A photograph showing a woman and a child walking through a desolate, destroyed village in Mali. The ground is covered in rubble and debris. In the background, there are charred remains of buildings and a donkey grazing. The woman is carrying a large, colorful cloth.

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# “How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”

Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali, 2019



# **“How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”**

Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali, 2019

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# “How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”

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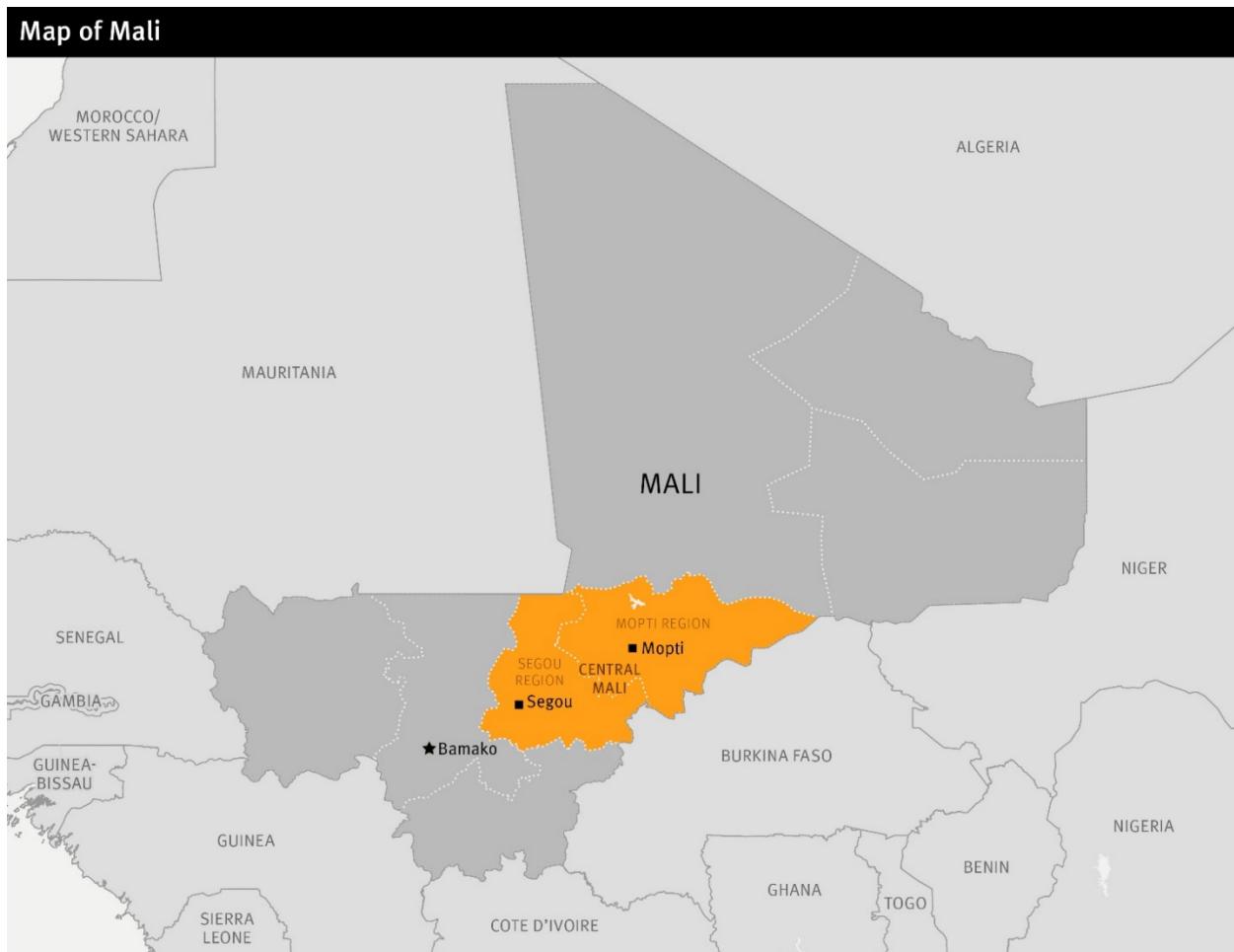
My husband was murdered. The house I raised my children in was burned. My family has been torn apart. Why doesn't the Malian state put the armed men who did this in jail so they can't hurt anyone else? Honestly, how much more blood must be spilled?"

Victim, Bankass *Cercle*, July 2019

"People from all ethnic groups and the jihadists too have learned they can kill and burn and destroy without consequence. It is impunity driving the violence in Mali more than anything else."

Elder, Mopti Region, September 2019

# Map



## Summary

Armed groups in central Mali killed hundreds of civilians in 2019, amounting to the deadliest year for civilians since Mali’s political and military crisis erupted in 2012. Central Mail, notably Mopti region, is the epicenter of the violence, where armed Islamists and ethnic self-defense groups massacred people in their villages, gunned them down as they fled, and pulled men from public transportation vehicles to be executed based on their ethnicity. Many people unable to escape armed attacks were burned alive in their homes while others were blown up by explosive devices.

Violence in central Mali has been escalating steadily since 2015, when armed Islamist groups largely allied to the militant Islamist group Al Qaeda began moving from northern into central Mali. Since then, they have continued to attack army, police and gendarmerie posts, commit atrocities against civilians, and enflame pre-existing communal tensions.

Islamist armed groups have concentrated their recruitment efforts on the pastoralist Peuhl by exploiting their grievances with the state and other ethnic groups. Recruitment from the Peuhl community inflamed tensions within the agrarian Bambara, Dogon, and Tellem communities, who – in the face of inadequate security from the Malian state – formed self-defense groups to protect their communities. The Peuhl also formed similar self-defense groups in response to these tensions.

This report documents dozens of attacks allegedly by ethnic militias and armed Islamist groups in central Mali from January through November 2019, during which at least 456 civilians were killed, and hundreds wounded. The attacks documented took place in more than 50 hamlets, villages and towns in Mopti region, the majority in areas along Mali’s border with Burkina Faso. Civilians were largely the targets of the attacks, including several that appeared well-planned and organized.

Human Rights Watch believes the total number of civilians killed in communal and armed Islamist attacks in central Mali in 2019 is much higher than those documented in this report given the relentless “tit-for-tat” retaliation in often-isolated areas. During these

attacks, in which there were often no witnesses, people were gunned down or hacked to death as they tended cattle, worked in their fields, or took goods to or from market.

Nearly all the attacks on villages by Dogon or Peuhl self-defense groups and armed Islamists were accompanied by the burning and destruction of houses and granaries, and looting of livestock, food stocks and valuables. The 2019 violence in central Mali forced tens of thousands of villagers to flee their homes and led to widespread hunger.

Human Rights Watch documented the abuses during four research trips to Mali's capital, Bamako, and the central Malian towns of Sévaré and Mopti, and in phone interviews throughout 2019 and in January 2020. Human Rights Watch interviewed 147 victims and witnesses to abuses, as well as leaders from different ethnic communities, security and justice officials, diplomats, aid workers, and security analysts.

The findings build on Human Rights Watch research in Mali since 2012, including the 2018 report, "*We Used to Be Brothers*": Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali, which extensively examined the root causes of communal violence, the role of the state in protecting civilians, and the failure to ensure justice for the atrocities.

Dogon self-defense groups, notably Dan Na Ambassagou, whose attacks targeted the Peuhl community, were implicated in 2019's first atrocity – the January 1 killing of 39 Peuhl civilians in Koulogon – as well as Mali's worst atrocity in recent history – the March 23 killing of over 150 Peuhl civilians in Ogossagou. Dogon militia were also implicated in over 10 other attacks on villages, as well as three incidents in which several Peuhl men were removed from public transportation vehicles and killed.

Communal attacks allegedly perpetrated by Peuhl self-defense groups included the June 9 massacre of 35 Dogon civilians, over half of them children, in Sobane-Da; the July 31 killing of at least seven traders in and around Sangha village; the November killing of nine men near Madougou, and several other incidents.

We also documented the killing of 116 civilians by armed Islamist groups in central Mali, the majority of whom were of Dogon and Tellem ethnicity. They included the killing of at least 38 Dogon and Tellem civilians in Yoro and Gangafani II villages, and the execution of

at least 14 civilians, mostly Dogon, who were taken off public transport vehicles around the towns of Sévaré and Bandiagara.

Over 50 civilians were killed by improvised explosive devices (IED) allegedly planted by armed Islamists as vehicles struck them or – in one case – when a civilian’s corpse had been booby-trapped. Several community leaders were abducted and are presumed to have been executed by the armed Islamist groups.

The worst atrocities spurred strong commitments from the Malian government to bring those responsible for abuses to justice. While the Ministry of Justice has made progress on investigations into a few massacres and Malian courts tried and convicted some 45 people for several smaller incidents of communal violence in 2019, magistrates had yet to question powerful militia leaders implicated in the worst atrocities.

Government officials blamed slow progress on accountability on the challenging security situation and inadequate resources, while community leaders said the government appeared to favor short-term reconciliation efforts over deterrence by way of prosecutions. Many of those interviewed expressed grave concern that the lack of accountability was emboldening armed groups to commit further abuses amid a general climate of impunity.

Human Rights Watch urged the Malian government to hasten the disarmament of abusive armed groups and the investigations and prosecutions of those from all sides responsible for the serious abuses documented in this and previous reports. Ethnic militias and armed Islamist groups should cease all attacks on villages, extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, and other serious abuses against civilians.

Mali’s international partners should press the government to ensure that those responsible for communal violence are appropriately held to account and to provide more support to the Malian judiciary in central Mali and the Bamako-based Specialized Unit for Terrorism and Organized Crime, whose mandate in 2019 was expanded to include war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.



An aerial photograph of an internally displaced persons camp near the Malian capital, Bamako. The insecurity in central Mali provoked the flight of tens of thousands of civilians in 2019. May 4, 2019. ©2019 Michele Catani/  
Getty Images

## Methodology

This report documents abuses committed against civilians by various self-defense groups and armed Islamist groups between January and November 2019 in Mopti region, central Mali. During four research trips along with telephone interviews in 2019 and January 2020, Human Rights Watch conducted 147 interviews, 119 of which were with victims of abuses and witnesses. The other 28 interviews were with leaders from the ethnic Peuhl, Dogon, and Tellem communities; local government, security and justice officials; foreign diplomats; local and international aid workers; members of victims' groups; and security analysts.

The research trips took place in March, April, July and August in Bamako, the capital, and in Mopti and Sévaré, in Mopti region. The victims and witnesses interviewed are residents of 53 hamlets, villages and towns in Mopti region, notably within the *cercles*, or administrative areas, of Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza, Mopti, and Koro.

Interviewees were identified with the assistance of community leaders and civil society organizations, and were conducted in French, Dogon, and Fulfulde, which is spoken by members of the Peuhl ethnic group. Interviews in Fulfulde and Dogon were conducted with the assistance of interpreters.

Many of the interviewees who had been displaced by the insecurity were living within informal internally displaced persons camps in Bamako, Sévaré, and other locations in Mopti region. They travelled to Bamako, Mopti or Sévaré for the interviews.

Death tolls referred to in this report were derived from witness accounts narrated to Human Rights Watch. When multiple witnesses of the same attack provided differing death tolls, Human Rights Watch has used the account with the lowest death toll. Alleged deaths reported by sources for which there was no firsthand witness are not included in death tolls recorded in this report.

We have withheld the identity and other identifying details of interviewees, to protect them from possible retaliation. Human Rights Watch informed all interviewees of the nature and

purpose of the research, and our intention to publish a report with the information gathered. We obtained oral consent for each interview and gave interviewees the opportunity to decline to answer questions. Human Rights Watch did not compensate interviewees; only travel expenses were reimbursed.

## Background: The Conflict in Central Mali



A group of armed Islamists during a 2019 attack on a Malian army base in northern Mali. Violence in central Mali has been escalating steadily since 2015, when armed Islamist groups linked to Al Qaeda, the armed Islamist group, began moving from northern into central Mali. Screen grab from video received by Human Rights Watch on January 22, 2020. © Private 2020.

In 2012, separatist ethnic Tuareg and Al-Qaeda-linked armed groups rapidly took over Mali's northern regions.<sup>1</sup> The 2013 French-led military intervention<sup>2</sup> and June 2015 peace agreement<sup>3</sup> between the government and several armed groups sought to eliminate Islamist armed groups, disarm Tuareg and other fighters, and reestablish state control over the north. Implementation of the agreement has been slow.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "In Mali, an Islamist extremist haven takes shape," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2012, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-mali-an-islamic-extremist-haven-takes-shape/2012/06/06/gIAKNIKV\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-mali-an-islamic-extremist-haven-takes-shape/2012/06/06/gIAKNIKV_story.html) (accessed November 19, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> "France confirms Mali military intervention," *BBC News*, January 11, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-20991719> (accessed November 19, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> "Malian rivals sign peace deal," *Al-Jazeera*, June 21, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/06/malian-rivals-sign-peace-deal-150620173301883.html> (accessed November 19, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> "Mali: Face aux retards pris dans l'application de l'Accord de paix, le Conseil de sécurité proroge les sanctions et le mandat du Groupe d'experts," United Nations press release, SC/13933, August 29, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/fr/2019/cs13933.doc.htm> (accessed November 19, 2019).

Meanwhile, since 2015 Islamist armed groups spread from the north into central Mali<sup>5</sup> and from 2016 into Burkina Faso. These groups, linked to both Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS),<sup>6</sup> have increasingly attacked both military targets and civilians. They have executed community leaders and government officials for their alleged collaboration with the security forces, indiscriminately placed improvised explosive devices on roads, and harshly imposed their strict interpretation of Islam.

Central Mali is largely inhabited by the Peuhl, also known as Fulani; the Bambara, Mali's largest ethnic group; the Bozo; and the Dogon and Tellem, found around Mali's border with Burkina Faso.<sup>7</sup> Administratively, Mali is divided into regions, communes, and circles, or *cercles*.

Armed Islamist groups have largely concentrated their recruitment efforts on the pastoralist Peuhl by exploiting Peuhl community frustrations over banditry, abusive security forces, public sector corruption, competition for land and water, and, increasingly, abusive self-defense groups.<sup>8</sup>

The increasing presence of and abuses by the armed Islamists inflamed tensions between the Peuhl and the sedentary Bambara, Dogon, and Tellem communities, which have been disproportionately targeted by the armed Islamists, and led to the formation of ethnic self-defense groups organized to protect their villages. Leaders from all communities said the Malian security forces were often slow to respond and at times failed to protect them from attacks by opposing armed groups.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Spreading south, jihadist violence threatens future of children in central Mali,” *Reuters*, May 22, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-violence-aid/spreading-south-jihadist-violence-threatens-future-of-children-in-central-mali-idUSKBN18I1IE> (accessed November 19, 2019); “Mali: Abuses Spread South,” Human Rights Watch, February 19, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/19/mali-abuses-spread-south> (accessed November 19, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*, Special Report No.1, Jihad in Modern Conflict, (March 2016), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/exploiting-disorder-al-qaeda-and-islamic-state> (accessed November 19, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Regions at Risk: Preventing Mass Atrocities in Mali*, Early Warning Country Report, April 2018, pp. 2, 5, [https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Mali\\_Report\\_English\\_FINAL\\_April\\_2018.pdf](https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Mali_Report_English_FINAL_April_2018.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2019)

<sup>8</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl villagers and community leaders, Bamako, Mopti and Sévaré, 2015-2019.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the evolution of self-defense groups and the state response to them, see Human Rights Watch, “We Used to Be Brothers”: Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali”; [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/mali1218\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/mali1218_web.pdf)



A concentration of Dozo, or traditional hunters, who in the face of inadequate security from the Malian state, formed self-defense groups to protect their communities from attacks by armed Islamist groups. © Bamada 2019.

Incidents of communal violence, underscored by the growing presence of the Islamists in central Mali, have been rising since 2015, including hundreds of individual “tit-for-tat” killings of farmers, and herders from all ethnic groups, as well as dozens of large-scale massacres, which have disproportionately impacted the Peuhl.<sup>10</sup>

The episodes have followed a similar pattern in which the killing of a Bambara or Dogon civilian credibly blamed on Islamist armed groups is followed by a wave of heavy-handed retaliatory attacks on entire Peuhl hamlets and villagers. In 2019, armed Peuhl groups and armed Islamists themselves engaged in several massacres targeting Dogon and Tellem civilians.

Other factors have exacerbated the rising toll of communal violence and contributed to the lethality of attacks. These include competition over grazing and farming land, effects of climate change, population growth, and the proliferation of assault rifles and other military weapons.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with academics, historians, community leaders, Bamako, Mopti, Sévaré, 2015-2019.

The fighting in central Mali amounts to a non-international armed conflict under the laws of war. Applicable law includes Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and other treaty and customary laws of war, which apply to non-state armed groups as well as national armed forces. The laws of war require the humane treatment of all persons in custody, and they prohibit attacks on civilians and civilian property, summary executions, torture and other ill-treatment, sexual violence, and looting. The government has an obligation to impartially investigate and appropriately prosecute those implicated in war crimes.

In June 2019, the United Nations independent expert on the situation of human rights in Mali, Alioune Tine, said the continuing deadly communal attacks on civilians in Mali “could be characterized as crimes against humanity.”<sup>12</sup> Following the March attack on Ogossagou, the UN special adviser on the prevention of genocide, Adama Dieng, deplored the “growing ethnicization of the conflict in central Mali” and said attacks against civilians impacting all communities in the context of the fight against terrorism had reached an “unprecedented level.”<sup>13</sup>

The mandate of the more than 13,000-member UN peacekeeping force,<sup>14</sup> the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), in Mali since 2013, was in 2019 strengthened by the inclusion of the deteriorating security situation in Mali’s center as a second strategic priority. The force was also tasked to increase efforts to protect civilians and support efforts to bring perpetrators to justice.<sup>15</sup> The growing insecurity in the Sahel region prompted the 2017 creation of a regional multinational counterterrorism force comprised of troops from Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. The force, known as the G5 Sahel Joint Force (*Force conjointe du G5*

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<sup>12</sup> “Mali: Cycle of violence against civilians must stop, says UN expert” June 14, 2019. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=24699&LangID=E>, (assessed October 21, 2019.)

<sup>13</sup> “Central Mali: Top UN genocide prevention official sounds alarm over recent ethnically-targeted killings,” March 28, 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1035661> (assessed October 21, 2019.)

<sup>14</sup> MINUSMA comprises up to 13,289 military personnel and 1,920 police personnel. “Security Council Renews Mandate of United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2480 (2019)” United Nations press release, SC/13867, June 28, 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13867.doc.htm> (accessed November 18, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2480 (2019), S/RES/2480 (2019) [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2480\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2480(2019)), (accessed November 18, 2019).

*Sahel*), coordinates their operations with the 4,500 French troops and 13,000 UN peacekeeping troops already in Mali.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “French and West African presidents launch Sahel force”, Reuters, July 2, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-sahel/french-and-west-african-presidents-launch-sahel-force-idUSKBN19NoCS> (assessed October 20, 2019.)

## Communal Violence in Central Mali in 2019



A displaced camp for thousands of people, largely from central Mali, on the outskirts of the Malian capital Bamako, April 23, 2019. © Corinne Dufka for Human Rights Watch 2019.

Human Rights Watch documented dozens of incidents of communal violence in central Mali in 2019 in which a total of 340 civilians were killed, scores wounded, dozens of villages looted and destroyed, and, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the displacement of over 50,000 villagers.<sup>17</sup> Among the dead were dozens of children.

The abuses documented occurred between January and November 2019, and took place in the administrative *cercles* of Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza, Koro, and Mopti. With few exceptions, the victims of attacks documented by Human Rights Watch were ethnic Peuhl,

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<sup>17</sup> “Mopti: Over 50,000 People Displaced Amid Inter-Communal Violence,” June 14, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mopti-over-50000-people-displaced-amid-inter-communal-violence> (accessed October 11).

who comprised the largest number of victims, 284 dead, followed by Dogon, of whom 56 were killed.

