



Country Profile: Mali

The Mali Federation gained independence from France on June 20, 1960. Two months later, the Federation broke up into two countries: Senegal and the Sudanese Republic, which changed its name to the Republic of Mali. The regime in Mali imposed authoritarian Marxist rule. In the 1990s, opposition against the government increased and resulted in a successful coup. The first democratic elections were won by Alpha Ouamar Konaré. In 2002 he was succeeded by Amadou Toumani Touraré.

The history of Mali is characterized by several insurgencies of the Tuaregs in the northern region. Historians identify four major rebellions: 1916-1917, 1962-1964, 1990-1995 and 2007-2009. During the third rebellion ethnic massacres occurred. Approximately 1,000 Tuaregs were killed by the Malian government. The current insurgency, however, is characterized by an unprecedented level of organization and militarization.

Some Tuaregs served as mercenaries in the forces loyal to Colonel Qaddafi, the former dictator of Lybia. After Qaddafi was overthrown in October 2011, the Tuaregs returned to Mali with heavy weapons and ammunition. They founded a new organization to fight for secession of northern Mali: the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (NMLA). The NMLA wants to establish an independent state for the Tuareg people in the Sahel region. Many sources highlight the link between the current Malian insurgency and the defeat of the troops of Colonel Qaddafi (read more).

Since January 17, 2012 the NMLA has conquered some of the tiny villages in northern Mali. (Many, such as Aguelhok and Tessalit were personally visited by the President of Genocide Watch when he hitch-hiked across the Sahara Desert as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1970.) During the Tuareg conquests, they committed brutal ethnic massacres and summary executions. One of the first villages they occupied, Aguelhok, was recaptured by the Malian army. On January 24, 2012, the NMLA recaptured Aguelhok and executed 82 prisoners from the Malian army. Two tactics were used: shooting a single bullet through the head or slitting the throat. The hands of the victims were tied. These summary executions were war crimes under both the Geneva Conventions and the Statute of the International Criminal Court, to which Mali is a State-Party. The Malian government has declared that these massacres are evidence of the involvement of the terrorist group Al Qaeda in the Islamist Maghreb (AQIM). France denies the existence of such a connection (read more).

Most Tuaregs do not support the cause of the NMLA and its secessionist claims. They consider themselves to be Malian nationals. For instance, some of the Tuareg mercenaries who served in the troops of Colonel Qaddafi have already been reintegrated in the Malian army. However, many Tuaregs not supportive of the NMLA have fled northern Mali because they are afraid of reprisals. Recent demonstrations in Bamako have turned against any persons who are believed to be Tuaregs.

The Azawad insurgency has had disastrous consequences. The number of internally displaced persons and refugees in the neighboring countries of Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Algeria now number nearly 130,000. Besides the tenuous security situation, there are food shortages in the entire Sahel region due to poor rainfall. A humanitarian crisis is lurking, but humanitarian food deliveries have been difficult because of the violent NMLA rebellion in northern Mali.

Mali is at Stage 5: Polarization. Genocide Watch closely monitors the alarming developments in Mali.



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