

Update on women, peace and security in Mali (and the broader Sahel region) June 5th 2018

The Informal Expert Group of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security has discussed the situation in Mali in February 2016 ([S/206/682](#)), September 2016 ([S/2016/1103](#)), and May 2017 ([S/2017/626](#)), with the participation of the leadership of MINUSMA and the United Nations Country Team. As the IEG reconvenes to review progress and challenges in the implementation of women, peace and security commitments in Mali, ahead of the expiration of the current mandate of the mission in June 30th and following a visit of the Secretary-General, this update summarizes relevant developments since May 2017, both in Mali and the Sahel region more broadly.

The Security Council renewed MINUSMA's mandate in June 2017 (UNSCR 2364), established a targeted sanctions regime on Mali in September 2017 (UNSCR 2374), and outlined the parameters of MINUSMA's support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force in December 2017 (UNSCR 2391). **All three resolutions integrated women, peace and security considerations, summarized in the annex below.** In addition, the Security Council visited the Sahel region in October 2017, specifically Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso, and was briefed by a Malian representative of women's organizations during an open debate on peacekeeping in March. Speaking on behalf of Malian women in northern Mali, Fatimata Touré spoke about the dire security situation: "Women who travel to work in the weekly markets as a way to provide for their daily needs can no longer do so. When they travel, either their vehicles explode on mines and they lose their hands and feet, or they are stopped, stripped of everything they have, and raped. They are now forced to confine themselves to their homes, even though they are the heads of their families."

Despite sustained advocacy efforts by MINUSMA, the UN Country Team, and civil society, little progress has been made in ensuring women's meaningful participation in the peace process. **Women continue to be underrepresented in the mechanisms for implementing and monitoring the Peace Agreement**, including in the Agreement Monitoring Committee, the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission, the National Council on Security Sector Reform, and the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. **Eight out of the 26 mechanisms called for in the peace agreement are now in place and, on average, only three percent of members of these mechanisms are women, which is shockingly low.** This issue was raised once again in January by a delegation of women leaders, including representatives of civil society organizations and two members of the signatory armed groups, who met with the president of the Agreement Monitoring Committee, the High Representative of the President for the peace process and MINUSMA, and then again in March and April, in meetings with the two leaders of the signatory armed groups and the Ministers of Defense, National Security and Reconciliation. Similarly, there is a need for women-led informal mechanisms and spaces for reconciliation and conflict mitigation to inform the national conversation and decisions on these issues. **The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security remains severely underfunded**, but was extended to cover 2018 and a new coordination team has been put in place.

In December, the President appointed Soumeviou Boubève Maiga as Prime Minister and named a new cabinet. **The cabinet includes nine women out of its 36 members (25 per cent).** Presidential elections have been confirmed for the end of July, and legislative elections are scheduled for November 2018. UN Women is facilitating a **national platform for women's participation in elections to support implementation of the 30 per cent quota required by the 2015 law.** To mitigate potential election-

related violence, MINUSMA has organized workshops benefiting over 600 national stakeholders, 40 per cent of whom were women, and facilitated the training of 703 elections mediators, including 225 women, to serve as members of community-based mediation panels.

The government extended the state of emergency that has been in place since November 2015. The main security threats remain the merger of several Mali-based Al Qaeda groups last year to form Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), and responsible for multiple attacks on MINUSMA and Malian and international security forces, the presence of the ISIS affiliate in the region, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISIS-GS), and recurring intercommunal clashes, particularly between the Dogon and Fulani communities in central Mali. In February, the President signed a decree approving the **National Policy and Action Plan on Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism and Terrorism**, whose text highlights gender equality as one of its principles. The draft **National Strategy for Security Sector Reform** also includes provisions to promote the protection and participation of women. Earlier this year, the Director General of the national police nominated 26 gender focal points. MINUSMA and partners have trained 1,279 members of the Malian security forces, including 204 women, on various policing modules and respecting human rights in countering terrorism.

In January 2018, the **International Commission of Inquiry on Mali** was formally established to investigate allegations of abuse and serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including conflict-related sexual violence, committed between January 2012 and January 2018. The Commission is chaired by Ms. Lena Sundh, a member of the Swedish Women Mediation Network, and will be supported by a gender expert from the UN Women-Justice Rapid Response roster. Since January 2017, the **Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (TJRC)** has received just under 8,000 depositions and **the majority of complaints received to date are from women**. UN Women is providing ongoing technical support on gender integration and training of members and staff, which has led to increased number of women commissioners, the creation of a gender sub-commission, and the elaboration of a gender action plan. MINUSMA continues to assist the Ministry of Justice to follow upon cases filed by survivors of sexual violence in conflict and has trained statement takers of the TJRC on the reception and referral of survivors. Last year, Mali adopted a national law on human rights defenders which includes **specific protection for women human rights defenders**.

