

Update on women, peace and security in Mali May 27th 2020

The last time the Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security discussed the situation in Mali was in June 2018 ([S/2018/688](#)). This note summarizes more recent developments on women, peace and security in Mali.

Developments in the Security Council

In June 2019, the Security Council **renewed the mandate of MINUSMA for another year and included more references to gender equality than in previous years**. The Council identified five areas where there had been lack of progress in the implementation of the peace agreement, and women's participation was one of them. Among other provisions, the Council called on Malian parties to meet the 30 percent quota for women in all political functions and offices and to complete all the targets related to the peace agreement in Mali's third national action plan on women, peace and security; requested the Malian Government to sign the joint communiqué with the UN addressing conflict-related sexual violence and to combat impunity for these crimes; added gender-related language throughout many of the mission's mandated priority tasks, including specific protection to women and children affected by conflict and support to victims of conflict-related sexual violence; requested MINUSMA to take fully into account gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue, including with regards to women's involvement and representation at all levels in the implementation of the peace agreement, security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, and in reconciliation and electoral processes; and requested the Secretary-General to pay specific attention to these points in its regular reporting on MINUSMA. **All the gender-related language in resolution 2480 are excerpted in the annex below.**

The Security Council has also included provisions on gender equality in its latest renewal of **sanctions** measures and the mandate of the Panel of Experts, stressing the importance of women's participation in the mechanisms established by the peace agreement. When the Council imposed sanctions in 2017, **rape and other forms of sexual violence**, as well as trafficking in persons, were explicitly named among the violations of international human rights law or international humanitarian law that would warrant the listing of an individual by the sanctions committee and requested the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict to share relevant information with the Committee. Out of the eight individuals listed by the sanctions committee in 2018 and 2019, one of them, an influential businessman from Kidal that controlled migrant smuggling, is listed for human rights violations, including holding and facilitating the sexual exploitation of at least two women, releasing them only after payments of USD 300-350.

The Security Council **visited Mali and Burkina Faso in March 2019** and had raised many of the issues mentioned above. Their arrival coincided with the massacre of 100 Fulani civilians, including many women, in central Mali, reportedly by Dogon armed elements. When meeting with civil society, a constant message from women was that so much of the resources are going towards security and military solutions but that issues like the under-representation of women in public life or the lack of social services and lack of trust in the state are a big part of the problem.

The Security Council was only briefed by one **woman from Malian civil society** during this period, in November 2019. Among other things, she told the Council: "MINUSMA, like the G-5 Sahel Joint Force,

is mandated to mainstream gender across all aspects of its work. MINUSMA still needs to do more to address the gender dimensions of security, while the G-5 Sahel Joint Force must ensure that its gender unit is capable of robustly defending women's rights across the Sahel region (...). Finally, as has been noted in the reports of the Secretary-General and highlighted by other speakers before the Council, the militarization of the Sahel is not helping to establish peace in the region — and it certainly cannot occur to the detriment of the security of local populations, who are all too often trapped in the middle of such operations.”¹

