



MALI: FIVE MONTHS OF CRISIS

**ARMED REBELLION AND
MILITARY COUP**

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Cover photo: Malian military junta supporters surround a car loaded with soldiers at Bamako airport, Bamako, 29th March 2012. © ISSOUF SANOGO/AFP/Getty Images

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4 Mali: Five months of crisis
Armed rebellion and military coup

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 2012, Mali has been faced with the worst crisis of its recent history, one that has questioned both the integrity of its territory as well as almost 20 years of political stability.

A Tuareg rebellion, fueled by fighters arriving from Libya after the fall of Mouammar Gaddafi, launched attacks against the Malian garrisons in the North of the country in early January 2012. The armed groups also committed serious infringements of international humanitarian law by executing the soldiers they caught in combat. The Malian army responded by bombing indiscriminately the civilian population.

Northern Mali has been weakened by several factors over the years, in particular: the disinvestment of the Malian state and the lack of development in this area which has caused much frustration; the development of all kinds of trafficking (drugs, trade of transnational migrants, weapons, vehicles, cigarettes); and the presence of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) who transformed certain areas of the region into a safe haven where these groups hold hostages.

Challenging the way in which Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré's government was managing this conflict, a group of non-commissioned officers, led by Captain Sanogo, took power following a military coup, on 21 March 2012, suspending the Constitution and arresting several political leaders.

One week later, whilst this new military power was contested both nationally and internationally, the armed groups seized the whole of Northern Mali in just a few days.

The armed conflict in the North resulted in major population displacement both within the country and towards neighbouring countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger). At the beginning of May 2012, there were some 130 000 internally displaced people (IDP) in Mali and approximately 190 000 refugees in neighbouring countries. This situation exacerbated the humanitarian crisis already faced by several countries in the region due to the food shortage currently affecting 15 million people in the Sahel.

This report is based upon the findings of a three-week research mission undertaken in April 2012, in Bamako, the Malian capital city, and in Niger. In Niger, the Amnesty International delegation visited four Malian refugee sites close to the Nigerien border (200 km North of Niamey, the Nigerien capital city). The delegation was also able to meet with authorities from both the Malian and Nigerien governments.

Five months after the beginning of this crisis, Northern Mali is now entirely controlled by armed groups, some of which seek to impose, through use of force, new behaviours based upon their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. Places of Christian worship have been destroyed, pushing Christian populations to leave the region. Moreover, some people have been accused of failing to comply with this way of life and have been punished, sometimes resulting in their death.

Amnesty International calls upon all parties in this conflict to respect international humanitarian law and, in particular, asks them not to attack civilians, nor people who have laid down their arms or have been taken out of action. The organization calls upon Malian authorities to put an end, without delay, to the harassment of those who campaign peacefully for the return to the rule of law.

Amnesty International also calls upon the armed groups who have taken control of the North to immediately stop sexual violence against women and young girls and also the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Amnesty International also asks that UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs have unrestricted access, particularly in Northern Mali, to refugees and internally displaced persons.

2. ARMED UPRISING IN THE NORTH AND MILITARY COUP

For some years now, Northern Mali has been marked by the Malian government's neglect of this region, particularly in terms of economic development and the limited presence of administrative structures, which has led to a high level of insecurity.

This state abandon has bred frustration among the populations in the North and has continued to feed desires of rebellion and autonomy, even independence amongst some Tuareg movements. The Tuareg population living in Mali represents approximately one-third of this community; it is scattered over four other countries (Niger, Algeria, Libya, Burkina Faso) and is estimated to be 1,5 million people. At the beginning of the 1990s, the region was shaken by an armed Tuareg rebellion that caused hundreds of civilian casualties.

In January 2012, a new rebellion was launched under the leadership of two armed groups made up, in particular, of the heavily armed Tuareg fighters returned from Libya after the fall of President Gaddafi – the Azawad National Liberation Movement (Mouvement national de liberation de l'Azawad, (MNL)) and Ansar Eddin (see box 2.2). There were serious clashes between these armed groups and the Malian soldiers, resulting in the death of dozens of fighters on both sides. Some Malian soldiers were killed and their throats slit after having been taken prisoner. This fighting caused tens of thousands of people to flee towards the south of the country and to neighbouring countries.



Displaced women at the Shelter Centre for members of the Timbuktu Baptist Church, in Bamako.
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2.1 FOOD CRISIS IN THE SAHEL

This population displacement occurred in a context of a food and nutrition crisis in the Sahel due to insufficient rainfall and poor harvests that were very unevenly distributed. As early as October and November 2011, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) had issued an alert and prepared a strategic response. The massive displacements of people fleeing the conflict and then the advance of armed groups in Northern Mali worsened an already very worrying situation. In April 2012, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that “this situation aggravates the food and nutrition crisis affecting the entire Sahel region, especially as refugees, including many shepherds with their flocks, are settling in areas that are amongst the most affected by the drought¹.”

In April 2012, the FAO estimated in its strategic framework for regional response that more than 16 million people were facing food and nutritional insecurity; approximately 35 percent of the population in Niger, 20 percent in Mali, 10 percent in Burkina Faso as well as in Sahelian zone of Chad and more than 20 percent of the population in Mauritania. Furthermore, more than one million children risk severe acute malnutrition².

The situation in Northern Mali is all the more serious as humanitarian agencies only have limited access to these areas for security reasons and also because the group Ansar Eddin has publicly shown its refusal to allow non-Muslim humanitarian actors access to the region (see section 6.2). Despite these obstacles, the ICRC and NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans frontières (MSM)) and Médecins du Monde (MDM) were able to bring assistance to populations in the North by using various strategies. The situation remains nonetheless very worrying. On 11 April 2012, the European Commission warned of the risk of a “major humanitarian disaster that could affect neighbouring countries, unless rapid progress is made in the coming days to open a humanitarian corridor and allow food and medical supplies in the North”. And at the end of April the ICRC estimated that, “security guarantees are not yet in place for a larger scale humanitarian adventure³.”

