



HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“None Can Run Away”

War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity
in Burkina Faso by All Sides

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

“None Can Run Away”

**War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity
in Burkina Faso by All Sides**

Copyright © 2026 Human Rights Watch

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 979-8-88708-279-0

Cover design by Ivana Vasic

Human Rights Watch defends the rights of people worldwide. We scrupulously investigate abuses, expose the facts widely, and pressure those with power to respect rights and secure justice. Human Rights Watch is an independent, international organization that works as part of a vibrant movement to uphold human dignity and advance the cause of human rights for all.

Human Rights Watch is an international organization with staff in more than 40 countries, and offices in Amsterdam, Beirut, Berlin, Brussels, Chicago, Geneva, Johannesburg, London, Los Angeles, Nairobi, New York, Paris, San Francisco, Sydney, Tokyo, Toronto, Tunis, Washington DC, and Zurich.

For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.hrw.org>



“None Can Run Away”
War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity
in Burkina Faso by All Sides

Summary.....1
Tracking Civilian Casualties and Incidents.....3
Political Instability and Restriction of Rights and Freedoms.....4
Abuses by the Burkinabè Military and VDPs6
JNIM Abuses6
JNIM Targeting of VDPs7
The Fulani Question7
Civilians Targeted by Warring Parties8
Justice and Accountability9
Burkinabè Armed Forces and JNIM Commanders Responsible for Mass Killings
and Other Abuses 10
Key Recommendations.....13
Methodology.....15
Glossary.....21
Key Actors and Alliances 21
Ethnicities and Languages 22
Note on Terminology..... 23
I. Background: The Conflict in Burkina Faso 25
Insurgencies by Islamist Armed Groups..... 25
Military Coups and Authoritarian Backsliding26
The Fulani Question: Marginalization, Stigmatization and Targeting with Impunity 32
Regional Alliances to Counter JNIM and IS Sahel, and Global Influences 41
Peace Negotiations 44
II. Parties to the Conflict..... 46
Government Security Forces46

Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIRs)	47
National Theater Operations Command (Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National, COTN)	51
Provost Marshals	52
Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (Volontaires Pour la Défense de la Patrie, VDPs)	53
Army	55
Islamist Armed Groups	56
Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, JNIM).....	56
Areas of Operation.....	58
Recruitment.....	60
Structure and Chain of Command	61
Propaganda Dissemination	62
Sanctions and Accountability.....	63
III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs.....	66
Circumstances of Abuses	66
Attacks Against Fulani Civilians on the Basis of Ethnicity	68
Attacks Against Civilians for Presumed Collaboration with JNIM	68
Attacks Against Civilians During Operations to Secure Supply or Other Convoys	69
1st Military Region (North and Center-North administrative regions)	71
Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North Region, February 2023	71
Zambanga, Center-North Region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023	73
Karma, North Region, April 20, 2023	76
Barsalogo, Center-North Region, April 20, 2023.....	77
Nondin and Soro, North Region, February 25, 2024.....	78
Torobo and Ouahigouya, North Region, May 2024	80
Touka, Center-North Region, July 13, 2024.....	81
2 nd Military Region (Cascades, South-West, and Hauts-Bassins administrative regions)	82
Man, Hauts-Bassins Region, February 2023	82
Pê, Hauts-Bassins Region, mid-late May 2023.....	83
Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins Region, July 8, 2023	84
Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins Region, September 2023	86
Bassé, Hauts-Bassins Region, late November 2023	87
Niangoloko, Cascades Region, June 14, 2024	91
Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins Region, January 31, 2025	92
3rd Military Region (Center-South, Center-West, and Plateau Central administrative regions)	98
Gomboussougou, Center-South Region, February 2023	98
Sissili province, Center-West Region, April 2023	100

4 th Military Region (Sahel Administrative region).....	102
Guide, Sahel Region, January-March 2023.....	102
Ekeou, Sahel Region, February 15, 2023.....	103
Gangaol, Sahel Region, April 3, 2023.....	104
Mansila, Sahel Region, June 1, 2023.....	105
Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel Region, December 11-14, 2023.....	107
Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel Region, January–March 2025.....	131
Gaskindé, Sahel Region, February 20, 2025.....	142
5 th Military Region (Boucle du Mouhoun Administrative Region)	145
Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, June 2023.....	145
Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, November 23, 2023.....	147
Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, January 2024.....	148
Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, August 15, 2024.....	150
Operation Green Whirlwind 2 (Opération Tourbillon Vert 2), Boucle du Mouhoun Region, February 27 – April 2, 2025.....	151
6 th Military Region (Center-East and East Administrative Regions)	157
Petit Zabré, Center-East Region, February 2023.....	157
Békouré, Center-East Region, February 2023.....	158