Human Rights Watch estimates the number of civilians killed in communal attacks in central Mali in 2019 to be much higher than the 340 killings documented in this report, given the steady stream of reprisals in which one or several Dogon or Peuhl civilians were gunned down or hacked to death as they tended cattle, worked in their fields, or took goods to or from market. Community leaders, aid agencies, and civil society groups from the Peuhl, Dogon and Tellem communities sent Human Rights Watch lists of a total over 100 such apparent retaliatory killings, all of which merit further investigation.<sup>18</sup>

“Each day we receive word of new incidents in central Mali,” said a Malian human rights investigator. “Two days ago, there were seven reports of killings, yesterday it was four. We start to investigate, verify the facts, and we’re notified of a new killing. It’s relentless.”<sup>19</sup>

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), a nongovernmental organization that collects and analyzes data on conflicts, recorded 591 civilian deaths in some 150 attacks by armed groups between January and mid-October 2019, in Mopti region.<sup>20</sup> They noted that attacks “attributed to Dozo/Dogon militias resulted in 310 civilians killed, making the Dozos the deadliest group in terms of civilian casualties.” According to ACLED, armed Islamist groups were responsible for 141 of the civilian deaths, while Peuhl self-defense groups were responsible for 90. The remaining 51 dead were attributed to unidentified armed groups.<sup>21</sup>

The incidents documented by Human Rights Watch included large-scale massacres, smaller attacks and individual killings. Witnesses to the attacks said most civilians harmed were deliberately fired upon, macheted to death, or burned inside structures. Many others were shot in indiscriminate gunfire as militiamen fired randomly and recklessly into villages or died after being caught inside a structure that had been set on fire.

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<sup>18</sup> Lists on record with Human Rights Watch.

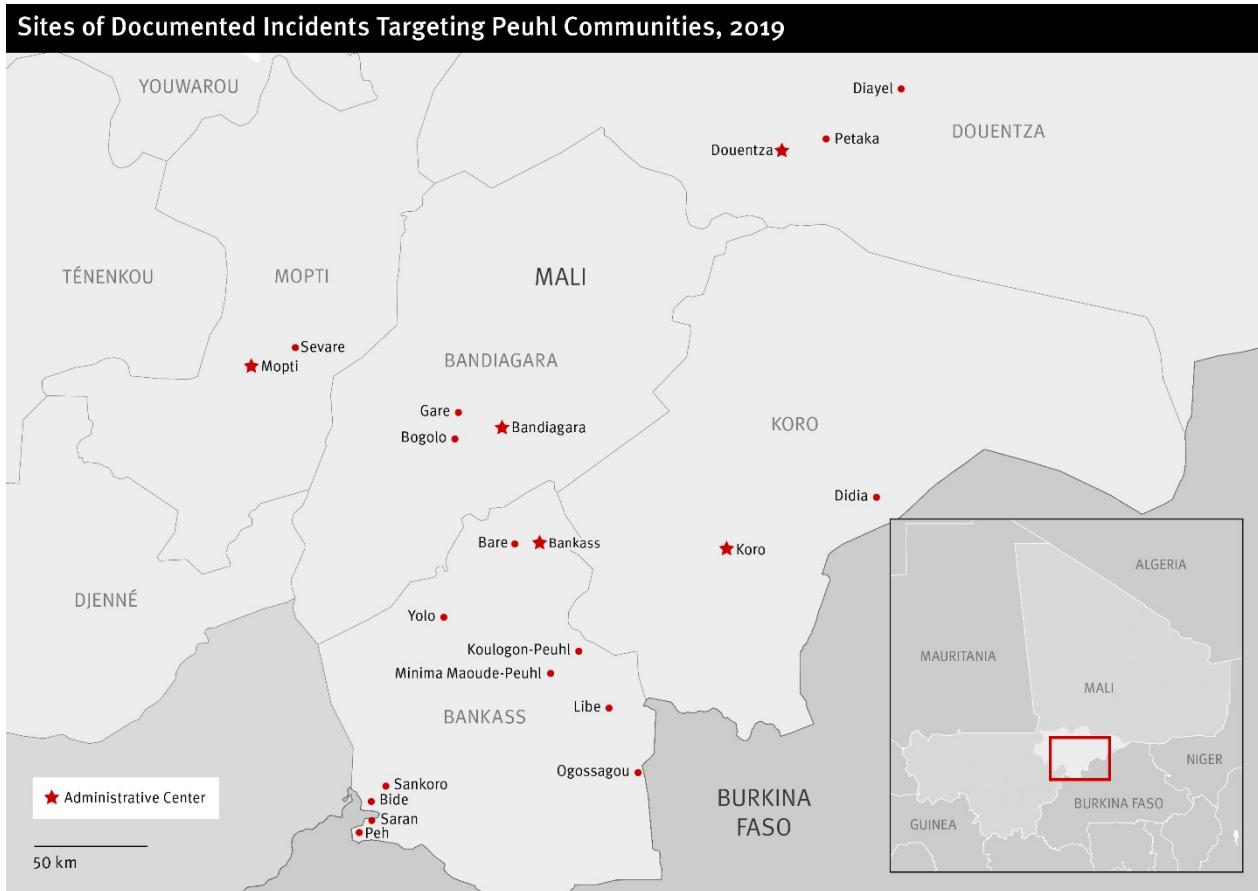
<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with member of human rights group, August 5, 2019.

<sup>20</sup>Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), email received by Human Rights Watch on October 25, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The attacks by all forces were almost always accompanied by widespread pillage, the destruction or burning of villages, and large-scale livestock theft. The widespread insecurity undermined the ability of herders, farmers and traders to work, resulting in hunger and tens of thousands of displaced.<sup>22</sup> The insecurity also led to the closure of at least 525 schools in Mopti region, affecting over 157,000 children.<sup>23</sup>

## Abuses Against Peuhl Civilians and Communities



Human Rights Watch documented 16 attacks by alleged armed Dogon groups against Peuhl civilians or communities in which a total of 284 civilians were killed. The incidents

<sup>22</sup> “Mopti: Over 50,000 People Displaced Amid Inter-Communal Violence,” June 14, 2019, <https://reliefweb.int/report/mali/mopti-over-50000-people-displaced-amid-inter-communal-violence> (accessed October 11, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF, “Protracted crisis in central Mali impacting all aspects of children’s lives,” April 26, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/protracted-crisis-central-mali-impacting-all-aspects-childrens-lives> (accessed December 4, 2019).

described in this section occurred in Koulogon-Peuhl, Minima Maoude-Peuhl, Libe, Yolo, Bogolo, Ogossagou, Didia, Bare, Saran, Diayel, Bankass, Peh, and near Douentza.

The attacks on villages followed a similar pattern: dozens of Dogon-speaking men travelling on motorcycles and armed with a combination of traditional hunting rifles, machetes, automatic weapons, and at times machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), surrounded and then stormed into a village in the early morning hours (typically 5 a.m. to 6 a.m.). Homes were often set ablaze, and civilians were killed as they tried to flee or as the armed men burst into their homes. In some incidents, the attackers spared women and children, while in others, they appeared to be directly targeted. Witnesses from three attacks described seeing victims mutilated before or after being killed, with hands, heads and or internal body parts removed and, in some cases, taken away.



Members of a Dogon self-defense group in approximately April 2019 from video received by Human Rights Watch on November 2, 2019. The video, which two sources said was taken in Bandiagara cercle, depicts a group of some 20 Dogon armed men unlawfully killing or mutilating several men. © 2019 Private.

The witnesses described the attacks as well-organized, and in the case of the two most lethal attacks – Koulogon and Ogossagou – planned and premeditated. Several witnesses described how different groups of attackers “came in waves” with each being apparently responsible for different tasks: advancing, bringing water, evacuating the wounded, rounding up and looting livestock, setting houses on fire, and going house-to-house in search of victims or loot.

In other attacks, armed assailants took Peuhl men off of public transportation vehicles and killed or abducted them. Some of the attacks took place in villages that had a small or

recent presence of armed Islamists. The attacks were usually preceded by apparent organized efforts to undermine the economic livelihood of the Peuhl community, and all of the attacks on villages were accompanied by the burning and destruction of homes, buildings, and granaries, as well as comprehensive looting of livestock, food stocks, money and valuables, which forced thousands of villagers to flee.

Human Rights Watch was informed of the killings of over 25 Peuhl civilians in numerous incidents for which firsthand witnesses were unable to be located. Human Rights Watch also received photographs and video footage of four separate incidents in which a total of five Peuhl men were beheaded, surrounded by self-defense group members. Most of the victims were reportedly herders, killed while grazing their animals.

### *Alleged Perpetrators*

Peuhl victims and witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch identified the perpetrators as “Dozos,” “hunters,” “Dogon militiamen,” or members of “Dan Na Ambassagou.” Many witnesses recognized individual attackers who they said were Dogon men residing in the surrounding villages, including many whom they knew to be members of a Dogon village defense force.

Witnesses typically described their attackers as dressed in attire used by the Dozo, or traditional hunters: reddish-brown clothing, adorned with amulets such as strings of bullet casings, shells or mirrors, and wearing caps often adorned with small animal horns. They said the Dozos were at times mixed with other armed men they believed to also be Dozos, but who were dressed in civilian attire or a combination of civilian and camouflage clothing.



Members of a Dogon self-defense group. © Private 2019.

In Mali, “Dozo” is a generic term for a member of a traditional hunting society whose beliefs are grounded in mysticism, and act as local village self-defense forces, typically armed with single-shot hunting rifles. Several ethnic communities in the country have such groups, including the Bambara and Dogon. Citing the refusal or inability of the Malian government to address the mounting Islamist threat in and around their villages in central Mali, these groups began to reinforce and reorganize the longstanding village-based structure, get training, acquire assault rifles and other military weapons, and take on national defense tasks in support of not only their village but the surrounding area.<sup>24</sup>

Dan Na Ambassagou (“hunters who trust in God,” in Dogon<sup>25</sup>) is an umbrella group of Dogon village-based self-defense groups, or traditional hunting societies. It was launched in 2016, and is operational in Koro, Bandiagara, Bankass and, to a lesser extent, Mopti cercles.<sup>26</sup> Dan Na Ambassagou has hundreds of members, is organized into a quasi-

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<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch, *We Used to Be Brothers*.

<sup>25</sup> “Mouvement « Dana Ambassagou » ou chasseurs se confiant à Dieu au pays Dogon : Vers l’autodéfense des populations et des valeurs sociétales,” Bamada, August 24, 2017, <http://bamada.net/mouvement-dana-ambassagou-ou-chasseurs-se-confiant-a-dieu-au-pays-dogon-vers-lauto-defense-des-populations-et-des-valeurs-societales> (accessed November 5, 2018).

<sup>26</sup> The group was reportedly formed in 2012 but became active in 2016. Human Rights Watch Interview with Dan Na Ambassagou, Mopti region, July 15, 2018; and “C’est pour sécuriser la zone du plateau dogon et dissuader d’éventuels assaillants, que des chasseurs dogons ont pris les armes pour former la milice Dan Na Amba Sagou (confier le territoire aux

military-like hierarchy, and is headed by Youssouf Toloba.<sup>27</sup> Toloba, from Mopti region, is a former member of the Ganda Koy and Ganda Izo militias founded to counter Tuareg rebellions in the early 1990s and 2000s.<sup>28</sup> Toloba said in December 2018 that Dan Na Ambassagou's force had grown to more than 5,000 men operating out of at least 30 training camps and had incorporated a political arm with offices in Koro, Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza, and Bamako.<sup>29</sup>

The attacks against Peuhl civilians documented by Human Rights Watch in 2019 are listed below in chronological order.

### *January 2019 Attack on Koulogon-Peuhl*

Human Rights Watch spoke with seven witnesses to the January 1 attack by Dogon militiamen on Koulogon-Peul village, Bankass *cercle*, that killed 39 civilians. All but one of the witnesses recognized Dogon men from nearby villages among the attackers. An estimated 80 percent of the village was burned.<sup>30</sup>

A 30-year-old herder said he saw the attackers “dressed as Dozos, in civilian attire, some in camouflage... armed with hunting rifles, AK-47s [assault rifles], PKMs



A destroyed house in Koulogon-Peuhl village, central Mali. A January 1, 2019 attack on the village by armed Dogon men killed 39 Peuhl civilians. ©Private 2019.

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chasseurs),” *Bamada*, January 5, 2017, <http://bamada.net/dan-na-amba-sagou-le-rempart-dogon>. (accessed October 21, 2019).

<sup>27</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou leader, Sévaré, July 10, 2018. See also: “Pays Dogon : Rencontre des 36 Camp de Dan Na Ambassagou,” *Bamada*, November 2, 2018, <http://bamada.net/pays-dogon-rencontre-des-36-camps-de-dan-nan-ambassagou> (accessed octobre 19, 2019).

<sup>28</sup> “Mali : accusé de pire, le chef de milice Youssouf Toloba ne désarme pas,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 14, 2019, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/773231/politique/mali-accuse-du-pire-le-chef-de-milice-youssouf-toloba-ne-desarme-pas/> (accessed November 18, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> “Mali-Youssouf Toloba : « Notre mouvement cible les malfaiteurs, pas une ethnie », ”*Le Point : Afrique*, December 12, 2018, [https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/mali-youssouf-toloba-notre-mouvement-cible-les-malfaiteurs-pas-une-ethnie-12-12-2018-2278819\\_3826.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/afrique/mali-youssouf-toloba-notre-mouvement-cible-les-malfaiteurs-pas-une-ethnie-12-12-2018-2278819_3826.php) (accessed November 18, 2019).

<sup>30</sup> MINUSMA, “Rapport sur les abus des droits de l'homme commis dans le village de Koulogon-Peul, commune de Koulogon-Habe, cercle de Bankass, région de Mopti, le 1er janvier 2019,” May 2019, [https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport\\_koulongo.pdf](https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport_koulongo.pdf) (accessed October 18, 2019).

[machineguns] and machetes. Later we found scores of cartridges littering the village.”<sup>31</sup> A 29-year-old woman said the attacked appeared premeditated and organized:

On December 31 [2018], we saw motorcycles and a mini-bus going to the Dogon side of our village, but we thought it was for the New Year’s celebration. Around 5 a.m. we heard gunfire and knew it was something else: they had used the celebration as a cover to sneak in arms and fighters. The Dozos entered; the firing set our houses on fire. Several Dozos burst into our house, saying, “All the women, out! We don’t need you, but as for the men, they’re dead.” I fled with a child on my back, and one in each hand...But they shot my father, my uncle, and my parents in law.<sup>32</sup>

A herder said:

It started around the 5 a.m. prayer. At first, we thought the gunfire was for the holiday. We hid in a nearby house...From there I saw them infiltrating from different sides. I saw them kill four men – two in front of the mosque and two more, Moussa Diallo and Hama Diallo – as they dashed for safety. After falling – I’m not sure if they were still alive – the Dozos slashed them with machetes. I was terrified, thinking they’d find me. I was with someone who phoned the FAMA [Mali armed forces] for help saying, “Please, the Dogon are all around us!” But they only came after the attack was over. I recognized several of the attackers. All are Dogon: Dan Na Ambassagou had recently established a base a few kilometers away.<sup>33</sup>

A farmer, 20, who helped bury the dead said, “The bodies were inside houses, near the mosque, in the street, seven, burned, in one house; three were women and four children. They burned the village, the granaries; they stole eight motorcycles and 28 cows.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 24, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

A herder, 30, said:

My father, grandfather, and one of my children were among those who perished, burned, in the chief's house. From one moment to the next your father is dead, your child is dead, the friends you grew up with are dead... and then you have to bury them when only the day before you were together...You weep thinking they are no longer by your side.<sup>35</sup>

A report by the human rights section of MINUSMA characterized the attack as “planned, organized and coordinated,” noting that in addition to the 39 killed and 9 wounded, 173 houses and 59 granaries were burned.<sup>36</sup>

#### *February 2019 attacks: Minima Maoude-Peuhl and Libe*

On February 16, Dogon militia attacked Minima Maoude-Peuhl, Bankass *cercle*, killing six villagers including a 7-year-old girl and several elderly men. The child, her father, and another man were found charred inside their homes, while two elderly men appeared to have been killed some 200 meters away, while trying to escape.

One of four witnesses from Minima Maoude-Peuhl said, “I found two bodies about 200 meters from the village, along the path...Amadou, 85-years-old, was the eldest man of our village – it seemed he was shot in the head; and Allaye, around 67... They were too old to run.”<sup>37</sup> Another witness said:

They came around 5 a.m. – they were Dozos, in brown clothing and caps adorned with horns and mirrors; the cartridges were raining down...I saw different groups doing bad things – some setting fire to our houses and granaries, others killing and others taking the animals away. They left us nothing. Tension had been mounting. A month before, many Dogon men

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<sup>35</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 26, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> MINUSMA, “Rapport sur les abus des droits de l'homme commis dans le village de Koulogon-Peul, commune de Koulogon-Habe, cercle de Bankass, région de Mopti, le 1er janvier 2019,” May 2019, [https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport\\_koulongo.pdf](https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport_koulongo.pdf) (accessed October 18, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

from the neighboring village had joined Dan Na Ambassagou... we used to see them with AK-47s.<sup>38</sup>

The following day, February 17, armed men speaking Dogon attacked Libe, also in Bankass *cercle*, some seven kilometers away. They killed 12 villagers, including seven found burned in their houses and five who were shot. Three witnesses described the attack and one provided a list of the 12 people killed, including three men in their seventies. “The attack erupted at 5 a.m. Not everyone could escape. Several people burned in their houses... we found only ashes... Respected Imam Abdoulaye Sidibe and his nephew perished, as did three women.”<sup>39</sup>

Another witness said:

I was asleep when the gunshots exploded...This was the attack we'd been fearing. I woke my family and we ran towards a forest, crouching to avoid the hail of bullets. From behind trees, I saw our village going up in smoke. Returning home later, we saw the destruction... they looted everything. My entire herd of 50 goats was gone. The attackers were from two neighboring Dogon villages. They arrived on three-wheeled motorcycles, and some others walked, all armed with [AK-47s] and shotguns.<sup>40</sup>

### *March 2019 attacks: Didia and Yolo*

In early March, Dogon militia reportedly attacked Didia village in Koro *cercle*, killing seven people. A 23-year-old shepherd who hid during the attack said: “Dozens of motorcycles sped by around 6 a.m. There was gunfire, then our village went up in flames. I helped bury three children, two elders, burned in their houses, and two young men.”<sup>41</sup>

In mid-March, two shepherds were allegedly killed by armed Dogon as they grazed their animals near Yolo village, Bankass *cercle*. “We the Peuhl had already been attacked once, in January, but when things calmed down, we returned, mostly to crush our millet because

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<sup>38</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with elder, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Bankass *cercle*, October 21, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interviews with witness, Bamako, October 18, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with victim, Bamako, July 27, 2019.

we were hungry. But we were attacked again,” said a witness. “We heard gunfire, I saw them from the hill – I couldn’t see faces but recognized the Dozo hats with antlers. Two of our men were killed point-blank – we later saw their bodies – both already had wives and children.”<sup>42</sup> Another witness from the same area said he saw the attackers abduct a woman and her adult son around the same time. They had not learned their whereabouts and status.<sup>43</sup>

*March 2019 attack: Ogossagou*



Part of the destroyed village of Ogossagou, attacked by armed Dogon men on March 23, 2019. The attack left over 150 Peuhl civilians dead. © Private 2019.

The March 23 massacre marked the worst atrocity in Mali’s recent history. At about 5 a.m., over 100 armed Dogon-speaking men attacked the Peuhl neighborhood of Ogossagou village, in Bankass *cercle*. Human Rights Watch interviewed 26 survivors and witnesses of

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<sup>42</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

the attack. Village elders said at least 152 civilians, including over 40 children, were killed, over 60 were wounded, and that over 90 percent of the village was burned.

