

Burkina Faso



An aerial view shows a camp for internally displaced people in Djibo, Burkina Faso, May 26, 2022.

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Burkina Faso's human rights situation seriously deteriorated in 2022 as deadly attacks by Islamist armed groups against civilians surged, military forces and pro-government militias committed violations during counterterrorism operations, and political instability deepened as a result of two military coups.

The mounting civilian and military casualties and the loss of government-held territory to Islamist armed groups, which reportedly control about [40 percent](#) of the country, spurred anti-government protests and two military coups, the first of which, in January, [overthrew](#) President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, who was [re-elected in 2020](#).

Hundreds of [attacks](#) on civilians and military targets by armed groups in 10 of Burkina Faso's 13 regions markedly intensified a humanitarian crisis and brought the total number of people internally displaced since 2016 to nearly 2 million, or just under [10 percent](#) of the population.

There was scant progress toward providing justice for the alleged killings of hundreds of suspects during past security forces operations. Rule-of-law institutions remained weak; however, the government denounced social media posts that were inciting violence against a minority group and took steps to reduce the numbers of suspects in pretrial detention.

The African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as Burkina Faso's international partners including the European Union, France, the United Nations, and the United States denounced both coups and abuses by Islamist armed groups but were largely reluctant to denounce or push for investigations into allegations of abuse by the military and pro-government militias.

Political Developments

In [late 2021](#) and [January 2022](#), protesters demonstrated against the government's inability to stem the worsening violence, prompting government protest bans and [internet shutdowns](#). On January 24, military officers from the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (*Mouvement*

patriotique pour la sauvegarde et la restauration, MPSR), [citing the worsening security situation](#), overthrew President Kaboré in a coup that left at least seven security force members dead.

On [February 16](#), the coup leader, Lt.-Col. Paul Henri Damiba, was sworn in as president, and on [March 5](#), appointed a transitional government. Damiba said he was committed to a return to legislative and presidential elections in 2024.

On September 30, Damiba was himself overthrown in the [second military coup](#) in a year. The coup leader and new transitional president, Capt. Ibrahim Traore, said he was committed to respecting the [February 2024](#) deadline for elections set by his predecessor.

Abuses by Islamist Armed Groups

Islamist armed groups allied to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) killed hundreds of civilians during attacks on villages and convoys and at water points and gold mines. Many attacks targeted communities that had formed local civil defense groups.

On May 25, Islamist fighters allegedly killed 50 civilians trying to flee an armed Islamist blockade of Madjoari village in eastern Burkina Faso, and on June 22, killed 86 people during an attack on [Seytenga village](#), near the Niger border, in the year's worst atrocity.

Other lethal attacks by Islamist armed groups included the January 5 attack on Ankouna village that killed 14; the January 15 attack on Namsiguia killing nine; the June 26 attack on a baptism ceremony in [Sandiaga](#) killing eight; the July 3 and 4 attacks on [Bourasso](#) killing 22; and the August 18 attack in [Kossi](#) province, near the Mali border killing 22. Attacks in March, [April](#), and August on artisanal [gold mining sites](#) and a convoy of miners killed 48.

Dozens of people were killed by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), allegedly planted by Islamist armed groups, including 35 people who died when their convoy, escorted by the security forces, hit an IED on [September 5](#) near Djibo.

Across the country, Islamist fighters [raped dozens of girls and women](#) who were foraging for wood, traveling to and from market and fleeing the violence. They also burned and looted villages, markets, and businesses; and commandeered ambulances and looted health centers. The fighters prevented farmers from accessing their fields; destroyed bridges, [water](#) sources, and telecommunications and electricity infrastructure; and engaged in widespread pillage, acutely exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

Islamist armed groups abducted numerous civilians including [50 traders](#) during a September 27 ambush on a convoy bringing supplies to the embattled northern town of Djibo and in April, an American nun who was [released](#) five months later.

Abuses by State Security Forces and Pro-Government Militia

Pro-government forces including soldiers and militiamen from the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP), a state-sponsored self-defense group, allegedly [unlawfully killed or forcibly disappeared](#) dozens of suspects during counterterrorism operations, at times coordinating operations.