IV. JNIM Abuses.....162

Unlawful Killings, Summary Executions.....	162
Destruction and Looting of Civilian Property	162
Unlawful Forced Displacement.....	163
Sieges	164
Circumstances of the Attacks.....	165
Boucle du Mouhoun Region.....	167
Doubala, January 5, 2024.....	167
Diamahoun, July 16, 2024.....	168
North Region.....	169
Zomkalga, Séguénéga District, April 22, 2024.....	169
Goubré, May 22, 2024.....	172
Séguénéga, March 15, 2025.....	173
Baani, March 15, 2025.....	176
Youba, August 3 and 11, 2025.....	178
Center-North Region.....	180
Barsalogo, August 24, 2024.....	180
Loulouka, August 18, 2025.....	181
East Region	183
Bantambougou, January 7, 2023.....	183

Mahadaga, January 23, 2023.....	184
Namponkoré, December 15, 2023.....	185
Barhiaga, May 19, 2024	186
Diapaga, May 12, 2025.....	186
Hauts-Bassins Region	189
Sindo, June 11, 2024	189
Niamana, June 30, 2024.....	190
Dé, mid-September 2024	190
Sindo, September 18, 2024	192
Gondaga, September 25 and 26, 2024.....	193
Sambabougou, October 2, 2024.....	195
Sindo, July 31, 2025	197
Sahel Region	199
Mansila, June 11, 2024	199
Djibo, May 11, 2025.....	199
V. International Legal Standards.....	202
Unlawful Attacks.....	203
Forced Displacement.....	204
Pillage and Destruction of Civilian Property	205
Collective Punishment	205
War Crimes	205
Ethnic Cleansing	206
Crimes Against Humanity	207
Murder and Enforced Disappearance	208
Torture	209
Persecution	209
Forced Displacement	210
Legal Findings.....	210
Rights of Displaced People	213
Right to Redress.....	214
VI. Military Commanders Implicated in Abuses	216
Capt. Ibrahim Traoré	219
Col. Maj./Brig. Gen. Kassoum Coulibaly	219
Col. Maj./Brig. Gen. Célestin Simporé	220
Col./Brig. Gen. Moussa Diallo.....	222
Col. Théophile Nikièma	225
Col. Maj. David Kabré	227

Col. Adam Néré	228
Cdt./Lt. Col. Lassané Porgo	228
Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga	229
Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba	230
Cdt./Lt. Col. Jean Marie Syriouma	231
Col. Hamed Hermann Rouamba	231
Capt. Amadou Sanou	232
Cdt./Lt. Col. Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly	232
Capt. Wendpanga David Ouédraogo.....	233
Capt. Abdoul Aziz Ouattara	234
Capt. Papa Parfait Kambou	234
Capt. K. Farouk Azaria. T Sorgho	235
Lt. Col./Col. Éric D. Some Dabiré	235
Cdt./Lt. Col. Abdoul Rachid Sawadogo	235
VII. JNIM Leaders in Positions of Command	237
VIII. Prospects for Accountability	239
National Legal Proceedings	239
Regional and International Accountability Perspectives	243
Recommendations	246
Appendices	255
Appendix I: Burkina Faso Military Chain of Command in Reported Incidents.....	255
1st Military Region (North and Center-North Administrative Regions)	255
2nd Military Region (Cascades, South-West, and Hauts-Bassins Administrative Regions)	269
3rd Military Region (Center-South, Center-West, and Plateau Central Administrative Regions)	283
4th Military Region (Sahel Administrative Region)	287
5th Military Region (Boucle du Mouhoun Administrative Region)	299
6th Military Region (Center-East and East Administrative Regions)	310
Appendix II: Software-Assisted Analysis of Primary Sources	314
Content Extraction	314
Database Graphical User Interface (GUI)	314
Report Impacts	315
Acknowledgments.....	316

Summary

I found my family and my neighbor's family massacred. My wives [and] my children were dead.... The only survivor [from my family] was my 11-year-old son.... I found the bodies lying on the ground, bullets in their heads, chests, stomachs. My little one was wounded in the left leg.... I took him out of a pile of corpses. I found five other injured children from my neighbor's family.

–Samer [not his real name], a resident of Bouro village, Sahel region, February 6, 2024

On December 14, 2023, Burkina Faso military forces and allied militias killed 19 of Samer's relatives in an attack on his neighborhood in Bouro village.