At least 12 armed Peuhl men awaiting entrance into a government-sponsored disarmament program, who tried to defend the village, were also killed.<sup>44</sup> The witnesses said that the attackers advanced on several fronts into the town, firing indiscriminately, executing and mutilating people in their homes and as they fled, and setting fire to houses including that of a respected religious leader who was sheltering several hundred villagers.

The preliminary report from MINUSMA’s human rights section described the attack as “planned, organized and coordinated,”<sup>45</sup> an observation witnesses told Human Rights Watch they shared. “They came in waves, attacking from different sides,” said one. “First heavy weapons fire from the west – we mobilized – then almost simultaneously, an explosion – a rocket launcher – from the east. We were only 40 men and couldn’t maintain both fronts,” said a Peuhl self-defense group member.<sup>46</sup> The attackers were also heavily armed: “They had AK-47s, PK machineguns, hunting rifles, grenades, containers of gasoline... people found RPG fragments,” a villager said.<sup>47</sup>

The witnesses said the majority of the attackers spoke in Dogon and were dressed in Dozo attire, while a small number wore civilian clothing or military camouflage uniform. “From where I was, I saw one large unit of Dozos and a second smaller unit of men in camouflage, sandy color, with bullet proof vests and military boots,” said a villager.<sup>48</sup>

A villager described witnessing the attack from his hiding place:

The attack started at about 5 a.m. with an explosion from the west, then bursts of gunfire from all sides. There was nothing but the sound of war. The Peuhl from the disarmament camp were overpowered and fled, which allowed the Dogon to flood in. I saw them advancing on foot, firing madly, and throwing fire and grenades into houses. I saw a family fleeing... the

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<sup>44</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with military source, Mopti, March 26, 2019.

<sup>45</sup> MINUSMA, communiqué du presse, “Conclusions préliminaires de la mission d’enquête spéciale sur les graves atteintes aux droits de l’homme commis à Ogossagou,” May 2, 2019, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/communiqu%C3%A9-de-presse-conclusions-pr%C3%A9liminaires-de-la-mission-d%F2%80%99enqu%C3%A9e-sp%C3%A9ciale-sur-les-graves> (accessed October 27, 2019.)

<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with wounded combatant, March 25, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with displaced man, July 27, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl armed man, Sévaré, March 26, 2019.

man was struggling to run with his elderly mother... Just as I was about to dash to help him move her to safety, the Dozo opened fire... I saw them fall – the man, his mother, younger brother, and his children. After taking over a few neighborhoods, hundreds of us ran towards the marabout's compound, thinking we'd be safe.<sup>49</sup>

A 32-year-old mother described how her 5-year-old son was ripped from her arms and killed by advancing militiamen:

The gunfire got louder as they approached. I drew my children close... bullets came into the house... we crouched down. I wasn't going to move, but they threw a burning object through the window that set the house alight. I grabbed my children and ran, but the armed men ripped them from my arms – they shot my little boy and only spared my second child, a year old, when they realized she wasn't a boy. When the gunfire stopped, I remained close to my son's body, crying, until the army arrived.<sup>50</sup>

One man saw many houses set on fire: "They opened the windows from the outside, poured in gasoline and then fired their guns or lit a match," he said.<sup>51</sup> A 50-year-old woman wounded in the attack said, "From my hiding place I saw them shoot six men, point-blank. My sons, Djibrill, 17, and Amdou, 12, also died."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 22, 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, March 26, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, March 26, 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, March 26, 2019.



Part of the destroyed village of Ogossagou, attacked by armed Dogon men on March 23, 2019. The attack left over 150 Peuhl civilians dead. © Private 2019.

A 55-year-old woman, whose husband, son, daughter-in-law and their small children were killed in the marabout's compound, described why they'd sought shelter there:

Our houses were going up in flames, so we fled to the home of the grand marabout, Bara Sékou Issa. He was so well-respected; we never thought they'd harm such a man. We weren't there long before the Dozo entered. They broke down the wall, then smashed the door, killing people by gunfire and by machete, then set [the house] on fire. I only survived after being protected by some Dogon women friends. I recognized 10 of the attackers, all from the Dogon part of Ogossagou.<sup>53</sup>

An elderly man who witnessed the assault on the marabout's compound, recognizing around 10 of the attackers, said:

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<sup>53</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

As the Dozos advanced, scores of panicked people were running into his compound, which was composed of four brick houses. From the window of my house I saw the attackers descending from a few directions. After surrounding the compound, they shot at the vehicles and solar panels, then broke through one of the doors, pouring gasoline; then they threw several grenades into the compound, followed by so many gunshots. Windows were popping, there was the sound of fire and explosions and screaming.<sup>54</sup>

The Malian prosecutor later reported that 333 bullets and 1627 cartridge cases were found at the scene.<sup>55</sup>

### **Victims of Ogossagou Attack**

Among the dead were the village chief, Amadou Belko Barry, who was also mutilated and thrown in the village well with three other civilians; respected Muslim religious teacher or marabout Bara Sékou Issa; dozens of women and children; and many displaced villagers who had sought refuge after their own villages had been attacked by Dogon militia. “We’d fled to Ogossagou for safety, but the war found us again; 11 from my village died that day including an 80-year-old woman and a young mother with a child on her back,” said an internally displaced man who had fled his village in Koro *cercle* in 2018.<sup>56</sup>

A man who participated in the mass burials said, “Returning to the village after the guns quieted, bodies were everywhere. As people found their loved ones they cried, ‘Oh god, not my child!’ and ‘My grandfather, my mother!’ There were scores of bodies in the marabout’s house, most of them charred.”<sup>57</sup>



A house burned during the March 23, 2019 attack by armed Dogon men on the Peuhl village of Ogossagou, which killed over 150. © Private 2019.

<sup>54</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 24, 2019.

<sup>55</sup> Boubacar Sidiki Samaké, Procureur du pole antiterroriste sur le massacre d’Ogossagou : « On ne va plus laisser les gens défier l’Etat,” L’Observatoire, May, 3, 2019, <https://voixdebamako.com/boubacar-sidiki-samake-procureur-du-pole-antiterroriste-sur-le-massacre-dogossagou-on-ne-va-plus-laisser-les-gens-defier-letat-2/> (assessed October 28, 2019.)

<sup>56</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with displaced man, Bamako, July 27, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 22, 2019.

A close member of the marabout's family said:

I lost 47 members of my family...my father, my first-born son, three brothers, two sisters, uncles, grandchildren, aunts...also killed were our faithful – the many talibés (Quranic students) studying there. In one room, I counted 60 people dead... most burned; in the next room were 14 dead, and two men who had hidden in the bathroom. They'd allowed some women to leave, but others were not spared. They burned the library, precious books, all in ashes. As they went in, I'd heard them saying in Dogon, "Kill them! We have to put an end to the Peuhl [*il faut finir avec les Peuhl*]."<sup>58</sup>

Six witnesses said deceased civilians had been mutilated – including village chief Amadou Belco Barry, around 70, and another man and a son of the marabout – though they were unsure whether the mutilation had happened before or after their deaths. "Near the mosque, I saw the 13-year-old son of the marabout with both hands cut off," said one witness.<sup>59</sup> "When participating in the burials, I noticed at least three people whose hands had been cut off," said another.<sup>60</sup> Several witnesses described the mutilated bodies of the village chief and another man in front of the village mosque. One said:

I tried to help the chief flee, but he was weak...he couldn't go on. I ran to save myself and left him hiding near the mosque...the armed men were advancing. But they found him. Later, I saw his body – he'd been shot in the chest and his two hands and other parts had been cut off. Another man, Adama Barry, had been decapitated, and at least one hand was cut off.<sup>61</sup>

Several witnesses said the village chief and Barry were later dumped in the village well, together with a boy of about 5 years and a 20-year-old woman, who survived the ordeal. A villager said:

I saw the Dozos break into my neighbor's house...We heard shots and learned they'd killed several people there. They dragged a 20-year-old

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<sup>58</sup> Human Right Watch interview with witnesses, Bamako April 25, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 22, 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>61</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, April 22, 2019.

woman from inside the house, asking her in Dogon where the marabout was. She insisted she didn't know, at which point a Dozo pulled out a knife, slashed her on the shoulder, then dragged her on the ground and threw her inside the village well.<sup>62</sup>

Several witnesses said village elders had called the security forces for help, but said they arrived hours later after the attackers had fled. "From 6 a.m., I personally called the FAMA and saw someone else calling the gendarmes in Bankass, only 14 kilometers away. They kept saying they were on their way," a village elder said. "During the attack, the FAMA called me several times for updates. The last time, around 10 a.m., I said, 'Don't bother coming; the evil is already done,'" another elder said.<sup>63</sup>

### Ogossagou Context and Attackers

Numerous witnesses from Ogossagou said that tensions between the Peuhl and Dogon neighborhoods of the village had risen in the weeks preceding the massacre as a result of several attacks – some of them lethal – allegedly perpetrated by Peuhl militiamen on nearby Dogon villages, as well as the recent establishment of government-supported disarmament camps of Peuhl men, including one in Ogossagou.<sup>64</sup>

Most of the witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch believed the perpetrators of the massacre were members of Dan Na Ambassagou, noting that the group was known to have several bases throughout Bankass *cercle* and were, as two witnesses said, "actively recruiting."<sup>65</sup>

One witness emphasized that "Dan Na Ambassagou is the only organized Dogon group that operates in this area."<sup>66</sup> Nearly all the witnesses recognized some the attackers, most of whom, they said, lived in Ogossagou's Dogon neighborhood. A woman whose 7-year-old daughter was killed in the attack named the five armed Dogon men who entered her house, one of whom was the son of a Dogon village chief.<sup>67</sup> The witnesses provided Human

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<sup>62</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, March 25, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with village elder, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ogossagou residents, Bamako, Sévaré and Mopti, March, July and August 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with villagers, Sévaré, March 26, 2019 and Bamako, July 28, 2019.

<sup>66</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, March 26, 2019.

<sup>67</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, March 26, 2019.

Rights Watch with a total of 27 names of attackers they recognized during the attack as well as the names of villages where they were allegedly from.<sup>68</sup>

Three witnesses described a large concentration of Dan Na Ambassagou hunters in Bankass town two days before the Ogossagou attack, speculating that the attack might have been planned during this meeting. “It was a huge concentration of Dan Na Ambassagou,” said a 40-year-old trader. “They started coming in the morning, from all directions – on motorcycles and by foot, dressed in typical Dozo attire. At around 9 a.m., I saw [Dogon leader Youssouf] Toloba himself get down from his car and greet Dogon elders one by one as he walked into the gathering, which lasted until 4 p.m.”<sup>69</sup>

In an interview with a local journalist on March 24, the day after the massacre, Mamoudou Goudienkilé, a spokesperson for Dan Na Ambassagou, denied responsibility for the attack. He reportedly stated: “We have nothing to do with this massacre, which we condemn with the utmost rigor.” He added that in recent months, “many Dogons have been killed and nobody talks about it. Our villages are also attacked, burned and people killed.”<sup>70</sup>

An official with Dan Na Ambassagou told Human Rights Watch: “We conducted our investigation and neither Ogossagou or Koulogon were perpetrated by our forces. We didn’t order it, we didn’t perpetrate it, no way. There are lots of bandits all over, and they often dress up as hunters. Perhaps this was a settling of scores by some Dogon men, but our movement was not involved in either of these incidents.”<sup>71</sup>

On March 24, the government replaced two top military commanders and announced the dissolution of Dan Na Ambassagou.<sup>72</sup> However, its leader, Toloba, said he would not disarm until the government demonstrated their ability to secure Dogon villages and property.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with witnesses, Sévaré and Bamako, March, July and August 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with trader, Sévaré, July 31, 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Croissance Afrique, “Massacre d’Ogossagou “Nous ne sommes pas impliqués là-dedans ni de près, ni de loin” dixit les milices Dana Amassagou,” March 24, 2019, <https://croissanceafrique.com/index.php/2019/03/24/massacre-dogossagou-nous-ne-sommes-pas-impliques-la-dedans-ni-de-pres-ni-de-loin-dixit-les-milices-dana-amagou/> (accessed October 28, 2019).

<sup>71</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou official, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> Al Jazeera, “Mali sacks top army chiefs, dissolves militia after scores killed,” March 24, 2019.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2019/03/mali-sacks-top-army-chiefs-dissolves-militia-scores-killed-190324154604780.html>, (assessed October 28, 2019.)

<sup>73</sup> RFI, “Mali: Dan Nam Ambassagou refuse sa dissolution demandée par les autorités,” March 28, 2019,

On April 8, Dan Na Ambassagou released a communiqué that withdrew a 2018 commitment to disarm and again denied responsibility for the Ogossagou attack.<sup>74</sup> The militia currently remains operational and has been implicated in further atrocities.

### *June and July 2019 attacks: Bare, Bogolo, Saran and Diayel*

Six women from Bare village, Bankass *cercle*, described an early morning attack on or about June 13, that killed four villagers including three children ages 15 to 17. Another four men were missing. One witness said, “We were living in peace with our Dogon neighbors, even after Ogossagou, until that day. We all saw them – some had weapons of war, I saw their hats, with horns, and their Dozo attire, surrounding us on over 30 motorcycles.” Another witness said, “I didn’t see the bodies...it is the men who buried them... But I saw the mothers of the dead – Bocarie, Amadou, and Baba, 15, and Allaye, 16 – who now bear the pain. They burned the entire village; and stole our animals. The message was clear: we were to leave.”<sup>75</sup>

Human Rights Watch interviewed three victims who had been wounded in a June 20 attack allegedly by Dogon militia in Bogolo, a largely Peuhl village in Bandiagara *cercle*, which killed 12. “I recognized them. I know what villages they are from. They burned, pillaged all they could find, including 60 of my animals,” a village elder said.<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch observed scars on the neck, arm and buttocks of one victim, a 59-year-old shepherd, who had buried and provided a list of the dead. He said:

They entered in large numbers from the south, firing on everything that moved, using shotguns and AK-47s. I ran for my goats and came face to face with a Dozo who shot me with a hunting rifle. I tried to defend myself with a wooden bar so he didn’t steal my animals – but two more shot at me

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<http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20190328-mali-attaques-meurtrieres-massacre-villages-dogons-dana-amassagou-yousouf-toloba>, (accessed October 28, 2019.)

<sup>74</sup> See Twitter post by MENAstream (with image of communiqué), “#Mali: Dan Na Ambassagou (Dogon Dozos) withdraws from DDR process, says group is open to dialogue, lists measures that should be taken by the government, again denies responsibility for the mass-atrocities in Kologoun-Peuhl & Ogossagou-Peuhl which left more than 200 Fulani dead.” MENAstream, Twitter post, April 9, 2019, <https://twitter.com/MENASTREAM/status/111682169240690689> (accessed October 28, 2019). See also PressAfrik, “Mali : la milice « Dan Na Ambassagou » rejette le programme DDR,” April 9, 2019, [https://www.pressafrik.com/Mali-la-milice-Dan-Na-Ambassagou-rejette-le-programme-DDR\\_a198423.html](https://www.pressafrik.com/Mali-la-milice-Dan-Na-Ambassagou-rejette-le-programme-DDR_a198423.html) (accessed October 28, 2019).

<sup>75</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with six village women, Bamako, July 27, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, August 1, 2019.

from afar, striking me on the neck and buttocks. The doctors extracted many pellets from my body. The assault lasted for hours and then we buried 12 people including four children. The villagers were desperate, crying out from their wounds or as they found the dead. Two young shepherds were missing but we finally found them...It seemed they were the first to be killed, as the Dozos crept towards the village.<sup>77</sup>



Injuries sustained by two civilians during the June 20, 2019 attack on Bogolo village by armed Dogon men, which killed 12 Peuhl civilians. August 3, 2019. © 2019 Corinne Dufka for Human Rights Watch.

The other victim, a 23-year-old woman, saw two of her children killed in the same attack. Human Rights Watch took photographs of injuries on her head, arm and leg that she said were incurred from machetes and pellets from a hunting rifle.<sup>78</sup> She said:

As the gunfire started, the Dozo emerged from the forest. My mom grabbed one of my 2-year old twins and I grabbed the other, a girl, and my 4-year old son. As we ran, my twin and I were hit with pellets (from the traditional gun)...I fell, and told my son, “Run! Run!” and he did, but he was confused so he stopped, and returned to me, crying. The attackers caught up with him and shot him at close range with a hunting rifle, killing him. Then they struck my wounded daughter with a machete, killing her. She would have survived the pellets – she wasn’t so badly wounded. Then they set upon

<sup>77</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, August 1, 2019.

<sup>78</sup> Photographs of victim’s injuries on record with Human Rights Watch.

me, slashing me with the machete several times. I knew them. They were from a nearby village.<sup>79</sup>

On June 30, at least 18 civilians were killed when Saran and two nearby hamlets, Sankoro and Bidi, all in Bankass *cercle*, were attacked. The mayor of nearby Ouenkoro, Harouna Sankare, was quoted in local and international media saying 23 civilians had been killed.<sup>80</sup> A respected elder from the area who had investigated the attacks described the contributing factors:

We, the Peuhls from Saran, used to live in harmony with our Dogon. We used the same land, shared the same well, prayed in the same mosque. But in recent months, Dan Na Ambassagou started recruiting in our area; they appointed local representatives in all the villages. At times we saw them firing their weapons in the air as a show of power. On the day of the attack, which killed 18 people, a group of Dogon had tried to steal cows from some Peuhl herders, who fought back, and this became the pretext for the attack. The Dogon called for reinforcements – we recognized Dogon from several villages – and about 30 Dogon surrounded the village, shooting everywhere and burning it. I was told there were Dogon from across the border in Burkina who participated. Eventually a FAMA helicopter and a truck of soldiers arrived, but they didn't stop the attack, which was still in progress. Later, they made at least one arrest.<sup>81</sup>

A witness who had helped bury the dead said:

Saran was attacked around 1 p.m. from the east side by a large number of Dozos armed with shotguns and AK-47s, firing in bursts as they advanced. Five people – including an 80-year-old woman – were buried the same day. The next day we discovered the bodies of seven Burkinabè shepherds who had been taking their animals for the seasonal movement – a few [were

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<sup>79</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with victim, Sévaré, August 3, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> « Attack on Mali Fulani village kills 23 : local Mayor, » Reuters, July 2, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/attack-on-mali-fulani-village-kills-23-local-mayor-idUSKCN1TW2YT>, (accessed October 19, 2019).

<sup>81</sup>Human Rights Watch interview with elder from Saran, Bamako, July 27, 2019.

found near] where the Dozos had launched their attack. During the attack, the Dozos broke into our houses to steal women's jewelry, money and anything of value. Saran is only 14 kilometers from a FAMA base, but they didn't save us.<sup>82</sup>

On July 2, the Diayel village chief, Amirou Diallo, his son, his grandson and a brother were among six killed during a 6 a.m. attack on the village in Douentza *cercle*. A villager who helped bury them said: "They started the attack with the chief's house...I recognized some of them. They were the Dozo including those from our area...They approached the village by creeping along the adjacent hill before opening fire on the chief's house. They stole all their animals – about 100 cows, donkeys and goats."<sup>83</sup>

### *November 2019 Attack: Peh*

On November 13, armed Dogon men attacked Peh village, Bankass *cercle*, situated three kilometers from the Burkina Faso border, killing at least 16 villagers. Three witnesses, including one who was wounded, told Human Rights they had each recognized several attackers who, they said, came from surrounding Dogon villages in Mali and Burkina Faso. They all credited the Malian army with helping to repel the attack. A Mali government communique denounced the attack, which it blamed on men dressed in "traditional hunter attire."<sup>84</sup>

A villager who participated in the burial of 16 people and provided a list of the dead said, "We found the bodies of our people near the mosque, in their fields, in their homes and in the bush. Eleven were elderly who couldn't run. Boucary Moussa, 84, was killed and thrown into a village well; Fatoumata Diagayeté, 80, was burned in her home; our marabout, Dramane Sidibé, 49, was killed near the mosque."<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, July 31, 2019.