By the end of January 2012, photographs were circulated which showed the corpses of Malian soldiers’ with their hands tied behind their backs, prompting the authorities to accuse the MNLA of carrying out extrajudicial executions. The armed opposition group denied this, saying that the Malian troops died during the fighting and that these photographs were fabricated. To shed light on these events an investigation was conducted by the Malian government (see section 4.2).

Releasing the images of the dead soldiers angered their families, who protested in Bamako on the 1 and 2 February 2012. Demonstrators looted and destroyed houses and properties belonging to Tuaregs and other ethnic groups targeted because of their lighter skin color (“teint clair”), including Arabs and Mauritians living in the capital, without the Malian security forces intervening to defend these people. This inaction of the security forces drove thousands of people from these groups to flee Bamako.

Whilst the rebellion continued to gain ground in the North, a group of soldiers led by Captain Amadou Sanogo overthrew the Malian President, Amadou Toumani Touré, and dissolved the Constitution the night of March 21 to 22, 2012. The coup leaders justified their coup d’état

by highlighting “the inaction of the government to provide adequate means to the armed and security forces to fulfil their mandate to defend the integrity of the national territory”⁴. This coup d’état came just one month before the Presidential election scheduled for the end of April 2012. In the hours and the days that followed, a number of people were killed by stray bullets and others wounded by gunfire. This coup was immediately contested by the majority of the Malian opposition parties and condemned by the entire international community, notably by the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), which imposed sanctions on Mali.

Taking advantage of the disorganization generated by the coup, the armed groups of the MNLA and Ansar Eddin seized the three main cities in the North of Mali (Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu) at the end of March, beginning April 2012. Several days later, the MNLA declared the independence of Azawad. This term initially meant the area north of the Niger River in the Timbuktu area, but since the rebellions of the 1990s, it has been used by the Tuareg movements to refer to all of Northern Mali, including the regions of Gao, Kidal and Tumbuktu.⁵

The takeover of the large Northern cities by armed groups was accompanied by the looting and the systematic destruction of banks, shops, food reserves, as well as public buildings, hospitals, schools and Christian places of worship.

In some cases, the looted supplies were sold back at high prices to the population. A man from Timbuktu who had fled to Bamako, told the Amnesty International delegation how the armed groups seized the reserves of the World Food Programme (WFP) and Mali’s Office of Food Security (Office des produits alimentaires du Mali (OPAM)) during the takeover of the city:

« They broke the doors, stole products, then sold them. They were asking for 18 000 francs CFA [approximately 25 euros] for a 100 kilo bag of millet. People refused to pay this price, which gave way to haggling, lasting one week. They also looted the WFP’s fuel depot. »

The ransacking of hospitals had serious health implications for the population as it deprived them of all healthcare. Thus, in Gao, beginning April 2012, shortly after the capture of the city by armed groups, a pregnant woman had to give birth in the street because armed men were looting the hospital. Another patient of this hospital, deprived of medical care, died.

2.2 ARMED GROUPS AND MILITIAS IN THE NORTH

The absence of effective state structures and the lack of development have encouraged, over the course of the past decade, the emergence of demands for autonomy and the appearance of armed groups and militias in the North of Mali. The origins of these groups and their relationships – with one other, with the Malian government and with other states – are not always clearly established and have led to differing interpretations.

The two armed groups behind the rebellion of January 2012 are the MNLA and Ansar Eddin.

Azawad National Liberation Movement (Mouvement national de libération de l'Azawad, (MNLA)

The MNLA was established in October 2011 from the merger of several previous Tuareg groups. In particular, it includes Tuaregs who had fled to Libya and then returned to Mali after the fall of Mouammar Gaddafi. It declares itself to be: “a revolutionary movement fighting for the right to have auto-determination for Azawad.”⁶ and is led by Mohammed Ag Najim, a former colonel in the Libyan army. The MNLA asserts that it is a secular movement. On 6 April 2012, the MNLA declared the independence of Azawad, this has not been recognized by any government to date.

Ansar Eddin

The group Ansar Eddin (which means “Defenders of the religion” in Arabic) was created in December 2011. The group is led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, who was a leader of the Tuareg rebellions in the 1990s. Unlike the MNLA, the group Ansar Eddin does not challenge the territorial integrity of Mali and declares its intention to impose the Shari’a across the whole country.

A third group plays an increasing important role in the current rebellion.

Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)

Deriving from the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), Al-Qa’ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) was created following its allegiance, 11 September 2006, to Osama Bin Laden. They settled in the North of Mali, encountering no resistance from the Malian government. This passivity of the Malian authorities allowed AQIM to build a sanctuary in this region of the Sahel where it has held, and still holds, a number of hostages. Some have been exchanged for ransoms through the mediation undertaken by the Malian and/or Burkinabe governments. AQIM has fighters of various nationalities amongst its ranks, in particular Algerian, Mauritanian, Senegalese and Malian. Moreover, reports indicate the presence in the region of Boko Haram combatants (an Islamic group active in Nigeria), which has established links with AQIM.

The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO)

MUJAO was created, at the end of 2011, from a defection from the ranks of AQIM. The movement claimed responsibility for the kidnapping, at the end of October 2011, in the Tindouf region (Southwest Algeria) of three humanitarian workers (two Spaniards and one Italian) and then the kidnapping of seven Algerian diplomats on 5 April 2012 in Gao (See section 7).

Several militias established for some years in the region with the consent, possibly even the support, of the Malian government, now figure amongst these armed groups.

Arab and Songhay militias

For years, the Malian government has delegated security tasks to an Arab militia in Timbuktu. In April 2012, a political official of this city told the Amnesty International delegation about the origins of this group: “The Arab militia is ATT’s creation [the Malian President Amadou Toumani Touré] to fight against armed Tuareg groups. It is equipped by the Malian government and trained by members of the Malian army.”

Moreover, there are two Songhay militias (black populations living along the Niger River) called Ganda Koy

("Masters of the earth" in Songhay) and Ganda Izo ("Sons of the country"). The patriotic movement, Ganda Koy, was created by former members of the Malian army during the Tuareg rebellions of the 1990s. This militia killed dozens of Tuareg and Arab civilians in 1994 and 1995⁷ without Malian security forces protecting the targeted populations. After the peaceful settlement of the Tuareg rebellion in the mid-1990s, most members of the Ganda Koy were integrated into the Malian army or administration or returned to civilian life, but members of these groups continue to harass Tuaregs. Since the beginning of the rebellion in January 2012, clashes between these two Songhay militias and the MNLA and the leader of the Ganda Izo militia, Amadou Diallo, who was killed with five of his men, the 26 March 2012, in an ambush during which they may have stepped on landmines at Tin-Hamma (Gao region).