Other recent developments and facts and figures

- In January 2020, the government of Mali, in collaboration with MINUSMA and UN Women and the support of Canada, held a **high-level workshop on the inclusion of women in the implementation of the peace agreement**, as explicitly requested by resolution 2480 (2019). More than two-hundred women leaders participated in this workshop alongside representatives of the signatory parties and recommended increasing the percentage of women in the implementation mechanisms **from the current three percent to 30 percent**. The high-level conference also recommended the creation of an **independent women's observatory** to monitor the progress of the implementation of the peace agreement, which the signatory parties all supported. A monitoring framework to follow up on the outcomes of the workshop was established in April and includes the ministries of Territorial Administration, Promotion of Women, and Social Cohesion, the High representative of the President of the Republic for the peace agreement and a group of nine women leaders designated unanimously at the conference. Norway, Sweden, Canada, UN Women and MINUSMA are represented as observers. In the 39th meeting of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, **each signatory party agreed to include two additional women representatives, so six additional women should be present at the 40th meeting of the CSA scheduled for mid-June**.
- **By the time this high-level workshop was held, and more than four years since the signature of the Agreement**, women made up 3 per cent of the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, 6 per cent of the National Council for Security Sector Reform, 4 per cent of the subcommittees of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, and 20 per cent of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. The **Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission** has received more than 16,000 testimonies, and 60 percent of them have been given by women, a percentage that has been gradually increasing.
- In March 2020, the first round of legislative **elections** took place in spite of the kidnapping of the opposition leader only a few days before election day. 426 women were registered as candidates for the election (out of 1447 total candidates, or 29.5 percent). The campaigns of women candidates and the mobility of women voters were affected by deteriorating security conditions and health risks associated with **COVID-19**, often due to limited access to accurate information about COVID-19, as well as gender-based violence and harassment at polling stations. On the other hand, women's participation was helped by the provision of transportation for female voters to polling stations. Women were only **9.5 percent of elected representatives in the National Assembly**. **With the results of the recent election, this number has now jumped to more than 28 percent, increasing between the first and second round thanks to targeted efforts**.
- Since May 2019, the government comprises 38 ministers, including 9 women. The government that had been formed in the previous year had 32 ministers, including 11 women, which means that **women's representation in the cabinet has decreased from 34 percent to 23 percent and therefore no longer respects the 30% minimum representation set by the national law 052 adopted in 2015**. The committee of experts that submitted a proposal for **constitutional review** in 2019 included two women among its 11 members. In the 2018 presidential election, there was only

¹ Her full speech can be read here: <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/peacebuilder-resource-un-security-council-briefing-assitan-diallo-11-2019/>.

one woman running for president, out of 24 candidates, and she obtained the lowest number of votes.

- Inclusion of women in public offices, particularly nomination of women in administrative positions, remains a serious challenge, despite the existing legal framework (**Law 052/2015**), **requiring 30 percent of female representation in public functions**. Female representation in administrative (and elected) positions remains low, with only 16 women in the *corps préfectoral* (Governor, prefect, deputy-prefect and sub-prefect) out of 301, only 9 women out of 703 mayors out of 301, and only one woman out of 69 interim authorities at the regional level and 14 out of 288 at the district level.
- Nevertheless, the Law 052 has led to an increase in women's representation not just in the National Assembly after the recent elections but also at the municipal level, which jumped from 9 percent to 26.6 percent of municipal councilors after the 2016 municipal elections.
- Although women could play an important role in **local conflict prevention and resolution**, their representation in local mechanisms, such as **Regional and Municipal Reconciliation Committees**, stands at **only 12 percent**, and the importance of their participation is rarely emphasized and remains largely ad-hoc and circumstantial. Social and religious norms and practices and increased recourse to traditional authorities (the *cadis*) for dispute resolution further prevent women from contributing to reconciliation processes in a meaningful way.
- The inclusive **national dialogue** was concluded in Bamako in December 2019, nine months after it was announced, and with the absence of opposition parties. Women's civil society organizations actively participated in the preparations for and the holding of the inclusive national dialogue, and the three lead facilitators appointed by the President were two men and one woman. A network of female parliamentarians championed an initiative aimed at convincing those who had decided to boycott the dialogue to join it.
- In March 2019, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and Family adopted the **third national action plan** on women, peace and security (2019-2023), for which the signature of the Prime Minister is still outstanding.
- The **Special Representative of the Secretary-General on sexual violence in conflict** conducted a five-day **visit to Mali** in March 2019, which culminated in the signing of a **Joint Communiqué** by the government and the UN. Following the visit, the government drafted an action plan to implement the Joint Communiqué. Two non-state armed groups, the Plateforme and Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad had issued unilateral communiqués in previous years, and have implemented half of the activities outlined in these communiqués, such as the development of codes of conduct that include provisions on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. In the 2019 annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence, five non-state armed groups were listed as credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence.²
- The United Nations saw a **significant increase in reported cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2019**. MINUSMA was able to verify 25 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2019 against 15 women, 19 girls, and one man. The Gender-Based Violence Information Management System reported 745 incidents of conflict-related sexual violence, perpetrated by non-state armed groups in 264 cases and Malian Security Forces in 58 cases. The remaining 412 are attributed to unidentified armed elements. The reported cases included instances of sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, and castration. Still, little progress was observed in relation to the monitoring and reporting of sexual violence against women and children, which is believed to