Alone, amid bodies and devastation, Samer tended to six injured children. "I started caring for them with what I had," he told Human Rights Watch. "I made bandages with clothes I tore off. I did this all evening. There was no one in Bouro. All had fled." Samer then took the children and fled to neighboring Mali.

Since 2016, Islamist armed groups have waged an insurgency against the government of Burkina Faso. The Al-Qaeda-linked Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, JNIM), the dominant Islamist armed group in Burkina Faso, controls wide swathes of the country, where it attacks security forces and kills civilians and loots their property, causing thousands to flee.

"They started shooting toward all directions of the camp and I ran to find shelter," Abdoul (not his real name), a 39-year-old farmer who lived in a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Goubéré village, North Region, told Human Rights Watch in June 2024. "People screamed, there was a lot of panic because we were about to receive food aid [...] Then, they burned the truck carrying humanitarian aid."

On May 22, 2024, JNIM fighters attacked the IDP camp in Goubéré, killing over 70 civilians, allegedly to punish those who refused to join JNIM ranks.

In response to JNIM's attacks, the Burkina Faso authorities have carried out brutal counterinsurgency campaigns that, since the military took power in a September 2022, coup, has increasingly targeted civilians.

Human Rights Watch documented widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Burkinabè forces alongside their auxiliaries called the Volontaires for the Défense de la Patrie (Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland, VDPs) and by JNIM. Our findings demonstrate that killings and other grave abuses of civilians lie at the heart of the junta's military tactics as well as those of JNIM.

This report documents 57 incidents that altogether resulted in the deaths of at least 1,837 civilians in 11 regions of the country between January 2023 and August 2025. In one such attack, on February 25, 2024, in the villages of Nondin and Soro in northern Yatenga province, the Burkinabè military summarily executed 223 civilians, including at least 56 children, accusing them of collaborating with JNIM. In another, on August 24, 2024, JNIM killed at least 133 civilians, including dozens of children, in Barsalogo in Sanmatenga province, in retaliation against a local community it accused of supporting the VDPs. These and the other incidents documented in this report do not fully capture the extent of the civilian toll of the conflict, as incidents often go unreported. According to the United Nations, about two million people have been displaced by the armed conflict.

Human Rights Watch found that the abuses by government forces, including VDPs, and by JNIM amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Combatants on all sides have committed the war crimes of willful killing, attacks on civilians and civilian objects, pillage and looting, and forced displacement. Government forces and VDPs also carried out the war crimes of torture or inhuman and degrading treatment and unlawful confinement.

As part of widespread or systematic attacks on civilian populations, the murder and forcible displacement by all sides amount to crimes against humanity. Government forces have also carried out the crimes against humanity of arbitrary imprisonment, torture, enforced disappearance, and other inhumane acts.

Burkinabè military and VDPs have also committed persecution on ethnic grounds, specifically targeting the Fulani community, the country's second largest ethnic group. In numerous attacks across the country, they have targeted members of the Fulani community, killing entire families, burning and looting their property, and forcibly displacing hundreds of thousands from their homes.

Capt. Ibrahim Traoré, the head of Burkina Faso's military junta and the country's president, has rejected that the country is in an armed conflict. He has dismissed accounts from survivors of atrocities and credible reports from media and human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, as “fake” or “manipulation.” Junta authorities have also repeatedly rejected allegations that their security forces and VDPs have committed serious crimes. None of the commanders of the Burkinabè armed forces or JNIM who have been implicated in serious crimes, including in the cases included in this report, have been brought to justice. This includes either direct criminal liability or as a matter of command responsibility.

Human Rights Watch's previous research, published across dozens of reports and news releases from September 2017 to May 2022, documented numerous allegations of atrocities perpetrated by all sides, provided background and context, and suggests a pre-existing pattern of atrocities by all sides.

This report is the first effort to systematically document abuses in more recent years with a view to capturing the scale and impact of the conflict in Burkina Faso. It is based on a total of 450 interviews—including with 380 victims of abuses—conducted by Human Rights Watch between March 2023 and February 2026, remotely and in person in Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Mali. The report also draws from verification and analysis of photographs, videos, satellite imagery, and documents shared by various organizations and individuals, as well as other publicly available information, including social media content and official reports.

