Committee and its four subcommittees. The transitional Government has also endorsed and kick-started the socioeconomic integration of 900 women from the signatory movements, a process led by the National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission and financed by the World Bank.
- Despite these advances, women remain heavily underrepresented, especially in regional and local government. For example, only 4.6 per cent of the prefects appointed in July 2022 and in February 2023 are women. There is only one woman currently serving as governor, the governor of Sikasso, only the fourth woman governor appointed since the independence of Mali. Women make up only 11 per cent of all ambassadors.
- On 27 January, the president appointed a commission to finalize the draft constitution. Only 20 per cent of its members were women, and women were not appointed to some of the key positions on this commission. The United Nations has supported civil society in analysing the draft text and informing communities about it, while a date for the referendum has not yet been agreed after its recent postponement.
- Women's participation in the economy also remains limited, with women lacking access to and control and ownership of land and financial assets.
- As for the security sector, women also remain largely absent. For example, women make up only 0.6 per cent of members of the Operational Coordination Mechanism set up under the Peace Agreement and consisting of joint units from the national army and the signatory movements.
- Efforts are being undertaken by the transitional authorities to support women's entry into public life, their representation within State institutions and participation in the economic sector. In this respect, the transitional authorities continue to solicit the support of the United Nations and other key international partners, including for capacity-building initiatives led by the Government.
- Recently, for example, MINUSMA, together with UN-Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), supported the organization of a high-level inclusive seminar, co-led by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization, in charge of the electoral process, and the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family. This exercise culminated in the validation of the content of a road map for gender integration in the electoral process and upcoming political and administrative reforms. MINUSMA is also fostering the efforts of women from political parties

and civil society by supporting initiatives to reinforce their leadership skills and capacities and analyse and disseminate the draft constitution.

- The United Nations is also supporting the building of dormitories for women officers in the police and gendarmerie deployed in Gao, Mopti and Timbuktu to facilitate increased representation of women in the security sector.
- The United Nations and bilateral partners are providing technical and financial support for the implementation of the third national action plan on women and peace and security (2019–2023). As part of localization efforts, the plan has been adopted in 9 regions out of 20 (19 regions plus Bamako district), and an assessment by UN-Women indicates that those regions register greater acceptance of women as peace and security actors in their communities, including their mediation efforts at the local level and community-based conflict prevention (women’s peace huts, peace circles, peace observatories, inter alia). The main challenge for greater implementation remains financial resources.
- Compared with 2021, 2022 saw a 49 per cent increase in reported cases of gender-based violence. Of these, 55 per cent were cases of sexual violence. In addition to conflict-related sexual violence, targeted violence against women and harmful social practices, abductions of girls by armed groups continue to be reported, including the kidnapping of 21 girls in Ségou as recently as January 2023. The United Nations requested greater support to scale up initiatives that are already working – such as the establishment of 17 one-stop-centres for survivors of gender-based violence, the deployment of mobile units to support internally displaced persons and host communities, and the interventions funded by the Spotlight Initiative – and strengthen data collection efforts at the local level, given the lack of access to conflict-affected areas.
- Access to multisectoral services remains severely limited, especially in remote areas as one-stop centres are mainly located in regional capitals, compelling survivors living outside of these urban centres to traverse vast distances. In 2022, 92 per cent of survivors were unable to access safe shelters, while 42 per cent were unable to obtain medical support. Security incidents, including vandalism, affected 65 per cent of service provision facilities in Gao and Ménaka.
- Despite widespread insecurity, which hampered access, monitoring and reporting, the United Nations verified 98 cases of conflict-related sexual violence affecting 85 women and 13 girls. The perpetrators were members of armed groups, including the *Coordination des mouvements de l’Azawad* (CMA), the *Mouvement pour le salut de l’Azawad Dawsahak* (MSA-D), *Groupe d’autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et alliés* (GATIA) and the *Coordination des mouvements et front patriotique de résistance* (CMFPR), as well as members of militia and self-defence groups, such as *Dan Na Ambassagou* and *Ganda-Izo*. Of concern is the increased use of sexual violence by militias and self-defence groups which often goes unreported because of the proximity of these groups to local communities and the attendant fear of reprisals. In some cases, the perpetrators were armed elements who could not be identified. Members of the Malian Defence and Security Forces and foreign security personnel were also implicated in cases of sexual violence against civilians.
- The United Nations continued to support the implementation of the 2019 joint communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence, as well as unilateral commitments by non-State actors to tackle sexual violence, in particular CMA. The sustained engagement between MINUSMA and the High Islamic Council of Mali culminated in the signing of a fatwa in January 2023 which urged the prohibition of conflict-related sexual violence, underscored the need to hold perpetrators accountable and encouraged support from communities to survivors

and children born of rape. The United Nations continues to support national judicial authorities to advance in the proceedings of the four emblematic cases of conflict-related sexual violence which involve 145 victims and have been pending before the courts for more than a decade.