Coexistence despite different objectives

Though they have diverging objectives, it appears that these groups and armed militias have found a *modus vivendi*, which has enabled them to manage to handover power without confrontation. One person who fled Timbuktu after it was taken over, told the Amnesty International delegation: "Before the MNLA arrived in March [2012] the Arab militia had taken control following the departure of the soldiers who had left behind them weapons and munitions. This militia went into the barracks. Then the MNLA took control of several parts of the city. When the Ansar Eddin movement arrived the following day, the Arab militia and the MNLA left. It was like a handover of power. All of the groups confirm that they have different objectives but, in reality, on the ground, there is a real division of labour, the city is controlled by Ansar Eddin and the airport is in the hands of the MNLA."

At the beginning of May 2012, reports indicate that AQIM groups occupy a dominant position in the three regions in Northern Mali, due to their alliance with Ansar Eddin and the arrival, in less than a month, of Tunisian, Libyan and Moroccan fighters within their ranks.

In the south, the military junta, increasingly isolated on the diplomatic front, was compelled to sign, on 6 April 2012, a framework agreement under the aegis of ECOWAS. This agreement provides for the return to constitutional order and establishes a transition period headed by a civilian government pending a presidential election. However, this agreement also gives the head of the junta, Captain Sanogo, an important role in certain key aspects of this process, in particular in the appointment of members to key posts in the transitional government.

Despite the appointment of an interim Head of State and Prime Minister, mid-April 2012, the new government remains largely under the influence of the military putschists. The latter carried out a wave of arrests of political leaders, beginning 18 April 2012, and have rejected the transitional period of twelve months as agreed by the ECOWAS Heads of State. At the beginning of May 2012, forces loyal to former President Amadou Toumani Touré launched an attempted counter-coup, which caused approximately 40 deaths and motivated a new wave of arrests.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY THE MALIAN AUTHORITIES AND ARMY

3.1 REPRESSION OF OPPONENTS TO THE MILITARY COUP

The military coup which overthrew the democratically elected President, Amadou Toumani Touré, on 21 March 2012, led to serious human rights violations. At least four people were killed by stray bullets, fired by soldiers, in the centre of Bamako, and their bodies were taken to the Gabriel Touré Hospital where thirty or so people, injured during the coup d'état, were treated. Many political leaders were arbitrarily arrested and detained without charge. Other opponents were harassed and beaten by men with batons and stones without security forces intervening to protect them, nor punishing the perpetrators of these acts.

In the hours that followed the military coup of 22 March 2012, several politicians were detained without any form of legal process. Amongst them were three members of President Touré's government.⁸ These people were detained, some for 20 days, without charge at the Kati military camp, 20km from the capital city, Bamako.

Though all of these people have since been released following the framework agreement signed 6 April 2012, under the aegis of ECOWAS, some of them, including Modibo Sidibe, former Prime Minister, as well as 20 others were re-arrested as of 16 April 2012.⁹ Amongst them, several were arrested in the middle of the night, at home, by armed men acting outside of any form of legal procedure.

A member of Modibo Sidibé's family told Amnesty International that thirty or so security force agents raided his home, 16 April, around 11pm. "Soldiers surrounded our house. Without knocking at the door, they invaded the premises and went upstairs, where Modibo's room is. After having talked with him, they took him away. They also confiscated all of the mobile phones in the house."

The same day, another leader of the opposition, Kassoum Tapo, former Head of the Bar and the spokesperson of the "Opposition Front" ("Front du refus") a coalition of political parties who seek the departure of the junta from power) was arrested by soldiers at the Hotel Azalaï, headquarters of the former President of the Republic and his staff.

These people were taken to the Kati military camp. The Amnesty International delegation, which was in Bamako, was refused access to these prisoners despite repeated requests made to the authorities. All those detained were released without charge a day or two after.

Moreover, political leaders of the civil society who peacefully demonstrated their rejection of the coup were physically assaulted on two occasions. The new military power neither condemned these acts nor did they pursue the perpetrators. Thus, on 29 March 2012, protestors campaigning for constitutional order to be restored were attacked and injured by a group of people in civilian clothes at the Labour Exchange (Bourse du travail) in Bamako. One of the witnesses, the former Minister of Justice, Hamidou Diabaté, told Amnesty International: "We were talking peacefully when people started throwing stones at us, and hit some of us with batons. They were shouting slogans in favour of the coup." Several people received bad head injuries, including Moussa Diakité, member of the National Assembly for the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (Alliance pour la démocratie au Mali (ADEMA)) and Mahamane Rakibou Touré, Secretary General of the Union for Democracy and Development (l'Union pour la démocratie et le développement (UDD)). Not only did the security forces not protect the protestors, they also briefly arrested six political leaders who were attending the meeting.

A new wave of arrests of both soldiers and civilians took place following an attempted counter-coup in Bamako by soldiers loyal to the former President Amadou Toumani Touré, on 30 April and 1 May 2012. This attack, which failed, caused at least 89 deaths and dozens of injured persons, of whom 9 civilians. Amongst these, several were killed by stray bullets, including three shopkeepers who were not far from the Office of Radio and Television in Mali (Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision du Mali (ORTM)) and a young seven year-old girl in the Djicoroni Para neighbourhood, where the camp of the Presidential guard (red berets) loyal to former President Touré is located.

On 1 May 2012, soldiers loyal to Captain Sanogo went to a hospital in Bamako to look for a dozen or so soldiers suspected to be involved in the counter-coup, some of whom were seriously injured, and took them to the Kati military camp.