On November 23, soldiers allegedly executed 18 men near Djigoue, close to the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Six of 15 men arrested on February 21 by soldiers in Todiamé, Nord region, were forcibly disappeared. In August, [over 50 men](#) allegedly detained by members of the security forces in and around Tougouri commune, Centre-Nord region, were found dead, most along local roads.

On February 17, eight men were found dead after being detained by VDP militia in Fada N’Gourma. The VDP allegedly executed over 15 men in several incidents between late 2021 and April 2022 in the Est, Sahel, Cascades and Sud-Ouest regions. VDP and soldiers working together allegedly unlawfully killed two men in February and March.

Accountability for Abuses

There was little progress with investigations into past atrocities by the security services—notably the 2018 and 2019 killings of scores of suspects in Burkina Faso’s Sahel region; the deaths of over 200 men in Djibo in 2020; and the deaths of 12 men in gendarme custody in Tanwalbougou in 2020.

The military justice directorate, mandated to investigate incidents involving the security forces, continued to be underfunded. Progress on the government’s pledged investigation into several of these incidents was scant.

An immunity provision in a 2021 decree creating a counterterrorism special force, providing that special force members “may not be prosecuted for acts committed in the exercise of their functions,” undermined accountability.

The high-security prison for terrorism-related offenses remained overcrowded. The vast majority had been detained far beyond the legal time limit. The government took steps to address the backlog and to ensure due process by releasing numerous suspects accused of terrorism-related offenses against whom they had insufficient evidence. Very few detainees had access to defense lawyers.

On April 6, a military tribunal convicted 11 men including the former president, Blaise Compaoré, for the 1987 assassination of President Thomas Sankara and 12 others. Compaoré was tried in absentia and remains in Côte d’Ivoire, where he has lived since being ousted in a popular uprising in 2014. In September, three soldiers were convicted for the 1990 murder of a student.

Hate Speech and Incitement

The Burkinabè government strongly denounced an uptick in social media posts that incited violence against ethnic Peuhl, perceived to support Islamist armed groups. In July, the police arrested and charged at least two men for incitement including a man who had, in June, threatened journalist Newton Ahmed Barry, a Peuhl, apparently for his reporting on counterterrorism.

Children's Rights and Attacks on Education

Armed groups, notably armed Islamists, increased their recruitment and use of children.

The United Nations verified attacks on 46 schools, primarily by armed Islamist groups. As of September 2022, 4,258 schools across the country were closed due to insecurity. Access to education is particularly concerning for forcibly displaced children who make up more than half of the country’s internally displaced.

Key International Actors

Burkina Faso’s key partners, notably France, the US, the EU, and the UN, expressed concern about the January coup and pressed for a prompt return to constitutional order. The EU and UN condemned the September coup.

International partners roundly denounced abuses by Islamist armed groups, but were reluctant to condemn abuses by the military and pro-government militias.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights maintained a [country office](#) mandated to monitor and report on human rights abuses, and support civil society, but, during 2022, did not publish any reports.

Following the January coup, the Economic Community of West African States ([ECOWAS](#)) and the AU suspended Burkina Faso from all governing bodies, pending the restoration of constitutional order.

The US [suspended](#) US\$160 million in foreign assistance to Burkina Faso as a result of the January 2022 coup, as stipulated by US law. The US-funded [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) similarly paused support related to an agreement signed in August 2020 for \$450 million.

[The EU provided](#) €52.4 million (around US\$ 53.9 million) in 2022 in humanitarian assistance to Burkina Faso. [Since 2018, the EU has allocated](#) €265 million (around US\$272 million) in support for the G5 Sahel joint counterterrorism force of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, which includes logistics, equipment and infrastructure, as well support for the promotion of human rights.

France, Burkina Faso's [leading bilateral donor](#), provided military training to its troops and to the military justice directorate.

In response to the gravity and number of attacks on schools and the killing and maiming of children, the UN secretary-general included Burkina Faso as a situation of concern for the UN's monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children during armed conflict.

In September, transitional authorities signed a handover protocol with the UN to ensure the transfer of children apprehended by military forces during armed conflict to civilian authorities for reintegration.