- The transitional Government adopted a decree in November 2022 establishing the compensation modalities for damages resulting from serious human rights violations, including financial support to cover medical treatment costs, as well as rehabilitation for both survivors and their children, including children born of conflict-related rape.
- In the discussion, the group was also informed that another Malian woman from civil society had recently been arrested on account of public statements that she had made on social media.
- In January 2023, the Secretary-General presented the strategic review report, containing three main options and several suboptions for the reconfiguration of the MINUSMA mandate and presence. In the light of the challenging situation regarding women and their rights, the United Nations insisted that it was important that the prioritization of women and peace and security remains at the core of any reconfiguration of the mandate of MINUSMA, that a reduced MINUSMA presence would have a negative impact on the situation for women, their protection and ability to participate fully in the peace process and would risk an expansion of extremist armed groups and a deteriorating security situation, with increased violations of women's rights, including sexual and gender-based violence, as a result.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made by UN-Women, as the secretariat of the Informal Expert Group.<sup>1</sup>

In the negotiations on the mandate renewal for MINUSMA, the Security Council should continue to prioritize women and peace and security and retain the references to women, peace and security in resolution [2640 \(2022\)](#), including in any reconfiguration of the mandate, and consider the following additions:

(a) Urge Malian transitional authorities to strictly apply Law No. 2015-052 of 18 December 2015, with a 30 per cent quota for women in elected and appointed positions, regretting that women are still significantly underrepresented in national, local and regional government, and urging their meaningful participation in the transition and restoration of civilian rule, as well as any engagement with signatory or non-signatory armed groups, in line with the recommendations of the 2020 national dialogue;

(b) Urge and support the transitional authorities of Mali to create a conducive environment for women's rights and their protection and promotion, that prevents and addresses violence, including gender-based violence, against women peacebuilders, human right defenders and women's organizations engaged in the political transition, electoral process and the peace process, including through legal frameworks, and request the Mission to monitor and report on these matters;

<sup>1</sup> 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, including by the Office of the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict. They are not recommendations from the Informal Expert Group as a whole or from Council members.

(c) Call upon the transitional authorities of Mali to facilitate the participation of internally displaced persons and returnees, including women, in the upcoming elections and the constitutional referendum;

(d) Urge the transitional authorities to redouble their efforts to achieve the effective implementation of the national action plan on women and peace and security;

(e) Urge the transitional authorities to ensure the participation of women, including from civil society and in forced displacement within the country, in decision-making processes related to national security and counter-terrorism policies and military expenditures;

(f) Urge the transitional authorities to adopt and implement a law on gender-based violence, establish mechanism to facilitate the protection of victims of gender-based violence, and reinforce victims' access to justice, and request support from the United Nations and international partners to this end;

(g) Urge the transitional authorities to prioritize the cases of conflict-related sexual violence pending before the courts for a decade now, to investigate gross violations or abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including by national armed forces, armed and militia groups and foreign security personnel, and to ensure that the law on reparations is effectively implemented and addresses the needs of survivors, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and those who have testified before the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission;

(h) Ensure the recruitment of an adequate number of Gender Advisers and Women's Protection Advisers to reach conflict-affected areas of Mali and operate in proximity to communities at risk;

(i) Call upon the transitional authorities to accelerate the implementation of the joint communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence and the three-year joint Action Plan adopted by the Government of Mali and MINUSMA to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence;

(j) Request the United Nations and international partners to contribute to preventing and responding to harmful practices affecting women and girls and develop innovative solutions to address these in areas where the presence of the State is limited;

(k) Request the United Nations and international partners to conduct gender-sensitive risk-assessments on the adverse effects of climate change and to ensure women's meaningful participation and leadership in efforts to address the impact of climate-related shocks on peace and security in Mali, including through conflict-sensitive natural resource management;

(l) Request the United Nations and international partners to support programmes aimed at enhancing women's participation, protection and empowerment that will contribute to stabilization in the centre and the north of the country.

In addition, members of the Security Council could request more detailed information from the United Nations on the women's rights situation in areas controlled by armed groups in central and northern Mali, and the potential impact of each of the options laid out in the strategic review for MINUSMA (S/2023/36 of 16 January 2023), as well as the withdrawal of several troop contributing countries.

The Co-Chairs thanked all participants and committed to follow up on the important issues raised at the meeting.