In the following days, more than 40 people were arrested, soldiers and civilians, some of whom were foreign nationals from Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea and Sierra Leone, accused of being mercenaries. The Malian soldiers arrested included several senior members of the Malian army, notably the commander Mamadou Lamine Konaré, member of the General Directorate of Public Security (Direction générale de la sécurité d'État (DGSE, known as the SE)) and son of the former Malian President, Alpha Oumar Konaré, the General Hamidou Sissoko, former Chief of army staff of Amadou Toumani Touré, and the colonel Abdoulaye Cissé, commander of the military region of Sikasso. These people may be held at camp 1 of the gendarmerie (military police station) of Bamako or at the DGSE.

3.2. VIOLATIONS COMMITTED IN THE CONTEXT OF FIGHTING ARMED GROUPS

In its fight against the MNLA, the Malian army indiscriminately attacked populations and civilian targets in violation of international humanitarian law.

Helicopters bombed the Kidal region several times (1 600 km Northeast of Bamako), decimating herds of cattle, camels and goats, which are the livelihood of the Tuareg population. Moreover, on 22 February 2012, during the bombing an army helicopter targeted the Kel Essouck camp near Kidal, injuring at least twelve people. Amongst these people was Fata Walette Ahmedou, a young girl of four years, who was hit by a shell and died of her injuries the next day. Two women were also seriously injured. Khawlata Walette Alladi was hit in the pelvis and had her leg subsequently amputated, another woman who had recently given birth also sustained head injuries.

Malian soldiers also extra-judicially executed three unarmed people accused of spying for the MNLA in Sévaré (630 km North of Bamako). These people were arrested, on 17 April 2012, by a military patrol after being denounced by local inhabitants. These three people, of whom two were Tuareg, were detained and beaten with rifle butts. They were executed the next day.

In this same town, in April 2012, three other extrajudicial executions were reported: Malian soldiers stopped a car and made an Arab and a Tuareg get out of the car. A Tuareg soldier of the Malian army, Rouma Ag Boba Ahmed, protested against this measure judged to be discriminatory and was executed alongside the two passengers.

Other people, suspected to be MNLA supporters or targeted because they were Tuareg, have been victims of ill treatment by security forces.

In Menaka, (1500 km Northeast of Bamako, close to the Nigerien border), on 20 January, two Malian soldiers tortured two Tuaregs found in possession of water containers. These men were accused of giving petrol to “rebels” and beaten with rifle butts.

One month later, on 17 February 2012, two Tuaregs working for the Red Cross were briefly detained and ill treated by the army outside the town of Kidal.

People suspected of being supporters of the MNLA were also arrested and detained without charge. This was the case for four people arrested in the Kidal region in February 2012 and transferred to Bamako. Amongst them there were two women: the President and Vice-President of the Azawad Women’s Assembly (Assemblée des Femmes de l’Azawad). These four prisoners were released on 9 and 10 April 2012 in exchange for 13 people that the MNLA were holding.

Moreover, persons suspected to belong to or of helping the armed rebellion movements in the North are currently being held in places of detention not officially registered as such. These places include the DGSE and the National Youth Service (Service national des jeunes). During its mission, the Amnesty International delegation learned that 19 people (the organisation has their names) were detained, apparently in secret, in a cell at the National Youth Service. These people are suspected of being members or supporters of either the MNLA or Ansar Eddin. In April 2012, officials from the Ministry of Justice confirmed to the Amnesty International delegation that this place as well as the SE was not within their jurisdiction but in fact under that of the Presidency of the Republic. The delegates made a request to meet the head of the SE, who had just been appointed by Captain Sanogo, with no success.

4. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES COMMITTED BY ARMED GROUPS

4.1. SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Women and young female minors were raped, sometimes collectively, by armed men, including members of the MNLA, particularly in Ménaka and Gao. Amnesty International was able to talk to some of the victims in Bamako.

A young girl aged 16 years, who was raped in Gao, shortly after the city was seized at the beginning April 2012, told the Amnesty International delegation: “Five rebels came and took me by force, they were speaking Tamasheq and some others Songhay. They took me into the bushes and raped me. I stayed there two days. During that period, I was raped several times.”

Another young woman, aged 22 years and four months pregnant, was raped, not far from the OPAM reserve in Gao. “The morning after the attack, we were told that we could obtain supplies at the OPAM. I went with other women to get food at the OPAM. When we arrived there, one of the rebels shot in the air. We panicked and ran in all directions. Several of us were caught by the rebels. One man grabbed me, he spoke Tamasheq. Other rebels spoke in Arabic, Songhay, I heard all the languages. Many women were raped there, but they don’t dare talk about it, they are ashamed.”

In the same town again, a student, aged 19 years, was also raped. She told Amnesty International: “I was on the way to a friend’s house around 8pm with one of my classmates. On the way, a motorcycle carrying two Tamasheq [Tuareg] and a car full of armed men and the women they had captured, stopped beside us. One of the two Tamasheqs on the motorbike was wearing a military uniform. They began to tell us that we should go with them to the camp because they needed women. We refused. My friend lied and said she was pregnant. One of the Tamasheks then made me go into an empty house. I told him I had my period. He ordered me to show him. I showed him the blood. He said « What’s that » and raped me. On my return home my aunt told me that girls from the neighbourhood had been abducted and taken to the camp.”

Other girls were abducted in groups and were victims of gang rape.

Three young girls in the Bella group were kidnapped in the middle of the night by armed men in Gao. They were brought home the next day and showed signs on their lower backs of beatings. One witness of this abduction told Amnesty International: “Some days after Gao was seized [beginning April 2012] in the Goulboudien neighbourhood – sector VIII, three girls who worked as housekeepers were abducted, raped and then brought home. One of the girls is a minor of 15 years old.”

Four young girls were abducted in Gao on 3 April 2012, not far from the reserve of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that had been looted by armed groups. This kidnapping was orchestrated by five armed men aboard an all terrain vehicle. The four girls were tied up and taken to a military camp where they were gang raped during a period of 48 hours. They were saved by another man. One month after the attack, one of the girls who was seven months pregnant, is still in shock and unable to sleep.

In late April, Amnesty International was also able to talk to a human rights defender, a native of Gao, in Niger, who has documented many cases of rape. This person told Amnesty International: "The list is very long. Many of the cases have been identified, but the victims refuse to testify for fear of being stigmatised."