<sup>83</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview, Douentza *cercle*, October 15, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Primature du Mali Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/www.primature.gov.ml/photos/a.660701414006511/2514787145264586/?type=3&theater> (accessed December 4, 2019).

<sup>85</sup> List of the dead on record with Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch phone interview to Ounkoro, December 4, 2019.

A 67-year-old farmer said:

The first group came from the direction of Burkina – some in Dozo attire and a few in athletic gear...I thought for a moment they'd come to play football. As the firing started I ran to my cows, tended by my children, fearing the cows would be stolen. As we fled, they fired directly at us, and from where we hid, I saw more attackers approaching from the Malian side.<sup>86</sup>

A man wounded in the attack said:

I saw at least 40 Dozo flooding in from several directions...they quickly overwhelmed the few village defenders and started killing and looting. They killed many as they fled with their animals – later we found their bodies in the bush – and others like my mother, burned in her house. The FAMA came at 6 p.m., and dispersed the attackers, who I think were Dan Na Ambassagou. They're all over and are the engine behind this trouble: they've been harassing us for months... They stole everything, including our animals – the only thing I'm left with is the *boubou* [tradition Muslim robe] I was wearing.<sup>87</sup>

#### *Executions, Abductions of Men from Public Transport Vehicles*

Human Rights Watch documented three incidents in which a total of 10 Peuhl men were removed from public transportation buses by Dogon militiamen manning informal checkpoints and reportedly executed or disappeared. Security analysts said the checkpoints had been set up in apparent response to recent killings of Dogon either by armed Islamists or in communal attacks.<sup>88</sup>

Two people described the abduction and disappearance of three men taken off a public transportation vehicle in mid-March between Bankass and Sévaré. They said they had

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<sup>86</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview to Bankass *cercle*, December 2, 2019.

<sup>87</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview to Ouenkoro, November 15, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with security analysts, Sévaré, August 1, 2019 and October 13, 2019.

credible information suggesting the men had been killed the same day. A friend of one of the men said:

Boucar Bah, 62, Harouna Barry, 51, and a third Peuhl man were taken off a 207 Peugeot taxi from Bankass to Sévaré. I know this because a man who'd travelled with them came to my house an hour later, to tell me what happened. He explained how 20 kilometers from Bankass, near Gare village, they were made to stop at a checkpoint manned by Dogon militia. After ordering everyone out, the Dogon kept the three Peuhl men. He explained that the driver was so terrified that he returned to Bankass. Since that day, they've not returned home. We asked the FAMA to search for the men, but when they got there, the checkpoint was gone. We heard, through Dogon friends, that the three Peuhl men had been taken to a nearby village and executed.<sup>89</sup>

In early October, Dogon militiamen set up an informal checkpoint along the major highway heading north to Gao, near the villages of Petaka and Drimbe. Witnesses said it was set up in response to an alleged killing some days prior of a Dogon militiaman by a Peuhl herder. Witnesses said that on October 2 and 3, the militiamen forced at least seven Peuhl men out of buses at gunpoint and either executed or disappeared them.

“I was on my way back from Hombori on October 2 when Dozo swarmed it and forced three Peuhl men out,” a witness said. “A few days later, I saw their bodies along the road not far from where they were taken. People were too terrified to bury the bodies, which were there even today, almost 10 days after they were killed.”<sup>90</sup>

A market woman described the abduction of four Peuhl men from a bus on October 3:

On our way back from market, around 5 o'clock, a large group of Dozos, armed with hunting rifles and [AK-47s], threatened to spray the bus with bullets if the driver didn't halt. They opened the back door and ordered only the Peuhl out. We were five, me and four men. They yanked the boubou of

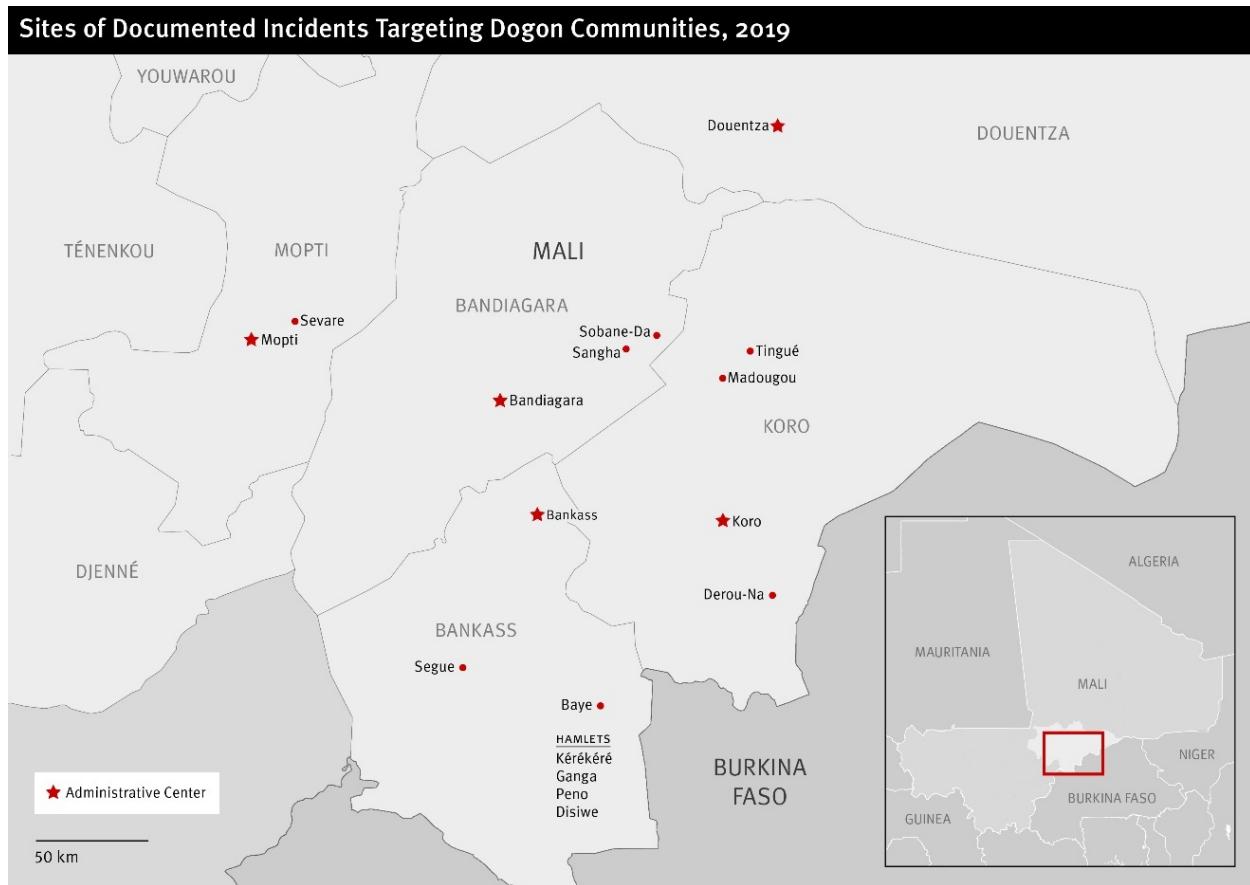
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<sup>89</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Bankass residents, Sévaré, July 31, 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Mopti Region, October 11, 2019.

the Peuhl seated next to me, forcing him out, then pulled out a man on my other side. I cried, terrified I was next, but they left me. They ordered the driver to start his bus and leave, but he resisted saying, “Where did you take my passengers?” They told him, “If you want to die too, keep asking questions.” Since that day, there is no word from these men... We fear the worst.<sup>91</sup>

## Abuses Against Dogon Civilians and Communities



Human Rights Watch documented eight attacks by armed Peuhl men or Peuhl civil defense groups in which a total 56 Dogon or Tellem civilians were killed. The attacks included a massacre, attacks on traders in or returning from local markets, and attacks on farmers in or returning from their fields. Some of the attacks appeared to be retaliation for killings of

<sup>91</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Douentza, October 11, 2019.

Peuhl civilians by Dogon groups. Dogon community leaders provided Human Rights Watch with details of over 50 other killings they attributed to armed Peuhl men.

Over a dozen Dogon civilians from different villages described how armed Peuhl men had provoked widespread suffering by blockading people in their villages, giving “ultimatums” to leave their villages under threat of what the witnesses perceived to be death, or by attacking and burning their villages and fields. They said these actions had resulted in profound economic hardship, hunger, and displacement.

### *Alleged Perpetrators*

The victims and witnesses varyingly described the attackers as “armed Peuhl,” or “Peuhl self-defense groups.” Many Peuhl villages throughout central Mali have organized self-defense groups in response to lethal attacks by Dogon militia. Some Peuhl leaders said they were compelled to organize into self-defense groups to protect themselves from what they describe as the collective punishment of their community by Dogon militia for attacks carried out by armed Islamists.

These groups consistently deny being affiliated with any Islamist armed group, contending that their members are comprised entirely of local Peuhl residents.<sup>92</sup> Dogon villagers contest this assertion, saying they have on numerous occasions identified Peuhl men from local village defense forces working alongside Islamist armed groups.<sup>93</sup>



A destroyed Dogon village in central Mali. Scores of Dogon civilians have been killed in attacks by armed Peuhl men. © Private 2019.

<sup>92</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl villagers and leaders, Bamako, May 23-25, Sévaré, July 9-13, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Dogon villagers and militia leaders, Sévaré, July 9-13, 2018 and Bamako, July 14-15, 2018.

Dogon witnesses from a few of the attacks said they believed individual armed Islamists had reinforced some village Peuhl self-defense groups, an assertion Human Rights Watch was unable to verify. However, three Peuhl elders said that some armed Islamists they knew said they had “asked for permission” to leave their unit or abandoned the armed Islamists so as to return to protect their native villages.<sup>94</sup>

The link between Peuhl self-defense groups and armed Islamists has been fed by several statements made by the Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (Group for Support of Islam and Muslims, or JNIM), Al-Qaeda's wing in West Africa and the Sahel. Following its March 17 attack on Dioura military base in central Mali, which killed 23 Malian soldiers, a JNIM statement said the attack was “in response to heinous crimes committed by the forces of the Bamako government, and the militias supported by it, on the right of our people of the Fula.”<sup>95</sup>

Another JNIM statement released shortly after the Ogossagou massacre promised that “the Fulani and the oppressed will be avenged throughout the region.”<sup>96</sup> An audio recording from JNIM leader Kouffa that circulated in late September, and that appeared to position JNIM as defenders of the Peuhl community, served to “further fuel ethnic misunderstanding and violence,” according to a Peuhl community leader.<sup>97</sup>

Several attacks attributed by different sources to “armed Peuhl” and “Peuhl self-defense groups” are described below in chronological order. Many other atrocities against Dogon civilians credibly implicating armed Islamist groups are discussed in a subsequent section of this report.

#### *December 2018, and March and May 2019 Attacks: Derou-Na, Kérékéré and Ama-Koro*

On December 27, 2018, nine men, including two Imams, were killed near Derou-Na village, Koro *cercle*, on their way back from nearby Ogossanhi village where they had attended a ceremony honoring a deceased community member. “They weren’t fighters, they weren’t

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<sup>94</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl elders, Bamako, April 23 and Sévaré, July 31 and August 2, 2019.

<sup>95</sup> “JNIM claims military base assault in central Mali,” Long War Journal, March 22, 2019, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2019/03/nim-claims-military-base-assault-in-central-mali.php>, (assessed October 28, 2019).

<sup>96</sup> Mali : le piège des vengeances communautaires,” Liberation, April 3, 2019. [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/04/03/mali-le-piege-des-vengeances-communautaires\\_1719227](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/04/03/mali-le-piege-des-vengeances-communautaires_1719227) (assessed October 28, 2019).

<sup>97</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl elder, Bamako, July 28, 2019.

armed. They'd gone to express condolences to the family of a man who'd recently passed away when they were ambushed near a forest around 14 hr." said a local man.<sup>98</sup> "I went with the army to recuperate the bodies...We found them two meters off the road; seven in one place, slumped over in their motorized tricycles and the others a few meters away, their bodies riddled with bullets," said a witness.<sup>99</sup>

A witness from Kérékéré village, Bankass *cercle*, described a March 2019 attack by armed Peuhl men that killed three elderly residents:

First, they gunned down a few farmers in their fields and then in mid-March, dozens of them on motorcycles, firing in the air with AK-47s, returned. They burned a few houses, then, when we refused to leave, returned the next morning, burning the village east to west. Three elderly were killed...They couldn't flee fast enough. Three days later, a few of us returned to rescue sacks of grain and other belongings, but they fired at us, killing another man.<sup>100</sup>

In mid-May, a young Dogon man was wounded when armed men – whom he believed came from a neighboring Peuhl village – fired on him as he was working his fields near the village of Ama in Koro *cercle*. "We were preparing our fields for planting when the Peuhl opened fire from several meters," he said. "They didn't steal anything... We weren't doing anything to them. I don't know when I'll walk again. We thought 2019 would be better, but it's not."<sup>101</sup>

#### *June 2019 attack: Sobane-Da*

On June 9, armed Peuhl men attacked the Dogon village of Sobane-Da, Bandiagara *cercle*, killing 35 civilians, including over 20 children. Human Rights Watch interviewed three witnesses to the attack, two of whom said they identified several of the attackers who hailed from neighboring villages.

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<sup>98</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

<sup>99</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

<sup>100</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

<sup>101</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Mopti Region, August 2, 2019.



Ruins of a house in the largely destroyed Dogon village of Sobane-Da, which was attacked by armed Peuhl men on June 9, 2019. The attack killed 35 civilians. June 11, 2019. © 2019 REUTERS/Malick Konate.

Sobane-Da is a Christian village; however, neither the church nor houses with crosses affixed to them were destroyed, suggesting religion was not the basis for the attack. “Our village of 431 residents is 100 percent Dogon and 100 percent Christian, but the church was not burned,” a community leader said.<sup>102</sup> “They came at 5 p.m., on many motorcycles that quickly surrounded us, and without talking, set fire to houses and started to kill. The majority of those killed were children. They rounded up and stole all our livestock... Everyone has now fled.”<sup>103</sup>

A 32-year-old man who witnessed the atrocities from his hiding place said:

I was having tea when the motorcycles came...I saw 12 attackers – riding two-by-two on six motorcycles, dressed in boubous cut short, with turbans and automatic rifles – but there were many more. We ran to hide in a house. An hour later, they set alight the Toguna [Dogon cultural meeting house],

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<sup>102</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with community leader from Sobane-da, Mopti, July 31, 2019.

<sup>103</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with villagers, Sevare, July 4, 2019.

which forced Moise Dara [age 18] and Timothe Dara [age 22] to run out, but they were cut down by gunfire.

Then the assailants went to another house, in which were hiding many women and children. I heard them asking for the men to come out...The brother of the village chief came out, saying 'Yes, I am here.' They killed him 200 meters away. It was like he sacrificed himself to save the women and children. The attack lasted for hours... I heard people screaming, I smelled fire, and heard gunshots and "Allahu Akbar" several times.

When we heard the motorcycles leaving, I rushed to my house. My family said they had fired into the house, which set it on fire. We lost three of my family including two children, ages 10 and 12. They stole 900 animals from us and pillaged the entire village.<sup>104</sup>

The 35 adults and children killed were buried the next day in five common graves. A village elder, who had participated in the recovery of bodies and burials, said:

In one house was a family of nine...The family doyen was seated in front, a bullet in his head. The attackers had fired through the window, which set a sack of grain and then the whole house on fire, burning the other family members. Their charred bodies were entwined together, clutching each other, like it was their last moment together. Two grandmothers, five children, women with their babies still on their backs. It seemed like most of the dead had been burned. We found several yellow plastic containers they'd used for gasoline.

In one house was a woman, eight-months pregnant. Her husband was next to her as were other family members, and from her wounds, the baby could be seen. None of us could bear to go in there... or touch them. We had to leave that family to the fire department.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, August 4, 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, August 4, 2019.



A Dogon community leader meets with Senegalese peacekeepers with MINUSMA, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, in his village on July 4, 2019. © 2019 Marco LONGARI /Getty Images.

The witnesses, Dogon community leaders, and security sources were divided on the level of involvement by armed Islamists in this attack. Two of the witnesses characterized the attackers as “terrorists,” and a Malian security source from the area said, “There is not a self-defense militia sufficiently structured to be able to organize such a major attack... No, at least some Islamists who are numerous in this area were implicated.”<sup>106</sup> In contrast, a Peuhl community elder noted, “This wasn’t the jihadsts: it was perpetrated by a coalition of local Peuhl self-defense groups hailing from several neighboring villages.”<sup>107</sup>

An investigation by the human rights section of MINUSMA concluded that the attack was carried out by “30-40 armed men, described as young Peuhl men from surrounding

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<sup>106</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with security source, Bamako, July 26, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl elder, Mopti, July 31, 2019.

villages.”<sup>108</sup> Investigators were unable to determine if the attackers were affiliated to a particular group.<sup>109</sup>

### *July 2019 attack: Sangha*

On July 31, at least eight Dogon civilians including two women were killed, and several more abducted, when two groups of armed Peuhl men attacked traders gathered for and returning from the Sangha market, in Bandiagara *cercle*. Human Rights Watch spoke with three witnesses to the attack who also said hundreds of livestock were stolen by the attackers, whom they identified as both armed Peuhl “assailants” and “jihadists.”<sup>110</sup> One witness said:

We were in the market – many had come for a food aid distribution – when dozens of assailants raced in on brand new motorcycles. One group headed for where several shepherds were standing with their animals, surrounding and ordering that they follow them. An 18-year-old named Nouhoum Kodio resisted, and the jihadists shot him on the spot. While this was going on, another group went towards the road, where I heard they started firing on people randomly as they returned to their villages.<sup>111</sup>

A second witness, whose brother was killed, described the scene on the road:

My brother left Sangha market on his motorcycle in a small convoy. Given the insecurity this is how we travel these days. On their way back – some kilometers away – they were ambushed by armed assailants. As soon as I heard, I rushed to the scene, but he was dead...I retrieved his body... he'd been shot in his chest and face. I saw six other bodies over the road in the same general area... slumped over or near their motorcycles – some were

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<sup>108</sup> MINUSMA, “Rapport sur les atteintes sérieuses aux droits de l’homme commises lors de l’attaque du village de Sobane Da (région de Mopti) le 9 juin 2019,” July 10, 2019.

<sup>109</sup> MINUSMA, “Rapport sur les atteintes sérieuses aux droits de l’homme commises lors de l’attaque du village de Sobane Da (région de Mopti) le 9 juin 2019,” July 10, 2019.