Tracking Civilian Casualties and Incidents

The civilian death toll in the conflict in Burkina Faso is unknown as there is no mechanism in place to count victims. Some figures are available, such as from Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED)—a nongovernmental organization that collects and analyzes data on

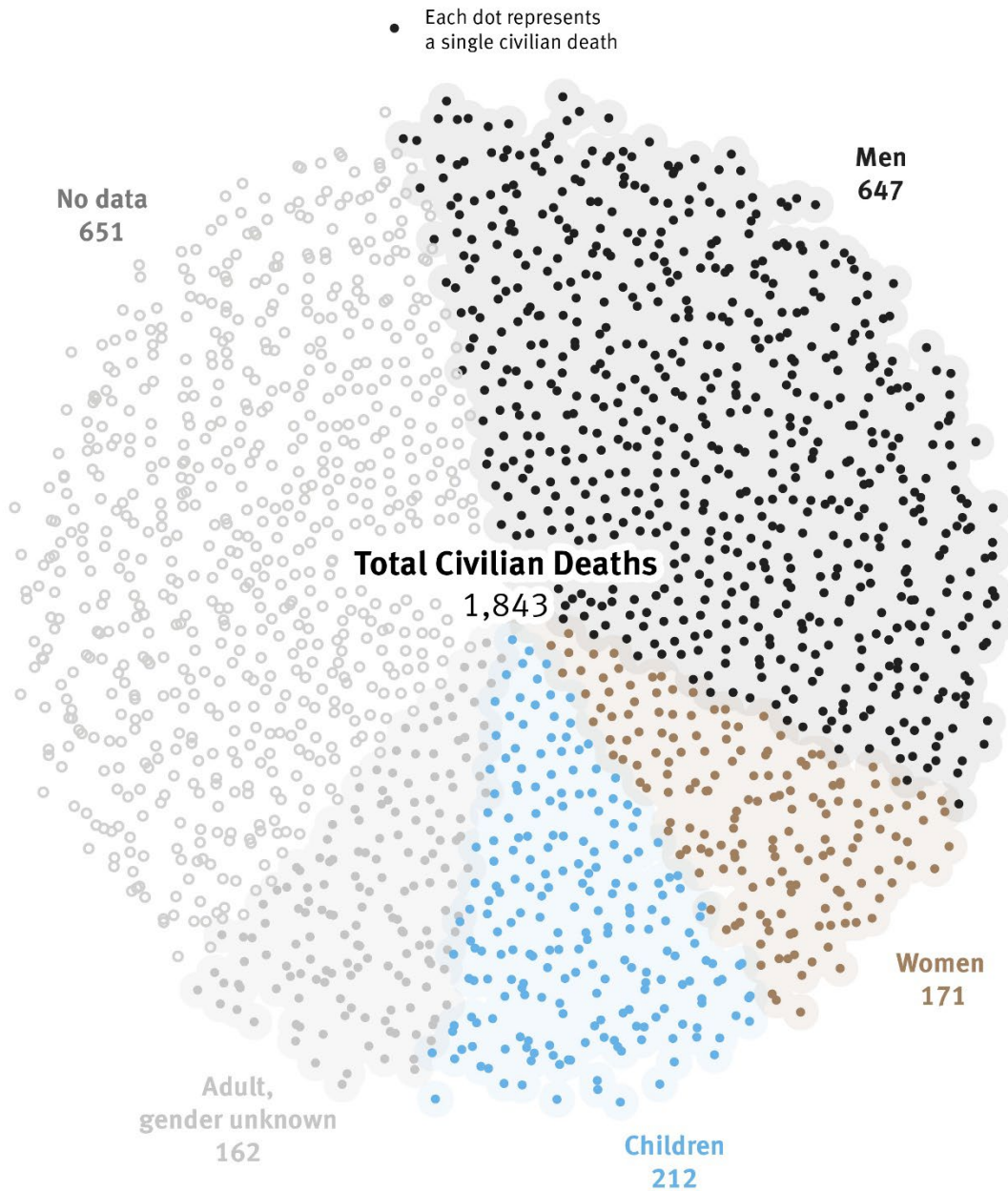
conflict worldwide—that show that at least 10,600 civilians have been killed since 2016. However, many incidents go unreported. In addition, Human Rights Watch’s own documentation of some of the same cases, based on witness accounts, found a higher number of fatalities. Human Rights Watch also found that the government often suppressed or downplayed conflict-related data and information by banning media outlets from critical reporting, blocking access to websites of media outlets and human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, and suspending the licenses of foreign nongovernmental organizations documenting security incidents. This reduces conflict-related information to the official government narrative, making accurate reporting more difficult. About 56 percent of the cases documented by Human Rights Watch did not appear in the ACLED database, underscoring the difficulties of this data collection.