Mali is both a **source and transit country for migrants** in West Africa heading to North Africa and Europe, as well as a transit country for returnees who have failed to cross the desert or are returning to Sub-Saharan countries. Many cases of human rights violations have been observed in the migratory roads leading to the north, including theft, extortion and abuse. In addition, **women and girls are exposed to sexual assault and rape, forced prostitution, both by smugglers and other migrants**.

The present context of instability has been accompanied by an increase in forced marriages. **More than 52 per cent of girls are married before 18 years**. More than nine out of 10 married girls aged 15–19 are illiterate. Mali has the **third highest total fertility rate in the world** with six children born per woman. Mali's infant, child, and maternal mortality rates are also among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa because of limited access to family planning, early childbearing, the prevalence of female genital cutting, infrequent use of skilled birth attendants, and a lack of emergency obstetrical and neonatal care.

There is no law specifically addressing violence against women. In September 2017, the Minister of Women, Children and Family established a committee to draft a national strategy to end gender-based violence and UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict seconded two experts to the Ministry to support the development of the strategy. A network of Malian members of parliament against gender-based violence have committed to collaborating with civil society to present a draft bill against gender-based violence before the end of the legislative assembly in 2018. It is estimated that nearly four in ten women have experienced physical violence and between 83 and 92 percent of gender-based violence

survivors do not have access to protection services or legal aid. **There is no legislation prohibiting female genital mutilation, which has been practiced on 89 percent of women and girls in Mali.** However, awareness-raising activities conducted by civil society and UN specialized agencies, in partnership with the Malian Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family, have led more than a thousand villages (out of 12,000 villages in Mali) to abandon the practice.

In 2017, MINUSMA documented 16 cases of **conflict-related sexual violence**, most of which concerned women and girls traveling by public transportation on the axis connecting key regions of Gao, Timbuktu, Ménaka, Mopti and the Niger border. Cultural taboos, stigmatization and the threat of reprisals perpetuate underreporting, while impunity prevails in the northern regions, where there is no functional justice system. In July 2017, the Coordination des mouvements de l'Azawad (CMA) issued a unilateral communiqué to address conflict-related sexual violence. MINUSMA has facilitated the economic reintegration of survivors of sexual violence through quick-impact projects for income generation, and supported a coalition of non-governmental organizations in bringing to court 120 cases of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated during the Islamist occupation and the Tuareg rebellion in the north. The 2018 Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence listed five non-state parties credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for patterns of rape or other forms of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict.¹

Since early 2018, MINUSMA has had an Action Plan to implement the UN's **Gender Parity Strategy**, and women currently represent 2.6 percent of military personnel, 4.7 of formed police unit personnel, 16.5 percent of individual police officers, 25 percent of international civilian posts, 30 percent of United Nations Volunteers, and 19 per cent of national staff posts. The Mission has unfilled vacancies in the Gender Unit, and **the position of Senior Gender Adviser is currently unfilled.** The Women Protection Adviser has served as the Office in Charge since January 2017. **The lack of a fully strengthened gender unit affects the Mission's ability to effectively integrate gender as mandated by the Security Council.** A recently concluded Independent Peacekeeping Review of MINUSMA, led by Ellen Margrethe Løj, was supported by a Senior Gender Adviser in a non-travelling role, primarily helping the review team in the preparatory phase. Additionally, a roundtable, chaired by the MINUSMA DSRSG and Ellen Løj, with representation from UN entities in Mali and in headquarters, was organized discuss the women, peace and security considerations that could inform the peacekeeping review.

On the Sahel region

Since last year, there have been repeated calls for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, to recruit a gender advisor, and Security Council resolution 2391 emphasizes the need for a gender perspective in implementing all aspects of the strategic concept of operations, ensuring that gender analysis and women's participation are integrated into assessments, planning and operations, that the Security Council receives reports on the ways the Joint Force is mitigating any adverse impact of military operations on civilians, including women, and to take adequate measures to prevent and combat impunity for sexual exploitation and abuse committed by its personnel. **To date, there is no clarity on whether or how this gender advisory capacity will be recruited and deployed to the Joint Force,** or whether this is in addition to the needs for gender expertise in the G5 Permanent Secretariat in Nouakchott.

Many of the **recommendations** put forward by women from the Sahel at the high-level conference on **Women's Leadership in the Sahel in 2013**, organized by the European Union, the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Sahel and UN Women, **remain unfulfilled and are still relevant.** These were: inclusion of women in all national, regional and international forums convened to

¹ Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, Ansar Eddine, Mouvement pour l'unification et le jihad en Afrique de l'ouest, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, and Groupe d'autodéfense des Touaregs Imghad et leurs alliés

resolve the Sahel crisis; ensuring that at least 30 per cent of participants in decision-making and politics in the region are women; allocating a minimum level of 15 per cent of all national and international budgets for development and peacebuilding to promoting gender quality and advancing women's rights in the Sahel; and increased visibility and respect for women's roles as leaders, including in the media and among traditional communities.