[https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mali\\_rapport\\_sobane\\_da\\_final\\_version\\_07.08.2018\\_15.45.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mali_rapport_sobane_da_final_version_07.08.2018_15.45.pdf)

<sup>110</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interviews with three witness from villages around Sangha, August 4, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Bandiagara *cercle*, August 4, 2019.

drivers, other passengers. They weren't armed... They were all traders from hamlets around Sangha.<sup>112</sup>

### *November 2019 attack: Near Madougou*

On November 4, nine Dogon traders were killed during an ambush on a convoy of traders returning from the Madougou market, in Koro *cercle*. Two witnesses alleged that armed Peuhl men were responsible for the attack. The dead were from the Dogon villages of Indem, Kobadji, Tingué and Tomdin. A witness, whose 18-year-old son was killed, said:

The ambush occurred around 4 p.m. as our convoy of eight motorcycles and five donkey carts passed through a forested area near Tingué, about 10 kilometers from Madougou. I was on my motorcycle and my 18-year-old son was driving our cart with the macaroni, rice, and other items we'd purchased at market. Four men in our convoy had hunting rifles, but they didn't have time to fire a single shot. I saw dozens of attackers on motorcycles in boubous and armed with military weapons. Some had helmets, others wore turbans. As the firing started, I saw several motorcycles falling down as the traders were hit by gunfire. Somehow, I maneuvered my way through the hail of bullets...but my son didn't make it. My heart grieves but there's nothing I can do...I can only pray for his soul. During the attack they also stole or burned several motorcycles and donkey carts including my own.<sup>113</sup>

### *Blockades, Ultimatums and Burning of Dogon Villages*

A representative of a Dogon cultural organization said, "In all four *cercles*, armed Peuhl men – many think they're Jihadists – have burned granaries, killed farmers, and stopped villagers from planting and harvesting. There is widespread hunger, malnutrition, and children with distended stomachs. Many villagers only eat once a day, while tens of thousands have fled."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Bandiagara *cercle*, August 4, 2019.

<sup>113</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with trader, Koro cercle, January 19, 2020.

<sup>114</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with member of Dogon cultural organization, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

One community leader, from Koro *cercle*, said:

Armed Peuhl men are surrounding Dogon villages, forbidding us to go to markets, forbidding us to get food aid, stealing our cattle and killing whomever they meet in the bush. It's as if our villagers are being strangled, condemned to die from hunger. This is the second year many villagers have been unable to cultivate.<sup>115</sup>

An elder from Koro *cercle* said, “From April 2019, the ultimatums started – in Ganga, Peno, Bisiwe, Keun, Tiniri and Segue hamlets. We were just starting to prepare our fields for planting, when the armed Peuhl men came saying, ‘Leave in 72 hours or else.’”<sup>116</sup> A farmer who fled his village in Bankass *cercle* said, “over 30 motorcycles with armed Peuhl men surrounded us, staying long enough to say we had two days to leave the village or ‘you will see.’ We took what we could carry and fled on foot and by *pirogue* [canoe].”<sup>117</sup>

A 52-year-old farmer from Bankass *cercle* who fled his village in March 2019 after receiving an ultimatum, said:

My 24-year-old son was killed in December 2018 on his way back from buying a cow... A friend who survived said they'd been shot by armed Peuhl men as they passed through a forest. But even with that pain, we remained in the village until March 2019 when a large group [of armed Peuhl men] rode in from the east and surrounded us while we were drinking tea. They asked for the village chief. The Peuhl leader said, “We've come to tell you, your family members, and the entire village to leave...you have until tomorrow” – they were aggressive, and heavily armed with strings of bullets. Everyone from the village, and several neighboring villages, fled that day.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder, October 13, 2019.

<sup>116</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with elder from Koro, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>117</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with displaced farmer, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

<sup>118</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with displaced farmer, Bamako, April 25, 2019.

An elder from Baye commune, in Bankass *cercle*, showed Human Rights Watch a list of 17 hamlets whose harvest had been burned in late 2018 and who were too fearful to plant in 2019. “They’re sowing hunger and misery to drive out the Dogon population,” he said.<sup>119</sup> A Dogon farmer who’d fled his village after a few of his friends had been shot and killed in their fields said, “I’d worked very hard on my land, but what is more important, your life or your harvest?”<sup>120</sup>

### *Alleged Retaliatory Killings*

Nine Dogon sources interviewed separately by Human Rights Watch, including local chiefs, civil society leaders and religious authorities, provided lists of incidents and victims of a total of 52 killings during 2019 that they attributed to Peuhl self-defense groups. All of the alleged incidents occurred in Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza and Koro *cercles*.<sup>121</sup>

The Dogon leaders said the killings happened in isolated areas and that the men were all found dead after leaving the village to attend a local market, work their fields or graze their animals. The sources said they were unaware of first-hand witnesses to the killings. They believed the men had been killed by armed Peuhl groups largely because the killings had happened within the context of worsening communal relations and a cycle of retaliation involving the Dogon and Peuhl communities in their respective areas. Human Rights Watch is not in a position to confirm the incidents, which all merit further investigation.

An elder from Koro said, “I know of 15 cases in my *cercle* in 2019, including a shepherd named Yussouf, who was killed by the Fulani in Kassa commune in mid-August, and another on September 1, killed near Ogoyerou. They left but never returned, and later we found their bodies, riddled with bullets.”<sup>122</sup>

A man from Douentza *cercle* said, “My father had gone out to forage for wood in mid-August near Tedjie village – he made his living selling firewood – but he never returned. Tension had been rising – there’d been killings back and forth in recent months. He was a simple man and didn’t have anything to do with an armed group. Hours after he should

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<sup>119</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with elder, Bamako, April 22, 2019.

<sup>120</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with farmer, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>121</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Dogon community leaders, Bamako, April 23 209, April 25, 2019, July 30, 2019; Sevare July 31, August 1, 2019 and phone interviews October 13, 2019 and October 29, 2019. Lists on file with Human Rights Watch.

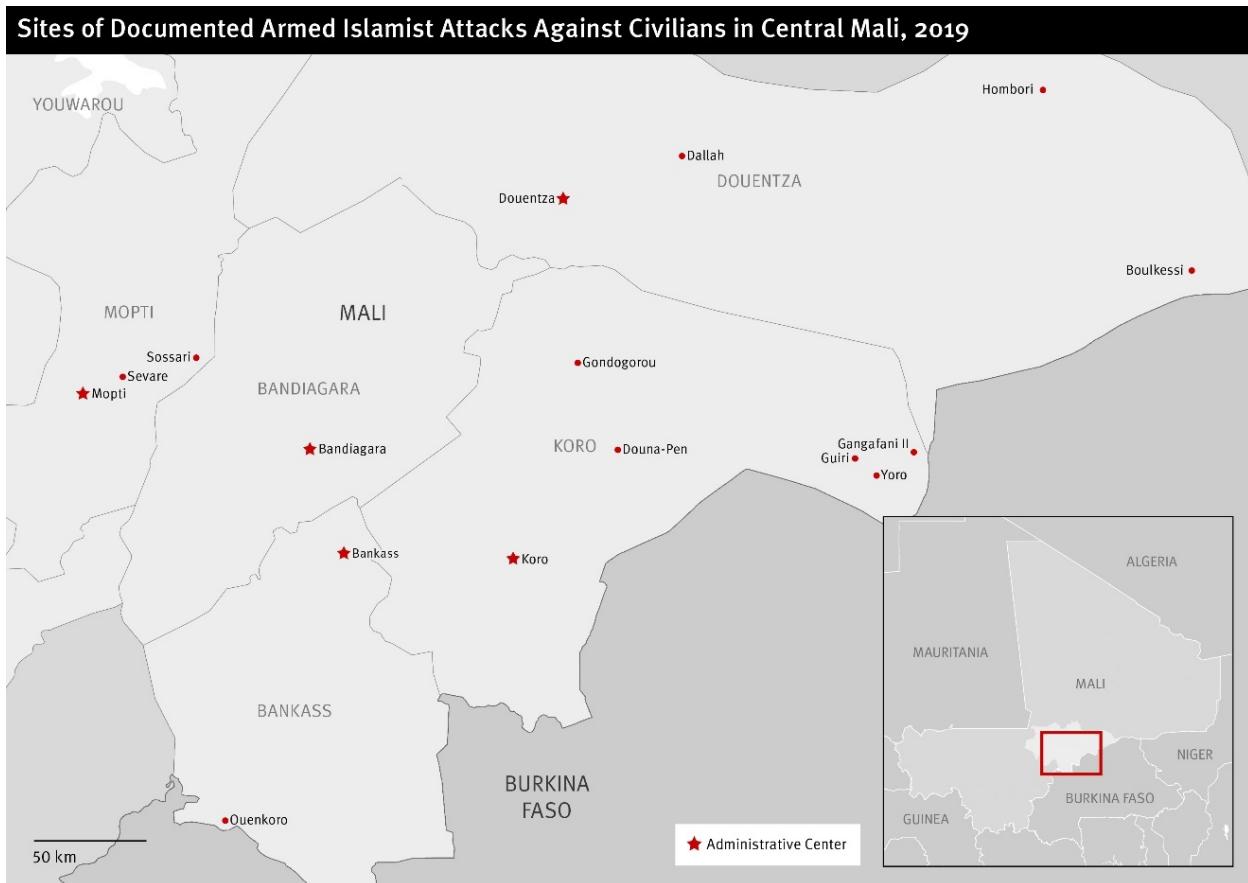
<sup>122</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview, Bamako, October 29, 2019.

have returned, we went out searching and found him, shot in the forest just a few kilometers from our village. My heart still aches.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview, Bamako, October 29, 2019.

# Violence by Armed Islamist Groups in Mopti Region



Armed Islamist groups active in central Mali have massacred civilians in their villages, abducted and executed local leaders, dragged off and shot civilians from public transportation vehicles because of their ethnicity, and indiscriminately planted improvised explosive devices.

Human Rights Watch documented the alleged killing by armed Islamist groups of 116 civilians in central Mali in 2019. The vast majority of victims were ethnic Dogon or Tellem – a small ethnic group residing in and around the town of Yoro in Koro *cercle*. Most of the attacks appeared to target individuals or communities for their perceived support of or allegiance to the government or Dogon militias. The incidents documented took place in Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza, Koro et Mopti *cercles*.

Villagers also said that armed Islamist groups had destroyed local business, looted large quantities of livestock, and forbade farmers from planting their fields. These abuses disproportionately occurred in towns and villages near Mali's border with Burkina Faso.

## Alleged Perpetrators

A patchwork of Islamist armed groups with shifting and overlapping allegiances are active in central Mali. These groups are heavily composed of Peuhl men from Mali, and to a lesser extent Burkina Faso and Niger, though numerous witnesses described the presence of armed Islamists from the Dogon, Songhai, Tuareg and Bella ethnic groups. Community members in central Mali refer to these groups as "jihadists," "assailants," "terrorists," "the men of the bush," "the men in turbans," or "the bizarre men."



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A group of armed Islamists in central Mali. Screen grab from video received by Human Rights Watch in January 2020.  
© Private 2020.

The groups include the Katibat Macina (or Macina Liberation Front) and Katibat Serma, both led by Hamadoun Koufa Diallo, a Peuhl preacher from Mopti Region who has been associated with Al-Qaeda-linked groups. In November 2019, the US Department of State named Koufa a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.<sup>124</sup> Other groups include: Ansaroul

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<sup>124</sup> The US State Department designated Hamadoun Koufa as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Executive Order 13224, which imposes sanctions with the aim of keeping Koufa from acquiring the means to plan or carry out terrorist

Islam, a Burkinabè Islamist armed group, founded in late 2016 by the late Ibrahim Malam Dicko and now led by his brother, Jafar Dicko<sup>125</sup>; and to a lesser extent the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS), which emerged in 2016 and is present in some areas bordering Burkina Faso.<sup>126</sup>

In 2017, the Katibat Macina and four Al-Qaeda-linked groups in Mali merged under the name Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), which means “Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims.” It is led by Iyad Ag Ghaly, a long-time Tuareg jihadist and leader of the armed Islamist group Ansar Dine.<sup>127</sup> Ansaroul Islam is informally linked to and supported by JNIM.<sup>128</sup>

These groups have claimed responsibility for attacks on military targets but rarely for attacks on civilians. However, witnesses and community leaders believed they were responsible for several reasons: armed Islamists had frequented and held meetings in and around their villages; the armed Islamists identified themselves as such before the attacks; some witnesses identified perpetrators they knew had joined Islamist groups; several witnesses had received letters or phone calls from men identifying themselves as members of armed Islamist groups threatening to perpetrate attacks; and witnesses had observed the distinctive way they dressed and the presence, in some attacks, of armed men apparently from other regions or countries.

## June 2019 Massacres in Yoro and Gangafani II

On June 17, dozens of heavily armed Islamists executed at least 38 civilians from the neighboring villages of Yoro and Gangafani II, in Koro *cercle* near Mali's border with Burkina Faso. A Human Rights Watch researcher spoke with 15 witnesses to the near-simultaneous attacks and was shown photographs that witnesses had taken of victims

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attacks. “U.S. Department of State Terrorist Designation of Amadou Kouffa,” US Department of State, November 7, 2019, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-department-of-state-terrorist-designation-of-amadou-kouffa/> (accessed November 18, 2019).

<sup>125</sup> “Ansaroul Islam and the Growing Terrorist Insurgency in Burkina Faso,” *CTC Sentinel*, March 2018, Volume 11, Issue 3, Caleb Weiss and Heni Nsaibia, <https://ctc.usma.edu/ansaroul-islam-growing-terrorist-insurgency-burkina-faso> (accessed November 4, 2018.)

<sup>126</sup> “Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel,” European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/sahel\\_mapping/isgs](https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/sahel_mapping/isgs) (accessed November 18, 2019).

<sup>127</sup> “Analysis: Al Qaeda groups regroup in West Africa,” *Long War Journal*, March 13, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/analysis-al-qaeda-groups-reorganize-in-west-africa.php> (accessed October 5, 2018).

<sup>128</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with security analysts, July and August 2019.

and their destroyed property. All the victims were from the Dogon and Tellem ethnic groups.



A burned motorcycle, destroyed during the June 17, 2019 attacks by armed Islamist groups on the villages of Yoro and Gangafani II, which killed at least 38 civilians. ©Private 2019.

The witnesses said both attacks occurred around 4 p.m., and that many of those killed were intercepted while returning from their fields while others were killed in their homes or while trying to flee. There was no presence of state security forces in either town at the time of the attack.

Several witnesses identified some of the perpetrators as residing in local hamlets and villages. The attack occurred only days after Islamists had delivered a threatening letter, described by people who read it as an ultimatum. “A dozen Jihadists rode in on six motorcycles and gave a letter to an elder, asking that it be delivered to the local chief,” a witness said. “Later, the chief called people together and read

it... Basically it said, ‘Are you with us or are you with the government of Mali?’”<sup>129</sup>

The witnesses said armed Islamists had frequented their area for several years without harming the civilian population. “Since 2017, they used to pray every so often in the village,” a farmer from Yoro said. “We used to see them passing by; each of us would raise our hands in greeting, and that was it.”<sup>130</sup>

Witnesses identified three factors that provoked the attacks: plans by the Malian army to establish a military camp in the area; efforts by some local residents to form a self-defense

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<sup>129</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti region, August 2, 2019

<sup>130</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with farmer, Bamako, August 6, 2019.

group; and two recent cross-border operations in Yoro and Gangafani II by the Burkina Faso army, during which dozens of Peuhl suspects had been detained and, the witnesses said, executed by the Burkinabè forces. “It was after all those Peuhl were killed by the Burkinabè, and government representatives had come to inspect a site for a new army camp, that our problems started,” a Gangafani II resident said.<sup>131</sup>

Witnesses from Gangafani II described seeing the bodies of up to 19 villagers executed during the attack. A farmer described the perpetrators: “From my field I saw a convoy of 22 motorcycles, two jihadists on each, all with turbans, some dressed in camouflage, others in black, some in boubous, with gray or brown turbans, and armed with belts of bullets on their chests. They had AK-47s, machine guns, and some had guns with tripods.”<sup>132</sup>

From where he hid, a villager described the shooting of 12 villagers near Gangafani II:

The bad men stopped people returning from their fields or from grazing their animals; some of us were on foot, others in donkey carts. I was terrified... they had big guns with strings of bullets. One donkey cart was full of people... they forced the men out and told about eight children to stand to one side – as if to make them watch. When they’d gathered 12 people including a 17-year-old, they told them to sit down and then started firing. They spoke in Pulaar [a Fula language] and said “Allahu Akbar” as they killed them.<sup>133</sup>

A man whose close family member died of injuries from the attack said:

It rained heavily that night, and in the morning, we all went to our fields to prepare the land for planting. As my [family relation withheld] headed back from our field, two kilometers from Gangafani II, he said, “I’ll see you at home soon.” I left a bit later. On the way I heard one, two, three gunshots and knew something bad was happening. I hid in a neighboring village for a few hours, and later found 12 people dead, their bodies 800 meters from

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<sup>131</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, July 27, 2019.

<sup>132</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, August 6, 2019.

<sup>133</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti region, August 2, 2019.

the village. All were men except one 16-year-old shot in the back, like he was trying to run. My family member was wounded – he died at 3 a.m. Before he died, he said, “You must flee...There is no way of fighting them [the armed Islamists]... They are too well armed.”<sup>134</sup>

A village elder who participated in the burials said, “They killed 19 people that day – I buried all of them. I saw nine bodies one kilometer from the village, three others nearby, three more to the west and a few elsewhere. All were male and several were children, including a boy and his father.”<sup>135</sup>

Human Rights Watch spoke with seven witnesses to the killings in Yoro. A farmer described the attack:

From 2017, we didn’t have a problem with these people. When we saw them, they’d say, “I didn’t see you, you didn’t see me... don’t tell the army where we are.” But the plan to build a FAMA camp and the Burkinabè killing of the Peuhl changed things. The attack started at 4:20 p.m., after [the late afternoon] prayer...First shots came from near the school, then all around us. I’d been chatting with two friends and as the shots started, they took off running for home, but the jihadists were advancing, firing, and they shot them from 10 meters away. I saw them firing and firing like mad...Bullets whizzed by, entering my house and hitting my motorcycle.<sup>136</sup>

A man wounded in the attack said he knew 16 people who were killed: “four from my family, six in my uncle’s neighborhood, and another six elsewhere. One 42-year-old man grabbed his 4-year-old and hid in his house, but the child cried out, alerting the jihadists, who kicked in the door, dragged him out and shot him in the head, in front of his children. Two of my nephews and my cousin were killed near the market.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, August 6, 2019.

<sup>135</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti, August 3, 2019.

<sup>136</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti, August 2, 2019.

<sup>137</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, August 2, 2019.

Another villager said, “I was fixing the roof of my house when the attack started, and then friends ran by saying they’d just seen the bizarre men [jihadists] coming towards us. I rushed down and hid, and minutes later saw them pass by, dressed in turbans and with sophisticated arms used in wars including machine guns with bandoliers.”<sup>138</sup>

A market woman described the attempted execution of a man the jihadsts had forced off his motorcycle: “They kept accusing him of belonging to a self-defense group, which didn’t exist in our village! The youth kept saying, ‘No, I don’t know anything about this, I’m just a trader,’ but they ordered him to lie face down and shot him three times. They left him for dead.”<sup>139</sup>

The jihadsts returned to both villages the next day as villagers were preparing to flee. Witnesses said that armed Islamists looted and burned the villages, stole hundreds of livestock and killed at least four people they found in or near the villages. A Gangafani II resident said, “Those who’d come from surrounding villages to help bury our dead and offer condolences had just left when the jihadsts returned. They fired in air and looted stocks of grain, everything in the shops, and hundreds of our animals, everything except a few chickens.”<sup>140</sup>

A farmer described the second attack on Yoro: “The jihadsts pillaged the shops and stole every camel, cows, goat and sheep - only the dogs were not taken. My family lost 400 animals. The village tried to save some by sending a small group of shepherds to recuperate any animals we could, but three of our family members were caught and killed by the jihadsts.”<sup>141</sup>

## Executions, Abductions of Men from Public Transport Vehicles

On September 8, 2019, six armed Islamists stopped three vehicles on an isolated section of the main road between Koro and Bandiagara towns. After forcing over a dozen passengers out, they executed seven men, apparently on the basis of their ethnicity. A

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<sup>138</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, August 5, 2019.

<sup>139</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti, August 2, 2019.

<sup>140</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Bamako, August 6, 2019.