² These were *Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad*, part of *Coordination des Mouvements de l'Azawad*; *Ansar Eddine*, part of *Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin*; *Mouvement pour l'unification et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest* whose former members joined Islamic State in the Greater Sahara; *Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb*, part of *Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin*; and *Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés*, part of the *Plateforme des mouvements du 14 juin 2014 d'Alger*.

be hugely under-reported due to insecurity, fear of reprisals, stigmatization of victims, lack of protection for victims and witnesses, lack of holistic and adequate social services support survivors, limited access to justice and mistrust in the judicial system by survivors and their families, and insufficient presence of UN staff in conflict-affected areas to monitor and report these violations.

- **55 percent of conflict-affected localities do not have dedicated GBV services.** In 2019, UN partners supported the creation of four integrated service centers for survivors of sexual violence in 2019 in Bamako, Mopti, and Gao.
- **Not a single investigation of conflict-related sexual violence has been brought to trial, including the 115 still pending before the Tribunal of Commune III in Bamako.** MINUSMA, in collaboration with the UN Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, undertook in 2019 an **assessment of the judicial response to sexual violence incidents in conflict (2012-2013)** in Timbuktu, Gao and Bamako with a specific focus on existing criminal complaints and civil parties' claims filed before Malian courts since 2014. The aim of the assessment was to identify the main challenges that prevent the judicial procedures from progressing (as no significant judicial act has been taken since 2017 in any of the identified cases), with a view to formulating opportunities and practical recommendations in the national legal, judicial and institutional response. The assessment was due to be shared with the Minister of Justice and discussed in a workshop, but these steps have been postponed due to the COVID-19.
- MINUSMA has continued to promote **access to justice for women** in the North and Centre regions. Between September 2019 and February 2020, MINUSMA provided civil society and criminal justice actors, including newly deployed magistrates, with a platform to discuss ways to overcome the challenges related to sexual and gender-based violence cases, as well as for targeted trainings of jurists and paralegals. MINUSMA and UN Women continue to support women in the security sector and the integration of gender considerations in the administration and management of prisons.
- In September 2019, the **ICC** pre-trial chamber confirmed the charges against Al Hassan Ag Adboul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud, accused of forcing hundreds of women into sexual slavery and forced marriage, among other charges, during the occupation of Timbuktu by rebel groups in 2012. The mandate of the **international commission of inquiry** on the situation in Mali, which is investigating sexual and gender-based crimes, has been extended until June 2020.
- In January 2020, MINUSMA hosted a **workshop with 113 Islamic religious leaders** to discuss the role that the High Islamic Council could play in addressing **sexual violence**. Following the workshop, the President of the High Islamic Council signed a declaration in which he made relevant commitments, including the issuance of a fatwa to denounce conflict-related sexual violence.
- The **Peacebuilding Fund** continues to invest significant resources in Mali, with multiple projects aimed at advancing gender equality while preventing cross-border and inter-community conflicts, whether through social cohesion, community dialogue, or the adequate management of natural resources. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund is supporting 26 women-led and women's rights civil society organizations in Mali, working on recovery planning, sustainable socio-economic reintegration of women affected by conflict, and women's access to livelihoods and income generation in the northern and central regions of the country.
- The UN Country Team and MINUSMA will be conducting a **gender-responsive conflict analysis** in the coming months that will also take into account the impact of COVID-19. The findings will be instrumental in informing the transition calendar, the Integrated Strategic Framework, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Preliminary analysis of the impact of COVID-19 reveals increased risk of both gender-based violence and economic insecurity for women due to their over-representation in the informal sector, as well as negative impacts on the reporting, documentation and response to violations committed against women and children and on reproductive health services.