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) continues to support women's participation in conflict prevention and peace processes. In April 2018, UNOWAS, in partnership with the Economic Commission of African States West (ECOWAS), the G5 Sahel, the United Nations Office Against Terrorism (UNOCT), the Mano River Union, UN Women, and the **Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel**, convened a high-level conference on Women, violence and terrorism in West Africa and the Sahel: building a regional and international response. The Dialogue was attended by over 150 stakeholders and resulted in a Call to Action to increase women's participation in preventing violent extremism and combatting terrorism through a variety of avenues. ECOWAS' 2017-2020 Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security is another important framework for implementation of these commitments. Also in April, the Government of Niger, supported by UNODC, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) and other international partners, held a workshop in Niamey on the operationalization of the G5 Sahel Joint Force Police Component. Recommendations were adopted stating the need to better ensure a gender perspective within the Police Component of the Joint Force.

Women from the region have called for security-driven responses to be complemented by **responses that address the structural drivers of instability and insecurity, including gender inequality**. The Sahel has one of the world's highest poverty rates and lowest gender equality and development levels. Over 78 per cent of people in Niger, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso live in poverty and 2.5 million asylum claimants in the European Union in 2015-16 came via Sahel routes. Criminal networks and terrorist organizations are taking advantage of migration routes to traffic drugs and persons. The **UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel and its Support Plan**, developed earlier this year, aim to accelerate and scale up support to the Sahel countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the African Union Agenda 2063. **The Support Plan has six priority areas, including empowering women as agents of socio-economic transformation and peaceful societies**. The gender dimensions of this plan will focus on climate change and smart agriculture, security sector reform, and preventing violent extremism. A Sahel Women's Platform of civil society organizations has national cells in all five countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, and Mauritania), and can be important sources of information for decision-makers, especially given the gender dimensions of trafficking and radicalization.

Recommendations for the Security Council and the Informal Experts Group

In upcoming resolutions on Mali, the strong language on gender equality and women's rights should be maintained, and the language on women's meaningful participation in the peace process, the mechanisms to implement and monitor the peace agreement, and the elections should be strengthened, reflecting the low levels of implementation to date of previous calls by the Security Council and the Secretary-General.

Council Members should ask the UN about plans to ensure a protective environment that would enhance women's protection and security, including the prevention of retaliation by armed groups against women leaders and human rights defenders.

The IEG co-chairs and other Council members should share a summary of this meeting with Malian counterparts and highlight the alarmingly low levels of representation of women in the mechanisms created to implement the peace agreement, noting the need to establish defined tracks that would ensure women's meaningful participation in preparation for the proposed national dialogue and reconciliation

process, and urge the Government to sign a Joint Communiqué with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, to adopt legislation prohibiting all forms of sexual violence, and to provide access to justice and services for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

During and after the meeting, MINUSMA should be asked specific information about the existing capacity and expertise on gender equality and women's protection in the civilian, police, and military components of the mission, and for plans on filling the position of the senior gender advisor.

The IEG co-chairs should inquire the Group of Support for the Joint Force, as well as the African Union and the relevant actors in the UN, about the deployment of gender expertise, and Council Members should use every Council briefing to hold the briefers accountable to the gender-related provisions of resolution 2391.

The IEG should take advantage of the UN-AU solidarity mission to the Sahel, led by the Deputy Secretary-General and scheduled for July, to follow up on any key issues raised during this meeting, and prepare a set of specific questions on women, peace and security for decision-makers in those countries.

ANNEX: Relevant excerpts on gender equality in latest Security Council resolutions on Mali

Resolution 2364 (2017) extending MINUSMA's mandate for a year

Welcoming the adoption by the Government of Mali, in January 2016, of Mali's second National Action Plan for the implementation of the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), further welcoming in this regard the adoption by the Government of Mali, in December 2015, of a law requiring a 30 per cent quota for women in national institutions, and encouraging its implementation (...).

Strongly condemning the activities in Mali and in the Sahel region of terrorist organisations, including MUJAO, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al Mourabitoune, Ansar Eddine, and associated individuals and groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims) and Islamic State in Greater Sahara and Ansaroul Islam, which continue to operate in Mali and constitute a threat to peace and security in the region and beyond, and human rights abuses and violence against civilians, notably women and children, committed in Mali and in the region by terrorist groups (...).

Strongly condemning all abuses and violations of human rights 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 and hospitals (...).

Welcoming the signing of an action plan to end and prevent recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children by the Coordination armed group and the United Nations in March 2017, and calling for its full and immediate implementation (...).