Amnesty International has learned that most of the perpetrators of these acts have not been punished and that the rape victims have not received any medical care. In at least one case a man complained to MNLA leaders, who promised to take action, but it is impossible to know if sanctions have been imposed. This man, living in Menaka, explained to Amnesty International: "The young girl was due to marry a soldier. The rape happened before the coup d'état on 22 March. Two MNLA members presented themselves to the girl's family. They declared that they were looking for Bambara women.¹⁰ This young girl was kidnapped and taken to the bushes 24 km from the town, at Essakane II, where the two MNLA elements raped her. I went to Gao to complain about this case in person to the MNLA. They told me that they would find them and that sanctions would be taken."

In early May 2012, the organisation received reports that raping continues, particularly in the Menaka region.

4.2. DELIBERATE AND ARBITRARY KILLINGS

Malian soldiers taken prisoner by armed groups have been summarily executed and some have been ill treated, particularly after the capture of Aguelhoc in January 2012, in violation of article 3 common to the Geneva conventions, which stipulates that:

"Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed ' hors de combat ' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria."

During its mission to Mali, the Amnesty International delegation met two Malian soldiers who had been taken prisoner by the group Ansar Eddin in January 2012 before being released as part of an exchange. They described how some soldiers had been tortured and abused, others were killed, some of them had their throats slit.

One of them was taken prisoner on 20 January 2012, he was part of a convoy sent to support Malian troops besieged at Aguelhoc. Whilst in the hands of Ansar Eddin, he witnessed the

military offensive against the Aguelhoc military camp: “Before us, one of the leaders of Ansar Eddin addressed a message to the soldiers ordering them to leave the camp in the next three days. The third day, at around 6am, they began to bomb the camp. Four hours later, the soldiers having no more ammunition, surrendered. Around 95 soldiers were arrested. No one resisted. My comrades were tied up and the Islamists said that they were going to slit their throats to show what they do to “kafr” [Arabic word for infidels]. I was told that those who resisted were shot and that others had their throats slit.”

The second soldier with whom Amnesty International spoke was taken prisoner during an ambush at Tilemci (60 km from Tessalit) mid-January 2012. He told Amnesty International: “At the time of our arrest, the rebels told us they were Islamists. We were blindfolded and led to an unknown destination in the desert hills, more than seven hours drive away. We were 175 soldiers and 15 Tamasheqs [Tuaregs] from the National Guard. We were forced to do chores: digging wells, building toilets, fencing the area. Three mechanics among the prisoners were called upon to repair a vehicle. The next day they were tied up, hands behind their back, feet tied and beaten with rifle butts, on the grounds that the vehicle had not been properly repaired. The rebels were both Arab and Tuareg. We were subjected to sessions of conversion to their conception of Islam. They wore boubou tunics and trousers that came to the tibia. Amongst them were youths ranging between 12 and 17 years old.”

A Tuareg civilian, living in Aguelhoc, told Amnesty International: “When the rebels arrived in the town, they asked the residents to leave for the bush. They then climbed the roofs of houses to fire on the barracks, then they entered the camp. Some soldiers died weapon in hand, others were grabbed and their throats slit at the gate of the camp. Two of my family members were killed, Sergeant Iljimit Ag Sidi and Ag Ghatari. Before this attack on the camp, at least three Tuaregs were killed by the army. One was called Tikarikar, another was a shopkeeper called Haballa Ag Agaly, and a third whose name I don't know.”

Pictures of soldiers taken prisoner in Aguelhoc with their throats slit were then circulated on the Internet, provoking outrage amongst the soldier's families. The Malian authorities accused the MNLA who denied all responsibility for these acts and claimed that they had been fabricated. A special commission inquiry, consisting of senior military and security officers was then established. On 22 February 2012, the commission submitted their report to the President of the Republic, Amadou Toumani Touré. This commission of enquiry concluded that the, “disarmed Malian army combatants were arrested, hands tied behind their back, before being coldly killed.”¹¹ During their mission, the Amnesty International delegation made a request to the Department of Justice for a copy of the report issued from this investigation, but received no reply.

Another witness reported that armed groups had slit soldier's throats during the capture of Gao. A political official of this city told Amnesty International: “When the town was taken, they were looking for me and I was able to get out of town wearing a turban on my head. I saw dead soldiers on the streets, some of their throats had been slit.”

Other civilians and soldiers were killed outside of combat. One Tuareg who had fled to Niger told Amnesty International how five people had been executed by an armed group: “On 2 April, I wasn't far from the Takalot camp [50 km south of Kidal] when members of an armed group arrived. They asked where the owner of the vehicle in front of us was. One of the

people in front of us replied that he was the owner. They arrested five people: Amouata Ag Mohamed, a policeman, Hamada Ould Maoued, member of the National Guard, Ghaly Ag Mbarkoua, a soldier, Baye Ag Mohamed and Moussa Ag Inasoum, a civilian. They were not wearing uniforms. They were taken to Tidjidar, a few kilometers away, and executed.”

This witness also stated that this same group shot at people living in a camp on the road between Tidjidar and Habrek. Those living there fled, including a pregnant woman who was shot and died instantly.

4.3. CHILD SOLDIERS

Amnesty International has collected several testimonies indicating the presence of child soldiers within the ranks of the armed Tuareg and Islamist groups in the three large Northern towns and within the Arab militia of Timbuktu.

One IDP who had fled the Tessalit region, told Amnesty International: “The armed fighters were Tuaregs and Arabs and amongst them were youths of less than 17 years of age, some as young as 12 years old.”

One person, a native of Kidal, told Amnesty International that he had seen: « children with guns, some wearing uniforms, others large shirts.”

A mother, from Gao, told Amnesty International: “I saw children even younger than my own [who are 14 and 16 years old] armed and going around in cars. Others were posted at the entrance and exit of the town, on the checkpoints.”

IDPs, originally from Timbuktu, also reported the presence of many child soldiers within the ranks of the Arab militia of the town.

4.4. IMPOSITION OF NEW BEHAVIOURS UPON THE NORTHERN POPULATION AND ABUSES COMMITTED BY ANSAR EDDIN AND AQIM

There are many witness accounts of pressure from members of Ansar Eddin upon people to change their behaviour, in accordance with their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.

