

Burkina Faso: Killing of Civilians

We call for a full and independent investigation into the latest horrific killing of civilians in Burkina Faso and for those responsible to be held to account.

Reports indicate that on 20 April, armed men in uniform, allegedly members of the defence and security forces accompanied by paramilitary auxiliaries known as Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDP), encircled Karma village, in northern Yatenga Province, and randomly shot at people. Available information suggests that at least 150 civilians may have been killed, and many others injured. The armed men then proceeded to loot homes, shops, and mosques.

Sources in the nearby town of Ouahigouya reported hearing gunshots at 7a.m. on 20 April, three hours after they had seen men in military fatigues on vehicles and motorcycles headed towards Karma.

The public prosecutor in Ouahigouya announced on 23 April that 60 people were killed and an investigation into the attack was under way. This investigation must be prompt, thorough, independent, and impartial and must result in credible prosecutions, if such gross violations are to end.

The killings come in the wake of an attack on a VDP base on 15 April in which – according to the provincial governor – eight soldiers and 32 VDPs were killed and more than 30 injured. Credible accounts indicate the attackers accused village residents of sheltering members of the Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslim group, an Islamic State group affiliate, and other non-state armed groups.

We call on all parties to the conflict in Burkina Faso to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including by refraining from targeting civilians and civilian objects. Deliberately targeting civilians or individuals not taking direct part in hostilities constitutes a war crime.

This is one of several other reported attacks on civilians by the armed forces and VDPs in recent months. On 9 November last year, at least 50 civilians were killed when suspected members of the 14th regiment attacked four villages near Djibo town, in Soum Province. In another incident, at least 28 people were killed in Nouna town, in Kossi Province, on 30-31 December. Investigations were announced by the authorities. We call on the authorities to publish the findings of these investigations.