- In late 2019, UN Women, in collaboration with Alioune Blondin Beye Peacekeeping School in Bamako, **conducted national needs assessments on gender and human rights capacity-building for security sector actors of the G5 Sahel States**. The assessments informed the development of a comprehensive training and capacity-building package to be rolled out for security sector institutions in the region. Under the same regional initiative, UN Women carried out a study on mainstreaming human rights and gender equality in the security sector in the context of combating terrorism and violent extremism in the G5 Sahel States.
- Women represent 54 percent of the **internally displaced population** in Mali, as the rate of displacement and food insecurity increased sharply during 2019, due to escalating insecurity. In a recently published study by UNFPA, Mali was tied for lowest percentage of married or in-union women aged 15 to 49 that participate in the decisions on **sexual and reproductive health care**: seven percent, well below the 55 percent average among the 57 fragile countries surveyed. There are fewer than two midwives for every 10,000 inhabitants and pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death among adolescent girls. Pregnant and/or breastfeeding women are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition and constitute 500,000 of the 1,7 million persons affected by malnutrition.
- Women and girls are at an elevated risk of **sexual exploitation and abuse**, especially in remote areas where people are living in extreme poverty and in IDP camps. Apart from MINUSMA, there are other military contingents (Sahel G5 Joint Forces, French troops) and a significant presence of humanitarians.
- In MINUSMA, women account for 3.8 percent of military personnel, 12.2 percent of the police component, 25 percent of international civilian posts, 16 percent of national staff posts, and 28 percent of UN volunteers. **An action plan on gender parity has been developed and rolled out in the mission.**

Recommendations

- In upcoming negotiations in the Security Council to renew the mandate of MINUSMA, **all the gender-relevant language from resolution 2480 (see annex below) should be retained**. Since the high-level workshop of OP 4 has already taken place and its monitoring framework is already operational, emphasis should be placed on the implementation of its recommendations, for example by explicitly calling for progress updates in the periodic reporting to the Council.
- The co-chairs or other Council Members could consider a **technical-level event with representatives from Malian civil society and other international security actors in Mali** (AU, ECOWAS, selected EU Member States, the Sahel G5 Joint Force) on their integration of women, peace and security considerations in their interventions.
- The co-chairs should ask the **Panel of Experts** on the reasons behind their challenges in verifying cases of conflict-related sexual violence or provide more detailed information in this regard, including the trafficking of women and girls, as well as recommendations for listings of individuals.
- Council Members should dial up their advocacy with Malian authorities for the **prioritization of the judicial response to conflict-related sexual violence** and the adoption of a law against gender-based violence.

ANNEX: Relevant language in Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), renewing MINUSMA's mandate for a year.

Underlining that lasting peace and security in the Sahel region will not be achieved without a combination of political, security and development efforts benefitting all regions of Mali, as well as the full, effective and inclusive implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali ("the Agreement"), which involves all Malian actors supportive of the peace process and ensures full, effective and meaningful participation of women and youth,

Strongly condemning all violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law, including those involving extrajudicial and summary executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions and ill-treatment of prisoners, sexual and gender-based violence, as well as killing, maiming, recruitment and use of children, attacks against schools, hospitals and humanitarian and medical personnel, and *calling upon* all parties to bring an end to such violations and abuses and to comply with their obligations under applicable international law.