Dress codes have been imposed upon the population. An IDP, native of Kidal, told Amnesty International: “Before, women didn’t cover their heads, only the elderly women did that. Now, all women and young girls are forbidden to wear skirts that show their legs or to have braids with hair extensions. They are forced to go out veiled and to wear socks to hide their feet. Men have to shorten their trousers to the tibia to show their ankles.”

A man from Timbuktu told Amnesty International: “Ansar Eddin broadcast statements on radio Bouctou [Timbuktu private radio station]. They said that they had come to apply the Shari’a, the law of God, and have forbidden men to wear bracelets and rings, to drink alcohol, to smoke cigarettes and to shave their beards.”

Furthermore, reports indicate that only religious music is allowed to be played. Therefore, music stores with loudspeakers have been closed. In Gao, the bars and liquor stores have reportedly been prohibited and in Kidal, the group Ansar Eddin destroyed a nightclub whose owner had to flee.

This group also wants to regulate the relationship between men and women in forbidding people of opposite sexes, if unmarried, to sit next to one another in the bus or to walk in the streets together. One IDP, native of Kidal, stated: “On 6 April, after the Friday prayer at the Mosque, members of Ansar Eddin declared that every man and woman found together, holding hands, talking to one another, would be arrested and dealt with according to the Shari’a.”

Moreover, Ansar Eddin also seeks to prohibit the reading of books deemed contrary to Islam. Many IDPs, natives of Timbuktu, told Amnesty International: “People from Ansar Eddin told us that some books in the Ahmed Baba Institute [which collected over 18 000 manuscripts, some dating back to Pre-Islamic times] were not consistent with Islam and that Muslims should refer to the books they themselves had provided.”

On 4 May 2012, AQIM members, supported by Ansar Eddin, desecrated the mausoleum of Muslim Saint Sidi (Mahmoud Ben) Amar in Timbuktu and promised to burn other mausoleums in order to put an end to the cult of Saints, considered not to conform to their conception of Islam. This city is known as the “city of 333 Saints” and is a UNESCO-listed World Heritage Site.

The imposition of these new behaviours has been accompanied by intimidations and physical violence, including deliberate and arbitrary killings.

To ensure that these precepts are followed, Ansar Eddin have introduced patrols, particularly in Timbuktu. A local resident explained that these patrols check to see if “people have indecent behaviours. They stop people to explain to them how to behave correctly in terms of dress and conduct.”

The beginning of April 2012 in Timbuktu, three members of Ansar Dine asked one woman wearing a wrap-around skirt (pagne) and a t-shirt to dress according to their precepts. They criticized her for having hair extensions. One of them then cut her braids with a pair of scissors. They gave her money so that she could dress in a “decent” way and asked her to buy a full face veil.

In Gao, shortly after the city was captured, beginning of April 2012, a man was denounced for drinking alcohol and was hit approximately 40 times with a baton.

Ansar Eddin seeks to bring order. A resident of Gao said: “Five days after the rebels took control of the city, a car was stopped at the edge of town by armed men. One of the car’s

occupants then phoned the number given out by Ansar Eddin. They arrived immediately on the scene, they shot at the thieves, one was injured, the other ran off, a third was stopped and his throat slit.”

Moreover, the right to education has been severely undermined in the North by the armed groups Ansar Eddin and AQIM.

One IDP, from Kidal, told Amnesty International, “Before the rebellion started in January 2012, schools in the bush at Intadeni, Essouk and Aguelhoc were closed by order of AQIM. After Tessalit was taken, all of the schools were closed and the town’s educational centre was looted. Teachers working in the bush were asked to leave their posts. In Kidal, the high schools and libraries were burned and looted and only two madrasas [Islamic schools] were spared.”

The closures of these schools, notably in the Kidal region, have been the focus of reports delivered to the Ministry of Education, the government does not appear to have taken steps to guarantee the right to education in these areas in the North.

These attacks against schools appear to originate from a desire to prevent the teaching of French in schools and also the mixing of boys and girls. It was initially AQIM members that first attacked the Malian school system. A native of Timbuktu told Amnesty International: “Since 2008, AQIM has sent several warnings to teachers forbidding them to teach French in favour of solely teaching Arabic.”

Similarly, and around the same time, AQIM elements demanded the separation of girls and boys in school, in the region of Agounni, 20 km from Timbuktu. It appears that this principle has since been adopted in Timbuktu. This prohibition of mixing in schools risks to undermine all previous efforts made to enrol girls in school.

5. HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES COMMITTED BY THE SONGHAY SELF- DEFENCE MILITIA

The Amnesty International delegation has gathered many testimonies from Malian refugees in Niger who testified to the occurrence of deliberate and arbitrary killings committed by the two Songhay self-defense militias, the Ganda Koy and the Ganda Izo.

After the rebellion started in the North in January 2012, these two militias began indiscriminate reprisals against the Tuareg populations without the Malian security forces intervening, which could indicate that the Malian government tolerated, or even condoned these acts.

Elements of the Ganda Koy assaulted and killed Tuaregs in their camp in the Ouatagouna region (170 km south of Gao). This was the case for a man named Djibrila killed right in front of his wife, in February 2012. His widow, in Niger, told Amnesty International: “The house was surrounded, then members of the Ganda Koy came in, they hit my husband with a pestle, he died as a result.”



Malian refugees on the Tinfaguate Site, Ayorou Region, Niger. © Amnesty International

Other Tuareg camps located in the same region have also been subject to repeated attacks by members of the Ganda Izo between 20 and 25 January 2012. People, from this camp, and who are now refugees in the Gaoudel site in Niger, told Amnesty International: “At least eleven people were summarily killed between December [2011] and February [2012] by the militia Ganda Izo, including Ghali Narbi, Tuareg chief of the Imalikassen.”

In some cases, members of the Ganda Koy have demanded money from Tuaregs before killing them. This was the case for Mohamed Ag Illiya and Djibullal Ag Nounanante, both killed in Ouatagouna, as well as Rhissa Hamad Ikane, killed in Carou. In several of these cases, the Ganda Koy members have left taking with them the livestock of their victims.

6. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS AND REFUGEES

6.1. DISPLACED POPULATIONS

The conflict in the North as well as the acts of vandalism and assaults by armed groups have sown terror amongst the civilian population. A witness living in Gao told Amnesty International, 2 April 2012: “Armed men enter the houses and loot them. They fire in the air and we are terrified. We have been left defenseless.”



Malian refugees on the Gaoudel site, Ayorol Region, Niger. © Amnesty International

Tens of thousands of people have fled towards the inside of Mali and towards neighbouring countries. At the end of April 2012, 300 000 people had left Northern Mali: 190 000 were refugees in neighbouring countries (62 000 in Mauritania, 56 000 in Burkina Faso, 40 000 in Niger and 30 000 in Algeria) and some 130 000 IDPs

had fled in other regions of Mali, including over 25 000 in Bamako¹². The situation created by these displacements is all the more worrying that this region has been facing a severe food crisis, affecting the sub-region since 2011.

This exodus of civilians is also due to the threats made by the MNLA and Ansar Eddin. One local who left Timbuktu for Bamako told Amnesty International: “When the MNLA arrived, they declared that it was forbidden to use the word Mali but that from now on the region was to be called Azawad. They said that they would not hurt civilians but that the Bambaras had to leave Azawad territory.”

The Christian populations have also been subject to threats. One IDP told Amnesty that the group Ansar Eddin had been broadcasting statements on the Bouctou (private) radio station asking Christians to leave the area and announcing the imposition of the Shari’a throughout the Malian territory. In Tumbuktu also, Christian and Evangelical places of worship were ransacked and looted. A displaced woman from Timbuktu told Amnesty International “We know that Christians are no longer welcome in Timbuktu, we left as we didn’t feel safe.”

People have also been encouraged to leave because they were in contact with tourists or foreigners. One IDP woman, from Gao, said: “Five days after the town was captured, an Arab neighbor told a known Gao resident to leave town as the Islamists had learned that he lodged foreigners in his hotel.”

The Northern cities therefore emptied, people used every possible means of transport (bus, motorbike, canoe, donkey, by foot). Whilst escaping, they were victims of extortion. One of these people who fled the city of Gao told Amnesty International: “When leaving the city, each passenger had to pay 1,000 FCFA (approximately 1.50 euros) to the rebels and 129 people paid to get on a bus with 50 seats.”

In the rush, some people had to leave their homes without being able to take the weakest members of their family with them. A Malian woman in the Ayorou refugee camp in Niger told the Amnesty International delegation at the end of April 2012: “We were not able to bring the oldest with us, we abandoned them.”

6.2. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN MALI AND THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN THE NORTH

The living conditions of the internally displaced population also remain very worrying. The Northern cities were emptied of their populations, and mid-May 2012, the UN estimated that nearly two-thirds of the Timbuktu residents had left.¹³

In Bamako, which has over 25,000 IDPs, the Amnesty International delegation observed that the majority of these people were staying with relatives and friends. However, a group of Christian members of the Timbuktu Baptist church and of the Evangelical centre of Gao, who didn't have relatives or friends in Bamako, have been able to find shelter in two centres. When Amnesty visited the country, more than 200 people, including 70 women and 60 children, were in the centres.

In spite of this solidarity, some IDPs told Amnesty that they had concerns for the future as family solidarity could not be permanent, due to limited resources, and they made clear the needs for assistance.

In the North, where many banks, schools, hospitals and shops were looted and destroyed, food reserves continue to be depleted, thus contributing to higher prices.

Furthermore, humanitarian agencies have very limited access to the region, particularly because of the insecurity there. In addition, the access of humanitarian agencies in Northern Mali is subject to restrictions imposed by Ansar Eddin who officially refused any Western aid. This armed group said on 15 April 2012, that it was “willing to talk” with the Malian government and to open access to humanitarian aid, provided that there is no interference by non-Muslims.

6.3. THE SITUATION OF THE REFUGEE CAMPS IN NIGER



Mangaïze site, Ouallam Region, Niger. © Amnesty International

At the end of April 2012, the Amnesty International delegation travelled to Niger to visit four Malian refugee sites: Gaoudel, Mbaïdou and Tinfaguate, in the Ayorou region and Mangaïze, in the Ouallam region.]

These sites are located near the Malian border (200 km from Niamey, the capital city) and the United High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is currently discussing with the Nigerien authorities the possibility to find alternative sites, where the security of refugees would not be at risk.

Furthermore, Amnesty International observed that the water problem is particularly urgent in the Tinfaguate site. A community health worker working in this refugee camp told Amnesty International that this water problem had existed before the arrival of the refugees but that this had made things worse: “The village well has not been working for four months. Women who fetch water have to walk for over an hour to get unfiltered water. This water is undrinkable. At least 30 people fell ill with stomach problems. With the arrival of refugees, ten other cases have been reported.”

This same community health worker told Amnesty International: “Upon arrival, the refugees had nothing. The village chief gave out 100 kg of rice and 50 kg of corn but it was not enough. The people of the region normally eat rice, millet and wheat flour. Without these basic necessities, women have found Gorgui vine leaves that they boil and cook with oil and onions. Some people who come for medical advice are starving, others are dehydrated.”

Faced with this humanitarian crisis, UN agencies, including the UNHCR, WFP, FAO and OCHA and NGOS such as Médecins sans Frontières, OXFAM and ACTED carry out assistance operations in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.¹⁴

7. HOSTAGE TAKING AND THEIR DETENTION IN NORTHERN MALI

Northern of Mali has been confronted with kidnappings and the detention of hostages for several years now. Ten hostages are currently being held by AQIM.¹⁵ Seven other people of Algerian nationality, including the Algerian Consul in Gao, were abducted 5 April 2012 by MUJAO. At the same time, Ansar Eddin was involved in the liberation of a Swiss hostage abducted by AQIM in Timbuktu on 15 April 2012 and the handover of this hostage to the authorities in Burkina Faso on 24 April 2012. Another Italian hostage, held by AQIM for over a year was released 17 April 2012 in the Tessalit region, under the control of/overseen by Ansar Eddin.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mali is facing, since the beginning of the year, the worst crisis that the country has known since its independence in 1960. The entire North of the country has been taken over by armed groups. Ten of thousands of people have fled the region, creating a humanitarian crisis in southern Mali and in neighbouring countries. Moreover, the military coup of March 2012 in Bamako has set back almost twenty years of peaceful political changes through elections and has isolated the country internationally.