<sup>141</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with victim, Bamako, July 28, 2019.

woman, two children and a Peuhl man were spared. One of several men who survived the incident by fleeing the scene under gunfire said:

Arriving at a wooded patch on the road, four armed men jumped out and fired in the air, forcing the driver to stop. They ordered us about 25 meters off the road where we found that two more jihadists had stopped another car from a local bakery with two passengers, who were both face down with their eyes and hands bound. They screamed at us to lie face down next to them. Minutes later a third vehicle was brought. The jihadists spoke Pulaar and had camouflage dress with vests, rangers [military boots], and AK-47s. Two were near the vehicles and the other four carried out the operation.



A soldier stands guard near one of several vehicles forced off the road between Koro and Bandiagara on September 8, 2019 by alleged armed Islamists, who then executed seven men. ©Private 2019.

cars and all our baggage, so this wasn't a robbery.<sup>142</sup>

They yelled at us to give up our phones and started asking where we were from. One passenger was a Peuhl...I heard them saying, "You will not die today." [I later learned] he was abducted but let go a day or so later. One man, seated next to me in the car, said he'd come from Burkina Faso, but they checked his ID and found he was lying. He was actually a Dogon who worked with an NGO [nongovernmental organization]. Immediately, they shot him in the head... One of them said, "You're all going to die here." They killed a second one, one of those from the bakery, shot in the head like the first one. Since they hadn't tied those of us in the second group, a few of us bolted into the bush, bullets whizzing by as we did. Later we saw the photos of those who died...all shot in the head. The victims were four Dogons, two Songhoi and one Mossi. They didn't ask for money, and later burned the

<sup>142</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with victim, Mopti region, October 18, 2019.

On July 30, armed Islamists stopped two public transport vehicles near Sossari, some 20 kilometers from the military garrison town of Sévaré, on their way back from the Fatoma local market. After checking the identities of the passengers, they detained 11 men from several local villages, all Dogon. Seven were executed; the other four remain unaccounted for. Two informed sources and a security force member suggested to Human Rights Watch that the men had been singled out on the basis of their ethnicity.<sup>143</sup> An official who spoke with traders in the vehicles and had investigated the incident said:

The survivors described how they were intercepted by the jihadists in an isolated area. Through questioning and ID papers, they signaled out the Dogon: two of whom were forced out of one vehicle and nine out of the other. Seven bodies were found – five in one place and two who had been blindfolded and their hands tied behind the back, were 200 meters away.<sup>144</sup>

Human Rights Watch received photographs of five of the dead, all of whom appeared to have been shot.<sup>145</sup> An internal report about the incident noted that one of the bodies was attached to a detonator and 20 kilos of explosives.<sup>146</sup> The security forces member confirmed this, noting, “My men went to bury the Dogon dragged off by the jihadists... all seven were killed execution style, with a bullet to the head. One of the bodies had been booby-trapped but the army disactivated the explosive device.”<sup>147</sup>



A still image from a video in which armed Islamists took responsibility for the killing of several men taken off of public transportation vehicles near Sossari village. Screen grab from video received by Human Rights Watch on August 4, 2019. © Private 2019.

<sup>143</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with witnesses and a security force member, Sévaré, August 3, 2019.

<sup>144</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with witness, Sévaré, August 3, 2019.

<sup>145</sup> Photographs on file with Human Rights Watch.

<sup>146</sup> Internal report on file with Human Rights Watch.

<sup>147</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with security force member, Sévaré, August 3, 2019.

Human Rights Watch received a 58-second video via WhatsApp on August 4 in which an Islamist group takes responsibility for the killings. The video shows two armed Islamists, one seated and the other walking in front of five of the seven bodies. The man filming repeats “Allahu Akbar” numerous times and says in Pulaar, “This is how the Dozo who combat Islam have ended up.” Another fighter, dressed in camouflage with a black turban and holding an AK-47 assault rifle states: “This is how the life of an infidel ends... We the mujahedeen, give thanks to Allah.”<sup>148</sup>

## Indiscriminate Attacks with Explosives

Through witness accounts and, in a few cases, from interviews with security sources, Human Rights Watch documented the deaths of 54 civilians and injury to 57 others by 16 explosive devices allegedly planted by armed Islamists on roadways, paths, and, in one case, a booby-trapped corpse.<sup>149</sup> All of these incidents occurred in central Mali, most in areas near the border with Burkina Faso.



A Malian soldier holds a home-made explosive device captured from insurgent forces. Over 50 civilians were killed in 2019 by indiscriminately placed explosive devices in central Mali. ©Private 2018.

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<sup>148</sup> Photographs and WhatsApp video on record with Human Rights Watch.

<sup>149</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with witness, security sources and reports from security sources received in 2019.

A Dogon elder from Koro *cercle* said:

Only the bigger incidents get attention but there are many smaller ones. A few weeks ago, four of my cousin's cows were blown to bits by a mine – thank God he wasn't hurt. Other villagers aren't so lucky...They're killed looking for wood, going to market, walking between villages, on their motorcycles, motorized taxis, or on buses.<sup>150</sup>



The wreckage of a bus that hit a powerful explosive device near the town of Dallah on September 3, 2019, killing 14 civilians. ©Private 2019.

On September 3, a passenger bus that hit an explosive devise near Dallah, Mopti region, killed 14 and wounded 24 people.<sup>151</sup> A man who helped bury the dead said:

I dropped my sister and cousin at the Douentza bus station and not 15 minutes later they called me frantically, saying the bus had hit a landmine.

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<sup>150</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder from Koro *cercle*, Bamako, April 23, 2019.

<sup>151</sup> "Bomb explodes under bus in Mali, at least 14 killed," *Reuters*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/bomb-explodes-under-bus-in-mali-at-least-14-killed-idUSKCN1V01XJ>, (accessed October 12, 2019.)

Later, 13 of the bodies were brought for burial. Not one of them was intact...It was pitiful...seven women and children were among the dead.<sup>152</sup>

A 30-year-old female survivor described the attack:

I boarded the bus at 6:30 a.m., taking a seat in the middle. An hour and a half later, approaching Dallah, I heard a deafening noise. The bus lurched to a stop and there was red dust everywhere. As it settled, I saw people, bleeding, on the ground... the place where the driver sits was gone – I saw only debris. I opened the side window and jumped out...the explosion had opened the baggage hood, which helped break my fall. I lost consciousness for a few minutes and when I woke up, I saw horror all around me – people vomiting blood, some with gashes on their heads, others with their legs missing...pieces of what had been humanity. I started screaming, crying... Another survivor of the bus took my hand and led me away from that place until my parents came to take me to the village.<sup>153</sup>

A week later, the Al-Qaeda-linked group JNIM offered condolences and sympathy for the victims of the bus explosion, stating that the explosive device was targeted at French soldiers conducting military operations in Mali.<sup>154</sup>

On June 30, 11 civilians, the majority Dogon and Tellem, were killed when their motorized tricycle (moto-taxi) hit a powerful explosive devise near Yoro, Koro *cercle*, close to the border with Burkina Faso. It had left the town of Guiri some seven kilometers northwest. The incident occurred a few weeks after the killings of civilians by armed Islamist groups in Yoro and Gangafani II, detailed above. Human Rights Watch spoke with two witnesses who heard the explosion and helped bury the dead. One said:

We heard the explosion at around 9 a.m. ...Though seven kilometers away, it was still very loud. The entire village wept at the scene. We buried the

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<sup>152</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Douentza, September 6, 2019.

<sup>153</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Boni, October 12, 2019.

<sup>154</sup> “Mali jihadists say attack on passenger bus was targeting French troops,” [Reuters, September 11, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/mali-jihadists-say-attack-on-passenger-bus-was-targeting-french-troops-idUSKCN1VW2GZ](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security/mali-jihadists-say-attack-on-passenger-bus-was-targeting-french-troops-idUSKCN1VW2GZ) (assessed October 12, 2019.)

men in one common grave and the women in another. Their bodies were in pieces...body parts were 100 meters away. Many were only identifiable by their clothing. We fear the jihadsts even more now.<sup>155</sup>

An elder from Guiri said:

Two moto-taxis full of villagers had left Guiri on their way to Ouyiguiya, Burkina Faso. The one that hit the mine had 11 people – two women, one with a baby on her back, and the rest men. Several had fled the war in Yoro. All of them perished. One was a woman who had just gotten married and was on her way to join her husband. She was travelling with her brother in law; both were about 20 years old. Another man had lived in Saudi Arabia for about 20 years and had come home to visit. The power of the blast was so strong it threw the second moto-taxi completely up and over on its side. The army rarely comes on this road. Honestly, given the recent tension, it seemed like a targeted attack.<sup>156</sup>

On June 3, two traders driving home from market day in Koro ran over an explosive device, killing the 19-year-old driver and severely wounding his 33-year-old passenger. The passenger's burns, lesions and fractured leg were clearly visible to a Human Rights Watch researcher. "We hit the bomb four kilometers before reaching my village, Douna-Pen," said the injured passenger. "It was the same road we used in the morning. From one moment to the next everything changed. We were not armed, we are traders."<sup>157</sup> A friend who evacuated him to the hospital said, "the body of the driver was thrown eight meters away... like he'd been macheted... and the tricycle was totally destroyed. Who knows if the jihadsts were trying to hit the army, but it was market day...They should know that."<sup>158</sup>

On February 26, an armed Islamist group allegedly planted explosives in or around the corpse of a man with a mental health disability who villagers said had been abducted by the group on February 22 near Gondogorou, Koro *cercle*. The boobytrapped body of the

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<sup>155</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Guiri, August 2, 2019.

<sup>156</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Guiri, August 2, 2019.

<sup>157</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with wounded victim, Sévaré, August 2, 2019.

<sup>158</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, August 2, 2019.

man, found some two kilometers from Gondogouro, exploded as villagers were burying him, killing 17 Dogon family members and villagers, and wounding at least three. Four villagers described the incident, including one of the wounded, who said:

Boubacar Seydou Arou, who was around 35, left the village to wander, as he often does – he is not quite normal – but that day he didn’t return. Four days later, people foraging for wood ran to tell us they’d seen a body about two kilometers away. We were so worried...About 30 of us ran to verify if it was him. We found him under a tree. His throat had been cut. We dug a grave a few meters away, and had surrounded the body, a few taking his head, his feet, his chest, and as he was lifted, there was a powerful explosion.<sup>159</sup>

Another wounded man said:

It was a huge deafening explosion. I survived only because I was in the back of the group. There was so much carnage, some people were barely recognizable. Bodies were strewn all over. Among the dead were two brothers, Amadou and Hassoum Guindo. All we wanted was to give Boubacar a proper burial.<sup>160</sup>

The villagers said they believed armed Islamists were responsible because they frequently saw them passing by their village and because the villagers had on several occasions received oral and, in one case, a written threat from armed Islamists present in their area.

“We see them passing by at a distance and have received several ultimatums to stop foraging for firewood or farming. In 2018, the jihadists sent a letter warning us not to stray from our village,”<sup>161</sup> a village elder said. “We’re under siege – we can’t work our fields, we can’t go for water, our animals are stolen. We fear these people,” said another.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Mopti region, April 24 and October 14, 2019.

<sup>160</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with villager, Koro *cercle*, April 25, 2019.

<sup>161</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with villager, Koro *cercle*, April 25, 2019.

<sup>162</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with village elder, Bamako, April 24, 2019.

## Abductions and Killings of Local Leaders

Human Rights Watch documented the abduction or killing by armed Islamist groups of six community leaders from central Mali including village chiefs, mayors, and religious leaders (marabouts and imams). Informed community leaders believe most of those abducted were later executed. In one case, armed Islamists released an audio message of the victim being tortured while his abductors interrogated him.

Witnesses and family members said the men were targeted for several reasons: allegedly organizing self-defense groups; allegedly providing intelligence to the Malian or Burkinabè security services; or refusing to adhere to the Islamists' strict interpretation of Islamic tenets.

On September 8, 2019, Hamadoun Souleymana Sankare, a well-respected marabout, was abducted from Ouenkoro village, Bankass *circonscription*, near the Burkina Faso border. A close relative, who had investigated the incident and believes Sankare had been executed, said:

He was a well-respected marabout, sought out for his powers by people as far away as Côte d'Ivoire. He fell out with the jihadists because he was accused of informing the Burkinabè army about the presence in our village of a youth who had joined the jihadists, and because he had refused to stop using *gris-gris* [amulet charms] and presiding over marriages, baptisms... They said it is *haram* [forbidden], but he kept going. He was listened to by the population, and for them [the jihadists], that meant he was a danger who had to be eliminated.<sup>163</sup>

On June 21, armed men on motorcycles abducted the deputy mayor of Ouenkoro commune, Moussa Dembele. "At around 4 p.m., Moussa was in front of his father's shop in the market area when they drove in, firing in the air, forced him onto the bike and drove off with him," a witness said.<sup>164</sup>

A close friend of Dembele's said that he believes the deputy mayor was singled out because of his recent efforts to organize local villagers into a self-defense group: "He was

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<sup>163</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview, Bankass *circonscription*, October 17, 2019.

<sup>164</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Ouenkoro, October 18, 2019.

working to establish a Dozo camp in town and had started to recruit people from a few villages. We hear from well-informed people, that he was executed.”<sup>165</sup>

About three weeks later, a 21-minute audio recording of Dembele being tortured and interrogated by men identifying themselves as “jihadists” began to circulate on social media. Dembele is heard being asked repeatedly by three men about his involvement in supporting Dan Na Ambassagou. Human Rights Watch also read a transcript of the recording translated from Pulaar into French. Dembele’s voice indicates he is audibly in pain and on a few occasions asks not to be burned. A man is heard saying, “Talk, give us names, or we will burn you further.” One is heard saying, “Bring fire here so that he will talk.” As the men continue the torture, Dembele is heard begging his captors for forgiveness.<sup>166</sup>

At about 2 a.m. on June 22, armed Islamists allegedly executed the village chief of Hombori, Douentza *cercle*, Nouhoum Ousman Maiga. A Hombori resident close to the chief said, “The chief had been threatened at least once... They were pressuring him to accept their principles, saying he’s finished if he didn’t. And if killing the chief wasn’t enough, the jihadists returned just a few days later to attack people who’d come to express their condolences, but they [the Jihadists] were repelled.”<sup>167</sup> Another resident said:

I went to his house around 4:30 a.m. The distraught family said the jihadists dragged away the guard, then jumped the wall to gain access. They found the chief sleeping, and shot him twice, once in the head... I saw his body after he passed away. The Jihadists had left their motorcycles on the edge of town. The chief was going to leave for Mecca the very next day.<sup>168</sup>

On March 14, armed Islamists, allegedly allied with the Burkinabè Islamist group Ansaroul Islam, abducted the village chief of Boulkessi, Ibrahim Diallo, and his close friend

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<sup>165</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with elder, Mopti Region, October 17, 2019.

<sup>166</sup> Transcript on record with Human Rights Watch.

<sup>167</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, August,2, 2019.

<sup>168</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Douentza, August 3, 2019.

Boureima Barry.<sup>169</sup> “We have lost hope,” said a community leader. “We’ve had no sign of life.”<sup>170</sup>

A witness said: “At about 10 p.m., an unarmed man came to the door asking for a word. Amirou [the village chief] put on his shoes and followed him, which wasn’t unusual because as chief he was used to dealing with discreet requests for his counsel, even at night.”<sup>171</sup> A second witness said, “Some meters from his house he was surrounded by a large group of heavily armed men, who had quietly infiltrated the neighborhood. They said they’d been sent by [name of jihadist leader withheld] and ordered Amirou to mount a motorcycle. They left the village on a path going north.”<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> MENASTREAM Twitter post, <https://twitter.com/menastream/status/1107286344022265856> (accessed November 18, 2019).

<sup>170</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, August 3, 2019.

<sup>171</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti, August 4, 2019.

<sup>172</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, July 31, 2019.

## Justice for Victims of Crimes in Central Mali

Victims and their families and leaders from the Dogon, Tellem, and Peuhl communities told Human Rights Watch they were aware of few government investigations and prosecutions of those responsible for the serious abuses committed against civilians from their communities in central Mali in 2019.

Since the conflict spread from northern into central Mali in 2015, Human Rights Watch has documented the killings by alleged armed Islamist groups and ethnic militias of 794 civilians in scores of incidents and episodes.<sup>173</sup> In the same period, dozens of suspected armed Islamists taken into custody by government security forces have also allegedly been killed.<sup>174</sup>

Very few incidents of communal violence, including killings, have resulted in trials and convictions. Exceptions include the convictions of several men for the killing of about 30 Peuhl men by Bambara militia in 2016, and the convictions in December 2019 of about 45 men, largely for illegal possession of firearms, for several attacks by Dogon militias in 2018 and 2019.<sup>175</sup>

Victims, civil society members and foreign diplomats blamed the slow progress on justice on the challenging security situation, the sheer number of allegations, insufficient resources for the judiciary, and a lack of political will. They expressed concern that the absence of accountability was emboldening the armed groups to commit further abuses amid a general climate of impunity.

An elderly woman whose husband and several other family members were killed in Mopti region in 2019 asked a Human Rights Watch researcher, “Why doesn’t the Malian state put the armed men doing all the killing in jail so they can’t hurt anyone else?”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> See Human Rights Watch, “Mali,” <https://www.hrw.org/africa/mali>

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> “Affrontements sanglants entre peuls et bambaras:Bilan: Entre 38 et 50 morts,” *Malijet*, May 5, 2016, [http://malijet.com/a\\_la\\_une\\_du\\_mali/154849-affrontements-sanglants-entre-peuls-et-bambaras-bilan-entre-38-e.html](http://malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/154849-affrontements-sanglants-entre-peuls-et-bambaras-bilan-entre-38-e.html) (accessed October 22, 2019) and Human Rights Watch phone interviews with two justice sector professionals, Bamako, January 13 and 14, 2020.

<sup>176</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with village woman, Mopti Region, July 31, 2019.

Hamadoune Dicko, the youth leader of the Peuhl cultural organization Tabital Pulaaku, said, “My community has suffered grave, unspeakable violations. The hell we are living is a direct result of the government’s refusal to apply their own laws, which dictate that justice must be delivered and delivered impartially.”<sup>177</sup>

A Dogon youth whose village had been attacked by armed Islamists said, “The hunters, the jihadists, the armed Peuhl are all sowing fear and civilians are paying the price in ruined lives. The leaders of these groups must be made to pay for the bad they have done.”<sup>178</sup>

A diplomat noted concern regarding the lack of prosecutions for large scale atrocities: “We’ve seen a template in terms of government’s response to atrocities. First a strong statement condemning the act, followed by a VIP visit to the massacre site, then, a symbolic opening of an investigation, but it progresses slowly if at all, and trials rarely seem to happen.”<sup>179</sup>

## Challenges Undermining Progress on Investigations by the Mopti Tribunal

Malian officials told Human Rights Watch that judicial investigations are systematically opened into serious crimes against civilians in central Mali.<sup>180</sup> “Every time we learned of a crime related to intercommunal violence in 2019, a judicial inquiry was opened,” a justice sector professional in central Mali said.<sup>181</sup> Central Mali, composed of two regions, falls under two court jurisdictions: Mopti region falls under the jurisdiction of the Mopti appellate court (*Cour d’appel*) while Segou region falls under the jurisdiction of the Bamako appellate court.<sup>182</sup>

However, members of the judiciary and gendarmes responsible for conducting investigations admitted progress was slow, blaming insufficient resources and the precarious security situation that made keeping up with the continual cascade of allegations extremely difficult. Said a local judge: “Since 2015, many local prosecutors and

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<sup>177</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with H. Dicko, Bamako, October 23, 2019.

<sup>178</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon youth, Mopti, August 3, 2019.

<sup>179</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with diplomat, Bamako, August 5, 2019.

<sup>180</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Ministry of Justice officials, Bamako and Sévaré, 2019

<sup>181</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Justice sector official, Mopti region, July 31, 2019.