4. *Urges* the Malian parties to take immediate and concrete action to fulfil the following priority measures before the end of MINUSMA's current mandate:

- ensure the completion of the constitutional reform, including institutional reforms envisioned by the Agreement, following an inclusive consultation with the full involvement of the Malian parties, the political opposition and civil society;
- hold a high-level workshop, with the full involvement of the Malian parties and of the civil society, that will identify concrete recommendations to be implemented within agreed timelines to ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the mechanisms established by the Agreement to support and monitor its implementation, including through greater representation of women in the *Comité de suivi de l'Accord* (CSA);

5. *Calls upon* all parties in Mali to ensure full, effective and meaningful participation of women in the mechanisms established by the Agreement to support and monitor its implementation, including through greater representation of women in the CSA, meeting the 30 per cent quota for women in all political functions and offices as defined in Mali's legislation, and completion of Agreement-related targets laid out in Mali's third national plan for the implementation of resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), and *requests* the Secretary-General to pay specific attention to these points in its regular reporting on MINUSMA;

9. *Calls for* the inclusion within national and regional strategies of programs to address the stigma of sexual and gender-based violence, bring justice to victims and support the reintegration of survivors into their communities;

28. *Decides* that MINUSMA's mandate shall include the following priority tasks:

- (a) *Support to the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali*
- (ii) To support the implementation of the defence and security measures of the Agreement, especially its Part III and Annex 2, notably (...) to support the cantonment, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups, including through the integration of elements of the signatory armed groups in the MDSF as an interim measure, and the continued implementation of a community violence reduction program, within the framework of an inclusive and consensual reform of the security sector, taking into account the particular needs of women and children and without prejudice to the anticipated plans of the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration and integration commissions;
- (c) *Protection of civilians*
- (iii) To provide specific protection for women and children affected by armed conflict, including through Protection Advisors, Child Protection Advisors and Women Protection Advisors as well as

consultations with women's organizations, and address the needs of victims of sexual and gender-based violence in armed conflict;

(d) *Good offices and reconciliation*

(iv) To encourage and support the full implementation of the Agreement by the Government of Mali, the Plateforme and Coordination armed groups, and all relevant non-signatory actors, including by promoting the meaningful participation of civil society, including women's organizations as well as youth organizations;

(e) *Promotion and protection of human rights*

(ii) To monitor, document, help investigate and report publicly and regularly to the Security Council, on violations of international humanitarian law and on violations and abuses of human rights, including all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and violations and abuses committed against women and children throughout Mali and to contribute to efforts to prevent such violations and abuses;

46. *Requests* the Secretary-General to seek to increase the number of women in MINUSMA, as well as to ensure the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of operations;

53. *Urges* the Malian authorities to ensure that all those responsible for crimes involving violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law, including those involving sexual and gender-based violence, are held accountable and brought to justice without undue delay, and *notes*, in this regard, the Malian authorities' continued cooperation with the ICC, in accordance with Mali's obligations under the Rome Statute, in matters that are within its jurisdiction;

55. *Reiterates* that the Malian authorities have primary responsibility to protect civilians in Mali, *recalls* its past resolutions on the Protection of civilians in armed conflicts, Children and armed conflicts, and Women, peace and security, *calls upon* MINUSMA and all military forces operating in Mali to take them into account and to abide by international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, and *recalls* the importance of training in this regard;

56. *Welcomes* the adoption by the Malian authorities of a third action plan to implement resolution [1325 \(2000\)](#), and *requests* MINUSMA to take fully into account gender considerations as a cross-cutting issue throughout its mandate and to assist the Malian authorities in ensuring the full, effective and meaningful participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels in the implementation of the Agreement, including the security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, as well as in reconciliation and electoral processes;

58. *Urges* all parties to prevent and eliminate sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, *encourages* the implementation of the Joint Communiqué on sexual and gender-based violence signed by the United Nations and the Government of Mali in March 2019, *further* encourages Malian authorities to continue to take steps towards the enactment of the draft law on prevention, prosecution and response to gender-based violence, *calls upon* the Plateforme armed group to implement the commitments contained in its *Communiqué sur la prévention des violences sexuelles liées au conflit au Mali* of June 2016 and upon the Coordination armed group to make similar commitments, and *requests* MINUSMA to support efforts in this regard;

59. *Requests* the Secretary-General to ensure full compliance of MINUSMA with the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse and to keep the Council fully informed if such cases of misconduct occur, and *urges* troop- and police-contributing countries to take appropriate preventative action, including predeployment awareness training, and to ensure full accountability in cases of such conduct involving their personnel;