OP 2. Urges the Government of Mali, the Plateforme and Coordination armed groups to prioritize without further delay the necessary steps to advance the implementation of the following provisions of the Agreement, bearing in mind the need to ensure the full implementation of the Agreement, notably (...) ensuring women's participation (...).

OP 11. Calls for the inclusion within national and regional strategies of programmes to support community efforts to address the stigma of sexual violence and the reintegration of survivors into their communities.

MINUSMA's mandate:

(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 (...) taking into account the particular needs of women and children.

(b) Good offices and reconciliation: To exercise good offices, confidence-building and facilitation at the national and local levels, (...) and to encourage and support the full implementation of the Agreement by the Government of Mali, the Plateforme and Coordination armed groups, including by promoting the participation of civil society, including women's organizations, as well as youth organizations;

(c) Protection of civilians and stabilization, including against asymmetric threats:

(iii) To provide specific protection for women and children affected by armed conflict, including through 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;

(f) Promotion and protection of human rights:

(ii) To monitor, 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;

OP 27. 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 and effective participation, involvement and representation of women at all levels and at an early stage of the stabilization phase, including the security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, as well as in reconciliation and electoral processes, *further requests* MINUSMA to assist the parties to ensure women's full and active participation in the implementation of the Agreement, and further requests enhanced reporting by MINUSMA to the Security Council on this issue;

OP 28. Requests the Secretary-General to ensure full compliance of MINUSMA with the United Nations zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuses 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 pre-deployment awareness training, and to ensure full accountability in cases of such conduct involving their personnel.

OP 40. Reiterates that the Malian authorities have primary responsibility to protect civilians in Mali, further recalls its resolutions (...) 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013) and 2242 (2016), 2331 (2016), on Women, Peace and Security, (...) calls upon the Government of Mali to finalize and sign a joint communique with the UN on addressing sexual violence in conflict, and further 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 (...).

Security Council resolution 2374 (2017) establishing a targeted sanctions regime on Mali

Strongly condemning the activities in Mali and in the Sahel region of terrorist organizations (...) which continue to operate in Mali and constitute a threat to peace and security in the region and beyond, as well as human rights abuses and violence against civilians, notably women and children, committed in Mali and in the region by terrorist groups (...).

Strongly condemning all abuses and violations of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law in Mali, including (...) sexual and gender-based violence (...), and calling upon all parties to bring an end to such violations and abuses and to comply with their obligations under applicable international law (...).

8. Decides that the measures contained in paragraph 1 shall apply to individuals, and that the measures contained in paragraph 4 shall apply to individuals and entities, as designated for such measures by the Committee as responsible for or complicit in, or having engaged in, directly or indirectly, the following actions or policies that threaten the peace, security, or stability of Mali:

(f) Planning, directing, or committing acts in Mali that violate international human rights law or international humanitarian law, as applicable, or that constitute human rights abuses or violations, including those involving the targeting of civilians, including women and children, through the commission of acts of violence (including killing, maiming, torture, or rape or other sexual violence), abduction, enforced disappearance, forced displacement, or attacks on schools, hospitals, religious sites, or locations where civilians are seeking refuge;

19. Requests the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Special Representative for Sexual Violence in Conflict to share relevant information with the Committee in accordance with paragraph 7 of resolution 1960 (2010) and paragraph 9 of resolution 1998 (2011);

Security Council resolution 2391 (2017) outlining MINUSMA's support to the G5 Sahel Joint Force

18. Underlines that a gender perspective should be taken into account in implementing all aspects of the strategic concept of operations of the FC-G5S, including by ensuring that gender analysis and women's participation are integrated into assessments, planning and operations;

20. Welcomes the African Union's zero tolerance stance on sexual exploitation and abuse, and underlines the need for the G5 Sahel States to take adequate measures to prevent and combat impunity for sexual exploitation and abuse by their personnel operating in the framework of the FC-G5S;

25. Renews its urgent call to the Government of Mali and the Plateforme and Coordination armed groups (...) to take immediate and concrete action to fully and expeditiously deliver on their remaining obligations under the Agreement, in particular through (...) ensuring full and equal women's participation (...).

32. Calls upon G5 Sahel States to ensure women's full and equal participation in institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflicts, as well as to include a gender perspective in the development of comprehensive strategies to counter the threat posed by terrorism and organized crime (including trafficking in persons, arms, drugs and natural resources, and the smuggling of migrants) in the Sahel region;

33. Requests the Secretary-General, in close coordination with the G5 Sahel States and the African Union, to report to the Security Council on the activities of the FC-G5S, focusing: on (...) (v) on implementation by the G5 Sahel States of the compliance framework, the HRDDP, as well as on ways to mitigate any adverse impact of the military operations of the FC-G5S on the civilian population, including on women and children.