<sup>182</sup> There are three tribunals or appellate courts in Mali: Kayes, Bamako, and Mopti. The Mopti appellate court covers Mopti, Gao, Kidal and Timbukou regions, while the Bamako court covers Bamako, Koulikoro, Sikasso, and Segou regions. See: <http://www.droit-africain.com/mali-organisation-judiciaire/>

judges have fled, gendarmes responsible for investigations are attacked by the terrorists, and roads are subject to improvised explosive devices.”<sup>183</sup>

“Since 2018 I opened at least 10 dossiers of communal violence and others into jihadist attacks, but going to the villages is risky,” said another judicial officer. “The gendarmes often won’t deploy without the army, who are already thinly spread. And victims are often too afraid to talk and refuse to come when summoned to provide testimony.”<sup>184</sup>

Several judicial officers cited the November 2017 abduction by armed Islamists of the president of the district court of Niono in Segou region, Judge Soungalo Kone, as an example of the perils they face. In February 2019, it was announced that the judge had died, apparently of illness, in armed Islamist custody.<sup>185</sup>

Gendarme commanders said they had done numerous preliminary investigations, including into arms trafficking, which feeds the violence, and had made scores of arrests of armed men involved in abuses against civilians. They, however, told Human Rights Watch on several occasions that investigative units lack the resources and security to keep up with the many allegations received.<sup>186</sup>

“The environment is extremely challenging. The areas for investigations are far and isolated; we are regularly subjected to ambushes and booby traps; witnesses are afraid to talk; and we lack vehicles, funds for gas, repairs and equipment,” a gendarme official said.<sup>187</sup>

Security force members cited two examples of risks they encountered in the course of investigations : a July 30, 2019 incident when security forces came under fire while attempting to investigate the execution of seven Dogon men near Sévaré; and a mid-April incident in which members of the Malian security forces, while attempting to detain a Dan

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<sup>183</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with judicial officers and gendarmes, Bamako, Sévaré and Mopti, 2016-2019.

<sup>184</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with judicial officer, Motpi, December 14, 2018.

<sup>185</sup> “Otages maliens: le juge Soungalo annonce ‘mort’, des magistrats veulent ‘des preuves’ ,” *Studio Tamani*, February 20, 2019, <https://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/themes/politique/18945-otages-maliens-le-juge-soungalo-annonce-mort-des-magistrats-veulent-des-preuves> (accessed October 23, 2019).

<sup>186</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with gendarme commanders, Mopti, Bamako and Sévaré, 2016-2019.

<sup>187</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with gendarme commander, Mopti region, //August 2, 2019.

Na Ambassagou leader for questioning about his alleged involvement in the Ogossagou massacre, were surrounded by a mob of angry people and pelted with rocks.<sup>188</sup>

Beyond the precarious security situation, Malian and international justice professionals described two other dynamics which, they said, considerably undermined progress on investigations and prosecutions in Mopti region: the insufficient number of judicial personnel and the lack of capacity in gathering, analyzing and storing physical evidence.

“The Mopti court is in desperate need of more personnel. For example, the Mopti High Court (*Tribunal de Grande Instance*), should have four judges, but at present, only one is working. And the Cour d’appel lacks the permanent presence of several key staff including investigating judges, the advocate-general, the presidents of the customary law and the corrections chambers, the chief administrative officer, without forgetting the deputy attorney general. Most of these positions are only filled on a temporary basis, while others have never taken up their offices,” said a justice professional.<sup>189</sup>

The justice professionals also said local investigators often lack sufficient capacity into the gathering, analysis, and storage of physical evidence. “Criminal investigators often don’t know how to analyze ballistics, or to obtain or use forensic evidence in support of prosecutions. It’s hard to convict a suspect without adequate physical evidence,” one justice professional with knowledge of investigations in Mopti said.”<sup>190</sup>

They recommended the creation of a sub-unit of investigators with forensic expertise, staffed either by the judicial police (OPJ’s) or an already-existing national police forensic unit, which could be deployed in regional sub-units with a rapid response capacity. “This is much more efficient than training and equipping every single unit of the gendarmerie responsible for investigations, as it allows for the creation of real experts who could rely on a centralized lab in Bamako and could, as well, support the investigations component of

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<sup>188</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with security forces members, July 31, 2019 and August 2, 2019; “Mali struggles to disarm ethnic militia suspected of massacre,” *Reuters*, April 19, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-security-militia/mali-struggles-to-disarm-ethnic-militia-suspected-of-massacre-idUSKCN1RVOT2> (accessed October 23, 2019).

<sup>189</sup> Human Rights Watch email exchange with Malian justice professional, January 14, 2020.

<sup>190</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Malian justice professional, January 13, 2020.

the Specialized Judicial Unit, which has national jurisdiction,” an international justice professional said.<sup>191</sup>

## Social Cohesion Efforts versus Justice

Some community leaders, diplomats and human rights activists told Human Rights Watch they believed that the government’s failure to ensure justice, evidenced by the lack of arrests of known perpetrators, slow pace of investigations, and failure to hold trials for major atrocities, was in part explained by the government’s prioritization of short-term community reconciliation efforts over deterrence by way of the administration of justice.



Villagers from Dangatene, a village in central Mali, discuss peace and reconciliation with members of the MINUSMA mission in December 2018. © 2018 MINUSMA.

A government representative involved in the reconciliation efforts explained:

There is a new logic for ending the violence in central Mali, which is to prioritize social cohesion, or dialogue, between communities and armed

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<sup>191</sup> Human Rights Watch email exchange with international justice professional, January 15, 2020.

groups, to get them to commit to ceasefires and desist from violence against each other. This is where everyone's attention is going. This effort has been carried out through high-level visits to central Mali by the prime minister and others and is done with the support of civil society and international organizations.<sup>192</sup>

The approach in 2019 followed similar efforts in 2018 during which officials of local governments and nongovernmental organizations brokered agreements to reduce ethnic tension between the Peuhl and Dogon. A ceasefire in July 2018 was signed by one faction of Dan Na Ambassagou, and in August 2018 an accord to end communal violence in Koro was signed by dozens of Peuhl and Dogon village chiefs. Other agreements have been brokered between Peuhl and Bambara armed groups in and around Djenné.



Prime Minister Boubou Cisse (left) in a reconciliation meeting with members of the Dozo hunting society in central Mali in early August 2019. The Malian government has engaged in reconciliation efforts to reduce tension between the Peuhl and Bambara communities. © 2019 Malijet

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<sup>192</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mopti Region government representative, Bamako, July 27, 2019.

Government representatives and some community leaders interviewed by Human Rights Watch in both 2018 and 2019 said the arrest of high-level perpetrators would “inflame tension” and seriously undermine community reconciliation efforts, arguing that the release of suspects arrested in the aftermath of atrocities was needed to “give dialogue a chance” and “dampen the fire.”<sup>193</sup>

A community leader described how this played out in the aftermath of the 2019 Koulogon incident, which left 39 dead:

We were encouraged after the state arrested 12 hunters heavily implicated in the attack, including the village chief. But days later there was a reconciliation meeting where the Peuhl and Dogon pardoned each other and committed to keeping the peace. One of the recommendations was for the 12 suspects to be freed. I was told the judges were pressured to release many of them.<sup>194</sup>

A diplomat said:

There is limited political will to respond to the atrocities with judicial means, meaning trials. Known perpetrators are rarely questioned or arrested, and any who *are* arrested are often released under pressure from armed groups in the name of “social cohesion,” or in prisoner exchanges. It’s no wonder that atrocities are continuing unabated.<sup>195</sup>

Peuhl leaders criticized the state’s failure to question, much less arrest, powerful Bambara Dozo leaders credibly implicated in massacres in 2017 and 2018, as well as Yossouf Toloba, the self-proclaimed chief of staff of Dan Na Ambassagou. A victim said, “What social cohesion? Toloba’s men are killing more and more with each passing year. What will it take to arrest and question him?” A Peuhl civil society leader said:

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<sup>193</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with government officials and local civil society leaders, Bamako and Sévaré, MONTH?? 2018 and April and July 2019.

<sup>194</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Mopti Region Peuhl leader, July 27, 2019.

<sup>195</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with diplomat, Bamako, July 27, 2019.

Toloba has a veritable army. He is the so-called chief of staff (*chef d'état major*) of the powerful Dogon militia, and is regularly on TV and on the radio talking about his hundreds of men and many bases. He has been seen in planning meetings days before major massacres, he has an articulated command structure. And after all this he's not even brought in for questioning? Does that seem normal?<sup>196</sup>

Following the December 2019 conviction of four Dogon men for a communal attack in Bankass *cercle*, a newspaper representing the Dogon community, *Le Hogon*, asked rhetorically if the government was not “betraying” the Dogon community, alleging that during meetings aimed at reducing ethnic tension, the government had “repeatedly promised” the release of those arrested in the context of communal violence “in order to appease the intercommunal conflict in the Dogon Country.”<sup>197</sup>

The February 2019 release by the Malian government of armed Islamists in exchange for two men being held by the Katibat Macina was a further blow to justice for alleged atrocities by armed Islamist groups.<sup>198</sup> Makan Doumbia, the prefect of Tenenkou who had been kidnapped in 2018, and another man were released in exchange for 17 prisoners, several of whom had been implicated in human rights abuses.

The most high-profile detainee released was Aliou Mahamar Toure, former head of the “Islamic police” in Gao, northern Mali, who oversaw amputations and other serious abuses against civilians in 2012-2013 and had been convicted and sentenced to 10 years in August 2017 for crimes against the state. While he was not convicted for human rights crimes, several civilian victims testified at his trial.<sup>199</sup><sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl civil society leader, April 22, 2019.

<sup>197</sup> “*Grincements de dents au sein de la communauté dogon après la condamnation de 4 des siennes à 5 ans de prison*,” *Le Hogon*, December 18, 2019.

<sup>198</sup> “Libération” de l’ex juge islamique, Aliou Touré : son avocat dénonce « un enlèvement » en prison,” *Studio Tamani*, April 12, 2019. <https://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/themes/politique/19576-liberation-de-l-ex-juge-islamique-aliou-toure-son-avocat-denonce-un-enlèvement-en-prison> (assessed October 23, 2019).

<sup>199</sup> “Ex-chief of jihadist ‘Islamic police’ jailed for 10 years in Mali” *Agence France Presse*, August 19, 2017. <https://www.france24.com/en/20170819-ex-chief-jihadist-islamic-police-jailed-10-years-mali>, (accessed October 23, 2019).

<sup>200</sup> On November 29, 2019, Toure was re-arrested during a military operation by France’s Barkhane force, “Mali : l’ex-chef jihadiste Aliou Mahamane Touré à nouveau arrêté,” RFI, December 1, 2019. <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20191201-mali-aliou-mahamane-toure-chef-jihadiste-arrestation-gao>, (accessed January 9, 2020.)

Another diplomat said, “The government is prioritizing short-term reconciliation efforts, when what is really needed are arrests, trials and longer term-progress on rule of law. They’ve tried mediation before. The ceasefires didn’t hold, and the massacres got even more deadly.”<sup>201</sup>

## Promises and Progress in 2019

The Ministry of Justice’s investigations into several of the most serious atrocities against civilians in 2019, the trials and convictions, in December 2019, of several smaller incidents of communal violence, and the expansion of a special judicial unit’s mandate to include serious human rights crimes held promise for progress on delivering justice.

The investigations and prosecutions were being conducted by both the High Court of Mopti and the Specialized Judicial Unit to Combat Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime (the “Specialized Judicial Unit,” or SJU) whose jurisdiction was extended in July 2019 to include major atrocity cases.

A Justice Ministry official told Human Rights Watch that the fight against impunity, including for communal violence, and access to justice for the indigent were “top priorities” for the Minister of Justice, Malick Coulibaly, appointed in a cabinet reshuffle in May 2019. The official said the Ministry views the expanded jurisdiction of the SJU as a crucial step in ensuring justice for major atrocities, adding, “Our vision is for the SJU to have satellite offices in the regions – notably Mopti and Gao -- so as to make it easier for victims and their families to report cases and for the authorities to conduct investigations, and to ensure crucial evidence is preserved.”<sup>202</sup>

A May 2019 MINUSMA report noted that Malian authorities claimed to have opened about 20 investigations “in connection with attacks in the circles of Djenné, Bankass and Koro, Mopti region, during the year 2018.”<sup>203</sup> And the French newspaper *Le Monde* quoted

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<sup>201</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with diplomat, Bamako, August 5, 2019.

<sup>202</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Ministry of Justice official, Bamako, July 30, 2019.

<sup>203</sup> UN Security Council, “La Situation au Mali : Rapport du Secrétaire général,” October 1, 2019, S/2019/782, [https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s\\_2019\\_782\\_f.pdf](https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2019_782_f.pdf) (accessed December 6, 2019).

Broulaye Samaké, an investigating judge from the High Court of Mopti, as saying, “Since December 2018, a dozen investigations have been opened at my level.”<sup>204</sup>

While public information into the investigations and prosecutions was rarely provided by the government, and progress was thus difficult to track, there appeared to have been some progress into investigations into four major atrocities perpetrated in 2019:

- Koulogon: After condemning the January 1 massacre of 37 people, the government on April 15 confirmed the opening of an investigation into the incident by the High Court of Mopti and reported that authorities had arrested 12 suspects in connection with the killings.<sup>205</sup> At writing, eight of 12 suspects had been released.
- Ogossagou: The government stated its determination to prosecute the perpetrators,<sup>206</sup> and said it was being investigated by the Specialized Judicial Unit. On May 2, then-prosecutor for the SJU, Boubacar Sidiki Samake, said the cell’s investigators had taken statements from 120 people and made 10 arrests.<sup>207</sup>
- Sobane Da: The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights announced in a June 10 communique that the prosecutor for the SJU had opened an investigation into the attack.<sup>208</sup> As of October, at least nine suspects had been placed in pretrial detention by the SJU’s investigating judge.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> “Au Mali, des massacres impunis” *Le Monde*, June 26, 2019, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/06/26/au-mali-des-massacres-impunis\\_5481861\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2019/06/26/au-mali-des-massacres-impunis_5481861_3212.html) (accessed December 6, 2019).

<sup>205</sup> MINUSMA, “Rapport sur les abus des droits de l’homme commis dans le village de Koulogon-Peul, commune de Koulogon-Habe, cercle de Bankass, région de Mopti, le 1er janvier 2019,” May 2019, [https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport\\_koulongo.pdf](https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/rapport_koulongo.pdf) (accessed October 21, 2019).

<sup>206</sup> Le Primature du Gouvernement de Mali, “Attaque Barbare et ignominieux contre des civils innocents du village de Ogossagou,” March 23, 2019, <http://www.primature.gov.ml/index.php/salle-de-presse/actualites/11964-attaque-du-village-de-ogossagou> (accessed October 21, 2019).

<sup>207</sup> “Boubacar Sidiki Samake, Procureur du pole antiterroriste sue le massacre d’Ogossagou : ‘On ne va plus laisser les gens defier l’Etat’,” *Voix de Bamako*, May 3, 2019, <https://voixdebamako.com/boubacar-sidiki-samake-procureur-du-pole-antiterroriste-sur-le-massacre-dogossagou-on-ne-va-plus-laisser-les-gens-defier-letat-2/> (accessed October 21, 2019).

<sup>208</sup> Le Primature du Gouvernement de Mali, “Communiqué du Ministère de la Justice Garde des sceaux,” June 10, 2019, <http://www.primature.gov.ml/index.php/salle-de-presse/actualites/12078-communique-du-ministere-de-la-justice-garde-des-sceaux> (accessed October 21, 2019); MINUSMA “Rapport sur les atteintes serieuses aux droits de l’homme commises lors de l’attaque du village de Sobane Da (région de Mopti) le 9 juin 2019, » July 2019, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mali\\_rapport\\_sobane\\_da\\_final\\_version\\_07.08.2018\\_15.45.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mali_rapport_sobane_da_final_version_07.08.2018_15.45.pdf) (accessed October 21, 2019).

<sup>209</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General,” October 1, 2019, [https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s\\_2019\\_782\\_e.pdf](https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2019_782_e.pdf) (Accessed October 30, 2019).

- Yoro and Gangafani II: The prosecutor for the SJU has opened an investigation and had arrested or questioned about 10 suspects in connection with the investigation.<sup>210</sup>

Furthermore, in December 2019, the Mopti Cour d'assises (charged with adjudicating felonies) heard six cases related to several incidents of communal violence in Koro, Bankass and Bandiagara *cercles*, all but one of which had occurred in 2019. The cases involved at least 60 accused, of whom at least 44 were convicted. Of these, only two were convicted of murder, while the others were convicted for illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, arson and criminal conspiracy.<sup>211</sup>



The Criminal Court of Bamako. © 2018 Malijet.

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<sup>210</sup> “Au Mali, des massacres impunis,” *Le Monde*, June 26, 2019, [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrigue/article/2019/06/26/au-mali-des-massacres-impunis\\_5481861\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrigue/article/2019/06/26/au-mali-des-massacres-impunis_5481861_3212.html) (accessed December 6, 2019).

<sup>211</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with justice professional, January 13, 2020. Seven of the at least 44 men convicted, were in absentia and one of the six cases, involving an additional 13 accused, was postponed until 2020.

Judicial officers and civil society leaders said the December convictions were for “smaller incidents” noting that victims were still waiting for justice for the “big atrocity cases” including many of those documented in this and previous Human Rights Watch reports.

## Role of the Specialized Unit to Combat Terrorism and Organized Crime

In May 2013, in response to increasing attacks by Islamist armed groups, the Malian government passed legislation to create the Specialized Judicial Unit to Combat Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime (SJU). The SJU, which became operational in 2015, is based in the capital, Bamako, and has national jurisdiction. It is composed of dedicated prosecutors, investigative magistrates, and investigators. After investigation, cases are transferred to the Cour d’assises.

In 2017, a law enforcement unit of investigators, the Specialized Investigation Brigade (Brigade d’Investigation Spécialisé- SIB or BIS) to support the SJU’s investigations, became operational. Under the direction of a gendarme colonel, the SIB has 50 investigators – 25 police officers and 25 gendarmes.

On July 24, 2019, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita promulgated a law extending the jurisdiction of the Specialized Judicial Unit to investigate war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, with the aim of providing the basis for investigating perpetrators of major atrocity cases.<sup>212</sup>

The Specialized Judicial Unit has been investigating over 200 terrorism-related cases, 45 transnational organized crimes, 2 cases involving communal violence (Ogossagou and Sobane-Da), and scores of residual criminal cases it had inherited at the time of its creation or shortly thereafter. Since becoming operational in 2017, some 40 terrorism-

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<sup>212</sup> The project to amend Loi no. 01-08 du 20 aout 2001 portant Code de procedure penale, to extend the jurisdiction of the Specialized Judicial Unit to prosecute war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity was initiated during a meeting of the Council of Ministers in May 2019, Conseil des Ministres du Mali, “Communiqué du conseil des ministres du mercredi, 29 mai 2019,” May 29, 2019, <http://www.primature.gov.ml/index.php/communiques-du-conseil-des-ministres?start=5>; Loi no.01-08 du aout 2001 portant Code de procedure penale, <http://ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/64578/73898/F-784451298/MLI-64578.pdf>; United Nations Security Council, “Situation in Mali: Report of the Secretary General,” October 2019, [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_2019\\_782.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2019_782.pdf), (accessed October 21, 2019).

related cases investigated by the SJU have been tried by the Malian judiciary.<sup>213</sup> All of the convictions, of at least 51 individuals, were for charges related to crimes against the state.<sup>214</sup>

Malian and international actors saw promise in the SJU’s expanded mandate to support justice for serious international crimes. “There are likely links between terrorist groups, the perpetrators of international human rights crimes, and those who commit intercommunal violence, thus the centralization of these investigations under one judicial cell is a good thing,” said an international justice expert.<sup>215</sup> A Malian lawyer said, “The expanded jurisdiction has raised our expectations for justice on, at least, the biggest atrocity cases.”<sup>216</sup>



Bullet casings gathered in the aftermath of a 2019 attack in central Mali by Dogon armed men. Justice experts highlighted the need for Malian investigators to receive training in the collection and analysis of ballistics. © 2019 Private.