Without coordinated action for the defence of human rights, the respect of international humanitarian law and the assistance of displaced and refugee populations, the entire sub-region risks to be stabilized by the triple effect of political instability, armed conflict in the North and the food crisis which affects all of the Sahel.

A) RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MALIAN AUTHORITIES

End arbitrary arrests and the harassment of opponents

- Stop harassing and arbitrarily detaining those opposed to the military coup d'état and release all persons detained on these grounds.

End the detention of individuals in places of detention not registered as such

- End the use of detention facilities not identified as such and immediately transfer the prisoners in these facilities to official detention centres, granting them also the right to unrestricted contact with their relatives and lawyers and to receive necessary medical care where required.

Not to attack the civilian population

- Cease all attacks in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law in North Mali, including deliberate attacks on civilians and indiscriminate aerial bombardments.

B) RECOMMENDATIONS TO ARMED GROUPS AND MILITIAS

End violence against women

- Order all members of the armed groups not to commit human rights abuses, including rape and other forms of sexual violence against women.
- Remove any members suspected of rape, sexual violence or other human rights abuses from positions and situations where they might continue to perpetrate these abuses.

- Publicly denounce gender-based violence, whenever and wherever it occurs, issuing clear warnings or instructions to their forces that violence against women will not be tolerated.

Bring an end to torture, as well as deliberate and arbitrary killings

- Take immediate steps to end torture and deliberate and arbitrary killings and to prevent such acts.
- Make it clear to those under their command that they are totally opposed to the torture and killing of prisoners and non-combatants.
- Exercise strict chain of command control over their forces and hold responsible for their actions any member who has committed human rights abuses, or allowed them to be committed.
- Ensure that any person suspected of such actions is removed from any position of authority or duties which would provide them with the opportunity of committing further human rights abuses.

Release the hostages held in North Mali

- Release without delay the hostages held in the North of Mali and ensure that they are not subjected to torture and other ill-treatment during their captivity

Cease discriminatory attacks and threats

- Immediately put an end to discriminatory attacks and threats based on religious affiliation or customs.
- Respect places of worship and of cultural and historical heritage

End the recruitment and use of child soldiers

- Immediately stop the recruitment, re-recruitment and use of children under the age of 18; release all children from their ranks.

Respect the right to education

- Stop all attacks against the right to education and enable girls to attend school on the same terms as boys: put an end to the destruction of schools and libraries and threats made against the teaching faculty.

C) RECOMMENDATIONS TO BOTH PARTIES

- Call upon both parties to the conflict to respect the fundamental principles of humane behaviour as set out in common Article 3 of the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, including treating civilians and anyone taking no active part in the hostilities humanely and preventing any illegal executions or torture.

D) RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NIGERIEN AUTHORITIES

- Ensure security of access to refugee camps in Mali

E) RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Financially support the work of UN agencies **facing** a serious humanitarian crisis affecting tens of thousands of IDPs inside of Mali and refugees all other affected countries of the sub-region, notably Mauritania, Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso and Guinea.
- Ensure that all asylum seekers from Mali receive fair proceedings to determine the legitimacy of their claims for protection;

ENDNOTES

¹ OCHA Website, <http://ochaonline.un.org/>, consulted on 10 May 2012

² Food and Agriculture Organization, *La crise alimentaire et nutritionnelle du Sahel: l'urgence d'appuyer la résilience des populations vulnérables. Cadre stratégique de réponse régionale*, April 2012

³ Bulletin CICR n°05 / 2012, 27 April 2012.

⁴ Press release of the CNRDRE, 22 March 2012.

⁵ The National Pact of 11 April 1992 signed by the Government of the Republic of Mali and the united movements and fronts of Azawad and which establishes the special status of Northern Mali, specifies that the North of the country is “*called the sixth, seventh and eighth regions by the Government and the Unified Movements and Fronts of Azawad*”. This text adds that, “*The Government of the Republic of Mali is not opposed to the name “Azawad” for these Regions. Nonetheless, it respects the right of populations to freely decide upon the name of their local territory, regional and inter-regional (...).*”

⁶ Official MNLA website, <http://www.mnlamov.net/actualites/34-actualites/109-une-semaine-dans-lazawad-.html>, consulted on 10 May 2012.

⁷ Amnesty International, Annual reports, 1995 and 1996.

⁸ Amongst those detained were Madame Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé, Prime Minister, Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Kafougouna Koné, Minister of Territorial Administration.

⁹ Amongst these people were the former Minister of Finance, Soumaïla Cissé, the Director General of Police Mahamadou Diagouraga, General Hamidou Sissoko, the former President Touré's Chief of Staff, General Sadio Gassama, former Minister of Defence Tiéman Coulibaly, member of the Union for Democracy and Development (Union pour la démocratie et le développement (UDD)).

¹⁰ The Bambaras are a major ethnic group in Mali, from the Mandingo group. They are mainly located in the west and south of the country and are also present in other countries of the region.

¹¹ Conclusions of the Special Commission of Inquiry headed by the Inspector General of Police, Alioune Badara Diamoutene and consisting of senior officers of the armed and security forces, published 22 February 2012, consulted on 10 May 2012.

¹² OCHA, Complex Emergency Situation Report N°2, 1 May 2012.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For an overview of the humanitarian response in Mali and neighbouring countries, see OCHA, *Complex Emergency Situation Report N°3*, 8 May 2012, <http://ochaonline.un.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=3ccCKsiRvPU%3d&tabid=3097&language=fr-FR> (consulted on 11 May 2012)

¹⁵ Amongst the ten hostages held by AQIM are five French nationals working for the Areva Group, abducted in September 2010 in Arlit (Niger). The five other people (two French, one Swedish, one Dutch and one British) were abducted in Mali in November 2011. In April 2012, AQIM said it was ready to release the British hostage if the United Kingdom agreed to extradite Islamist Abou Qatada, “Al-Filistini” to the country of his choice.

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