These individuals identified three key recommendations for the Ministry of Justice and the SJU going forward: expand the new law to include war crimes in non-international armed conflicts; elaborate a prosecutorial strategy for atrocity cases given the massive number of cases and the overlapping jurisdictions investigating them; and address the need for increased capacity for criminal analysis.

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<sup>213</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General,” March 26, 2019, [https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s\\_2019\\_262\\_e.pdf](https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2019_262_e.pdf) (accessed October 30, 2019) and United Nations Security Council, “situation in Mali Report of the Secretary-General,” December 30, 2019. [https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s\\_2019\\_983\\_e.pdf](https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_2019_983_e.pdf) (accessed January 10, 2020.)

<sup>214</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interviews with justice sector professional, Bamako, November 12, 2019 and January 6, 2020.

<sup>215</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with international justice expert, Bamako, November 12, 2019.

<sup>216</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with Malian lawyer, Bamako, August 2, 2019.

With respect to the legal definition of crimes under the SJU's jurisdiction, justice experts said the new law only provided jurisdiction for crimes committed in international armed conflicts – those between two states – versus non-international ones – those involving a state and non-state armed groups. “The Malian law transposed half of the Rome Statute [of the International Criminal Court] but the other half is missing,” a human rights lawyer said.<sup>217</sup> They recommended that the Malian government fully incorporate the Rome Statute into Malian law to allow for the prosecution of war crimes during non-international armed conflicts – as is the current conflict in Mali.

Justice experts also said the Malian judiciary needed to elaborate and articulate a coherent prosecutorial, triage, and information-sharing strategy, and to define which judicial jurisdiction – the regional courts or the SJU – would be responsible for which cases.

“The ministry needs to define which cases rise to the level of jurisdiction for the SJU and why,” said an international judicial expert.<sup>218</sup> A Malian lawyer said, “The regional courts seem unclear about which cases they should handle and which will be handled by the Bamako-based SJU. The Mopti prosecutor and investigators have made considerable progress into some cases of mass atrocity and are loathe to transfer them to Bamako.”<sup>219</sup>

Some justice experts expressed concern that the SJU, already investigating hundreds of terrorism cases, would be overwhelmed by the increased jurisdiction. “We see the change of mandate as a positive development though are concerned about the Special Unit’s ability to absorb the increase in cases given their already heavily charged workload,” a justice expert said.<sup>220</sup>

To address the anticipated increased workload, several justice actors said the SJU should create a dedicated sub-unit of prosecutors and investigations to be tasked with the international human rights crimes. Justice experts also recommended that the Malian judiciary increase its capacity to centralize and analyze information on criminal conduct.

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<sup>217</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with Malian human rights lawyer, November 17, 2019.

<sup>218</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with international justice expert, Bamako, November 12, 2019.

<sup>219</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with lawyer, Bamako, August 2, 2019.

<sup>220</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with international justice expert, Bamako, November 12, 2019.

“The Malian judiciary and the SJU in particular is getting massive amounts of data on incidents, victims and perpetrators, and in different zones in Mali and the sub-region,” said an international justice expert. “In order to put it to good use vis-a-vis investigations into terrorism-related and human rights crimes, there is a need to improve their ability to analyze all that data.”<sup>221</sup>

## Need for Public Information and Promoting Justice

Very few of the victims, witnesses, or family members of victims of the incidents documented in this and previous Human Rights Watch reports knew about the existence or status of investigations by the Malian judiciary. Furthermore, they had very little knowledge of how the justice system worked: they rarely reported incidents to the authorities and did not know they had the right to file a judicial complaint, which would oblige the judicial authorities to open an investigation.



A destroyed house in the Dogon village of Sobane-Da. The June 9, 2019 attack on the village by armed Peuhl men killed 35 civilians. © Private 2019.

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<sup>221</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with international justice expert, Bamako, November 12, 2019.

In keeping with their religious traditions, family and community members often buried their dead before authorities had visited the scene, having the effect of destroying, disturbing or disposing of key evidence that could have been used to build a case. Many appeared resigned to the losses they had endured and had little hope that justice would be delivered.

Since 2016, justice officials working at the Mopti tribunal said that witnesses often failed to show up or respond to judicial summons for cases under investigation. They expressed frustration that community members often did not provide leads or contacts of those who could help provide evidence.

One high-level justice official said, “While we as prosecutors are obliged to open cases, and we do, it would help us immensely if victims and civil society groups who support them would put us in touch with witnesses, provide background information into the incident, and even file judicial complaints.”<sup>222</sup>

Ministry of Justice officials acknowledged the lack of trust between victims’ communities and the judiciary. As one member of the judiciary based in Mopti noted, “We have to start someplace. There needs to be a leap of faith. Our work can help address the impunity feeding ongoing abuse.”<sup>223</sup>

Some community leaders noted the lack of trust between victims and the state in general. They gave examples of having provided to Malian authorities the names of suspected perpetrators from militias and armed Islamist groups they had recognized at the scene of the crime, but said they were aware of few arrests resulting from the leads provided.<sup>224</sup> Victims groups also noted the dearth of information on existing investigations.

Several justice officials urged the judiciary and foreign donors to support the establishment and training of victims’ liaisons, attached to the judiciary, who could address the lack of contact between victims from all communities and the judiciary.

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<sup>222</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with justice official, Mopti region, December 14, 2018.

<sup>223</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with justice official, Sévaré, July 20, 2019.

<sup>224</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with Dogon, Peuhl, and Tellem community leaders, Bamako and Sévaré, 2018 and 2019.

Judicial experts, members of the Malian judiciary, and civil society leaders agreed on the need for more public education on how the justice system works within communities vulnerable to abuse. “There’s a desperate need for a sensitization campaign on the very pivotal function of the judiciary within Malian society,” one justice expert said, “including how to file a judicial complaint, the rights and responsibilities of the state and of victims, the role of the defense, different remedies available when a crime has occurred, civil and criminal procedures, and the roles of police, investigators and judges.”<sup>225</sup>

“The Justice Ministry needs to regain the trust of the victim population by elaborating a communication strategy around justice and investigations,” a civil society leader said. “This would raise the demand for and victim participation in justice, increase the national conversation about the importance of justice, and ultimately help reduce the terrible crimes we’re suffering in Mali.”<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Human Rights Watch phone interview with justice expert, Bamako, January 13, 2020.

<sup>226</sup> Human Rights Watch interview with civil society leader, Mopti, July 31, 2019.

## **International Support to the Malian Judiciary and Specialized Judicial Unit**

Mali's international partners, notably MINUSMA, the European Union, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), France, and the United States, have provided considerable assistance to the Malian judiciary, including to the Special Judicial Unit (SJU).

MINUSMA personnel present in Bamako, Mopti, Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal, notably those in the Human Rights section, Justice and Corrections section, and as part of the UN police component (UNPOL), provide considerable technical assistance, training and some equipment in support of justice sector reform and the restoration of rule of law. Training is provided to reduce arbitrary detentions and improve knowledge on international humanitarian law, international criminal law, human rights, gender-based violence, and counter-terrorism. Mission personnel also provide technical support to improve security and conditions in prisons and detention facilities.<sup>227</sup>



Armed Islamists on motorcycles in central Mali. Screen grab from video received by Human Rights Watch on January 22, 2020. © Private 2020.

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<sup>227</sup> MINUSMA, Justice and Corrections, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/justice-and-corrections> (accessed November 26, 2019).

To support the SJU, MINUSMA, jointly with UNODC, has trained magistrates, investigators and clerks; supplied equipment; provided logistical support including helicopters to transport judicial personnel to crime scenes; and provided mentoring. MINUSMA human rights investigators and other members of the mission have supported the SJU's investigations into some crimes, including Ogossagou and Sobane Da.<sup>228</sup>

From 2013-2018, the European Union, through its *Programme d'appui au secteur de la justice au Mali* (Support Program for the Mali Justice Sector, PAJM), provided technical support and conducts training for monitoring and supervision within the judicial system to reduce impunity and encourage more rapid delivery of justice. The PAJM supported rehabilitation and construction of courts in priority areas to improve local access to justice,<sup>229</sup> including in central Mali.<sup>230</sup> PAJM trained prison personnel on international detention standards and the rights of detainees to improve conditions in detention facilities.<sup>231</sup>

The EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP), a training mission for police, gendarmes and the national guard, supports the SJU and Special Investigation Brigade through training, equipment, and by playing an advisory role.<sup>232</sup> In 2019, the EU launched a program to improve access to justice and strengthen the judiciary, and<sup>233</sup> in 2020, the EU is launching a project to support the SJU.

The UNODC through its regional Sahel Programme, which is developed within the UN Regional Integrated Strategy for the Sahel 2014-2019, supports the establishment of the legal framework to address terrorism and organized crime and conducts training and

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<sup>228</sup> Human Rights Watch interviews with MINUSMA personnel, July 26, 2019 and November 12, 2019.

<sup>229</sup> European Union, Programmes sur la réforme de l'état et la consolidation de l'état de droit, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/presentation\\_projets\\_site\\_web.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/presentation_projets_site_web.pdf) (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>230</sup> "Inauguration du tribunal de grande instance de Segou: ' pour que le plumage puisse ressembler au ramage,'" *Maliweb*, October 19, 2019, <https://www.maliweb.net/societe/justice/inauguration-du-tribunal-de-grande-instance-de-segou-pour-que-le-plumage-puisse-ressembler-au-ramage-2844343.html> (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>231</sup> European Union, "Programme d'action annuel 2018 en faveur de la République du Mali à financer sur les Fonds européen de développement," January 2019, pp. 7 and 8 <https://www.gtaf.de/GTAI/Content/DE/Trade/Fachdaten/PRO/2019/01/Anlagen/PRO201901165007.pdf?v=1> (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>232</sup> EUCAP Sahel Mali, March 23, 2019, [https://eeas.europa.eu/csdp-missions-operations/eucap-sahel-mali/42540/eucap-trains-specialised-investigation-brigade-combatting-trafficking-persons-and-smuggling\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/csdp-missions-operations/eucap-sahel-mali/42540/eucap-trains-specialised-investigation-brigade-combatting-trafficking-persons-and-smuggling_en). (assessed January 9, 2020.)

<sup>233</sup> The European Union mobilises an extra €50 million for structural reforms in Mali, June 12, 2018, [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/european-union-mobilises-extra-euro50-million-structural-reforms-mali\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/european-union-mobilises-extra-euro50-million-structural-reforms-mali_en) (assesed November 27, 2019.)

mentoring. For the SJU, and jointly with MINUSMA, the UNODC provides mentors and training to law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and judges to improve investigatory and prosecutorial capacity, case management; and international cooperation.<sup>234</sup>

Throughout 2018, the Embassy of France in Mali supported a training program,<sup>235</sup> in collaboration with Lawyers Without Borders (*Avocats sans frontières*) and with the support of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for Malian magistrates on criminal justice, including for children and vulnerable persons, and international legal instruments.<sup>236</sup> They also support a few mentors working to reinforce the investigations capacity of the SJU, including for atrocity cases.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through its Mali Justice Program, conducts judicial trainings and outreach activities; trains and deploys paralegals throughout the country to improve local access to the justice system; and provides legal assistance to citizens affected by corruption.<sup>237</sup> USAID, together with the US State Department, provides advocacy training and capacity building activities for Malian civil society groups to improve their effectiveness in soliciting government response to cases of human rights abuse.<sup>238</sup> The State Department provides technical training to justice sector officials to improve the capacity for human rights litigation.<sup>239</sup> In early 2020, the US Department of Justice will support the SJU with a resident legal advisor from the US Bureau

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<sup>234</sup> UNODC: The Sahel Programme, :<https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/newrosenwebsite/sahel-programme/sahel-programme.html> (Assessed November 27, 2019.)and UNODC, “The Global Firearms Programme organized a national training course on investigation and prosecution,” December 2018, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/firearms-protocol/news/gfp-organised-a-national-training-course-on-investigation-and-prosecution-in-mali.html> (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>235</sup> L’ambassade de France à Bamako, “Séminaire des magistrats du Nord et du Centre du Mali sur l’éthique et la déontologie (12 et 13 février 2018) ,” March 9, 2018, <https://ml.ambafrance.org/Seminaire-des-magistrats-du-Nord-et-du-Centre-du-Mali-sur-l-ethique-et-la> (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>236</sup> L’ambassade de France à Bamako, “Lancement du projet de renforcement des magistrats du Nord du Mali,” April 2017, <https://ml.ambafrance.org/Lancement-du-projet-de-renforcement-des-magistrats-du-Nord-du-Mali-PROCAMANO-le> (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>237</sup> USAID, “USAID Mali Justice Program: Enhancing Justice Services,” March 2019, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/USAID\\_PDG\\_Mali\\_Justice\\_Project\\_Fact\\_Sheet - March 19.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/USAID_PDG_Mali_Justice_Project_Fact_Sheet - March 19.pdf) (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>238</sup> USAID, “Country Development Cooperation Strategy Mali Forward: 2015-2020,” p.27, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Mali\\_CDCS\\_2015-2020.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Mali_CDCS_2015-2020.pdf) (accessed November 26, 2019).

<sup>239</sup> USAID, “Country Development Cooperation Strategy Mali Forward: 2015-2020,” p.27, [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Mali\\_CDCS\\_2015-2020.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/Mali_CDCS_2015-2020.pdf) (accessed November 26, 2019).

of Counterterrorism to advise counterparts on legal reforms, rule of law, human rights, and the administration of justice.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup>Human Rights Watch email exchange with US Justice experts, October 20, 2019.

## **Recommendations**

### **To the Malian Government**

- Adequately equip and staff the Ministry of Justice so that local prosecutors and judicial police officers can effectively investigate and fairly prosecute those on all sides responsible for serious abuses.
- Accelerate deployment of police, gendarmes, and justice ministry officials to towns and villages in the areas affected by communal and armed Islamist violence.
- Increase measures to ensure judicial personnel working in central Mali are adequately protected so that they can conduct their work in a secure environment.
- Incorporate the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court into Malian criminal law to cover war crimes in non-international armed conflicts.
- Increase appropriate training for the judicial police on the penal code and judicial procedures; human rights; and specifically, ballistics and forensic science in support of criminal investigations.

### **To the Malian Judiciary**

- Provide adequate resources, equipment and support to Malian judges and other judicial personnel handling cases of communal violence.
- Specifically increase the number of magistrates and other personnel assigned to the Mopti Tribunal, notably to the Tribunal de Grande Instance de Mopti and the Cour d'Appel de Mopti. Ensure these positions are deployed year-round.
- Create a crime lab, or special forensic unit, in Mopti, and provide it with the means to deploy quickly to crime scenes and the capacity to collect, analyze and store scientific evidence including from ballistics, fingerprints, dental records, autopsies, and other physical evidence.
- Create and train victims' liaisons so as to facilitate greater contact and coordination between victims from all communities and the judiciary in central Mali.
- Prioritize the establishment of regional "satellite" offices of the Specialized Judicial Unit to Combat Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime (SJU).

- Launch a public information campaign within communities vulnerable to abuse on how the judicial system works with a view to promoting justice and appropriate investigations and prosecutions
- Elaborate and articulate a coherent prosecutorial, triage, and information-sharing strategy considering both the massive nature of atrocities and that atrocity cases are being investigated by both the regional courts and the SJU.

## To the Malian Security Forces

- Take all necessary measures to protect civilians at risk from communal and armed Islamist violence including by increasing patrolling and establishing additional security posts in vulnerable areas.
- Ensure the security forces protect all civilians impartially, regardless of their ethnicity or religion.
- Disarm all abusive armed groups and refer members credibly implicated in abuses, including those occupying command positions, for prosecution.

## To the Mopti Region Prosecutor and Prosecutor for the Specialized Judicial Unit against Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime

- Provide regular public accounting of the status of ongoing investigations for all communal and armed Islamist violence-related crimes in central Mali.
- Open criminal investigations into the serious communal violence-related crimes, including those documented in this report, and continue to appropriately prosecute those responsible in fair trials.
- Direct the gendarmes to promptly and impartially investigate all serious incidents of violence, regardless of the religious or ethnic identity of the victims.
- Hold community meetings in areas affected by communal violence to explain the steps taken to investigate alleged crimes and the government's intention to prosecute anyone implicated in retaliatory violence.

## To Ethnic Militias and Armed Islamist Groups Operating in Central Mali

- Immediately cease all attacks on towns and villages, extrajudicial killings, kidnappings, abductions, looting, and other serious abuses.
- Immediately release all civilian abductees in custody.
- Desist from any attacks and threats on livelihoods notably on farmers, herders and market people.
- Permit full, unhampered access to those investigating the grave violations documented in this report.
- Desist from using explosive devices in an indiscriminate manner.

## To the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court

- Consider opening preliminary investigations into the crimes documented in this report as possible war crimes or crimes against humanity that fall under ICC jurisdiction, should the Malian authorities fail to do so.

## To the African Union

- Monitor and support Malian domestic accountability efforts by publicly pressing for investigations into abuses against civilians.
- Increase technical support to the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel, strengthen its human rights component, and improve coordination between the Office of the High Representative, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), and AU human rights observers.
- Facilitate a fact-finding mission by the ACHPR, in line with ACHPR Resolution 419, to assess human rights violations against civilians in the context of intercommunal violence in Mopti region.
- Press the government of Mali to inform the ACHPR, in conformity with article 62 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, in its next periodic report, of measures taken to ensure the implementation of the recommendations contained in previous reports, resolutions, and observations, including those presented at the 58<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session in 2016 and in the final report of the 2013 Fact-Finding Mission.

## To Mali's International Partners (European Union, United Nations, France, United States and other foreign partners)

- Consistently and publicly press the Malian government to promptly investigate and appropriately prosecute all those implicated in communal violence.
- Assist the Malian judiciary in fairly prosecuting communal violence, including by supporting the creation of a case management system, witness protection program, and forensic capability.
- Support the training of Malian judicial personnel in best practices for investigating violent crimes, including collection and preservation of evidence, forensic analysis, criminal analysis, and effective and appropriate techniques in interviewing and protecting witnesses and interrogating suspects.
- Provide support to the Malian government to increase the capacity of magistrates and judiciary police officers to carry out credible, impartial, and independent investigations and prosecutions into communal violence and other grave crimes.
- Increase availability of air assets in support of Ministry of Justice personnel to assist their ability to conduct timely investigations in the aftermath of major atrocities.



A Dogon man walks with his son near their village in central Mali. © Ferdinand Reus 2008.

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# “How Much More Blood Must Be Spilled?”

## Atrocities Against Civilians in Central Mali, 2019

This report documents the killing of over 450 civilians in central Mali in dozens of attacks in 2019 by armed Islamist groups and ethnic militias that were formed to protect their communities from them. This was the most lethal year for civilians since the advent of Mali’s political-military crisis in 2012.

“How Much More Blood Must be Spilled” contains accounts from scores of witnesses who describe how these armed groups massacred civilians in their villages, gunned down those trying to flee, and summarily executed men taken from public transportation vehicles on the basis of their ethnicity. While most civilians were the targets of deliberate attacks, others were killed by explosive devices indiscriminately placed on roadways.

The report analyzes the lack of justice for these and past atrocities against civilians. The Malian government should hasten the disarmament of abusive armed groups and improve efforts to hold those responsible to account. Mali’s international partners should support these efforts.

*(above) Malian officials and local residents stand near freshly dug graves in the Dogon village of Sobane-Da after a June 9, 2019 attack by armed Peuhl men that left 35 dead.*

© Getty

*(front cover) A woman walks with her daughter past the remains of homes that were destroyed during the March 23, 2019 attack on Ogossagou village by armed Dogon men in which over 150 civilians were killed.*

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