Political Instability and Restriction of Rights and Freedoms

The conflict has transformed Burkina Faso’s politics and civic life. In 2022, the country faced two coups in eight months. In September 2022, President Traoré ousted Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, who had been in power since January 2022, when he himself led a coup overthrowing the democratically elected president, Roch Marc Christian Kaboré. Under Traoré, the junta has cited the need to counter activities from Islamist armed groups as a pretext to suppress fundamental rights and freedoms, including through arbitrary arrest, enforced disappearance, and unlawful conscription of political opponents, dissidents, human rights activists, journalists, and judicial personnel. Political instability has provided opportunities for Islamist armed groups to gain territory. It has also led to a deterioration of the country’s human rights situation and further entrenched impunity for serious abuses.

Civilian Deaths in Burkina Faso Documented by Human Rights Watch

January 2023 – April 2025



Source: Human Rights Watch incident data.

© 2026 Matteo Bettini for Human Rights Watch

Abuses by the Burkinabè Military and VDPs

President Traoré has relied heavily on the VDP auxiliary forces to support the military in counterinsurgency operations. Both the military and the VDPs have committed grave crimes, including the killing and forced displacement of civilians, especially from the Fulani ethnic group, whom they accuse of supporting the insurgency. They have fired on civilians in the path of military-escorted convoys and, during large-scale counterinsurgency operations, have massacred civilians from various ethnic groups simply because they lived in JNIM-controlled areas or maintained relations with local Fulani people.

Attacks against civilians in retaliation for JNIM attacks have become a hallmark of the military's counterinsurgency approach. Human Rights Watch has found that some attacks directed by the Burkinabè military against civilians constitute a form of collective punishment. International humanitarian law prohibits collective punishment, which is the deliberate punishment of people for an offense that others committed.

Bouro, Samer's village, in the Sahel region, was one of at least 16 villages and hamlets government forces and VDPs attacked in December 2023, in a punitive operation dubbed Tchéfari 2 (The Warrior's Honey 2). Soldiers and VDPs targeted communities living under JNIM rule, killing hundreds of civilians. The operation was an apparent reprisal for a major JNIM attack against government forces two weeks earlier in Djibo town, 30 kilometers away, in which JNIM killed several soldiers and at least 40 civilians. The government hailed Tchéfari 2 as a "success" against JNIM, when in reality it was one in a series of atrocities against civilians.

JNIM Abuses

JNIM also targets civilians in its effort to establish territorial control over rural areas. It has used violence and coercion to subjugate populations and has punished and forcibly displaced communities that refused to submit, or that it accused of supporting government forces. JNIM has also laid siege to dozens of towns and villages across Burkina Faso, causing starvation and illness among residents and displaced people. Under the laws of war, sieges are unlawful when they cut civilians off from food, basic necessities, and humanitarian aid. JNIM fighters have planted improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on roads and destroyed bridges, electric lines, water sources, and communications infrastructure, harming the civilian population. They have also attacked

humanitarian convoys as well as villages and towns, summarily executed civilians, and abducted women and girls.

JNIM Targeting of VDPs

Many communities have become more vulnerable to attacks by JNIM since the civilian government led by Kaboré created the VDPs in 2020, and the military junta conducted additional recruitment in late 2022. When a community has VDPs, JNIM treats that entire community as being allied with government security forces, making the community a target for retaliation, attacks, and intimidation. JNIM has imposed sieges on localities where VDPs are present, cutting off civilians from food and necessities and limiting their freedom of movement. Usually, JNIM has targeted VDP positions close to civilians in villages and towns. Thus, when JNIM attacked a VDP position, civilians were also exposed. “Since the VDPs were created, there is chaos,” a Burkinabè refugee in Mali said. “If a village is spared by the jihadists [Islamist armed groups] ... [it] is targeted by the VDPs and the military, and if the VDPs protect a village, or if a village has VDPs, this village is targeted by jihadists.”

The Fulani Question

The Fulani people, who are spread across the Sahel region, make up about 8 percent of the population of Burkina Faso. Historically, they have been cattle herders and are predominantly Muslim.

Government forces and VDPs accuse Fulani people of supporting JNIM. While JNIM has focused its recruitment efforts on disaffected youth in the Fulani community, exploiting the continual degradation of the Fulani people’s pastoralist livelihood and the community’s underrepresentation in the government and military, government forces have often failed to distinguish between armed Fulani combatants and civilian members of this community.

In a February 2023 meeting with Fulani leaders, President Traoré enjoined them to “acknowledge that the epicenter of terrorism is in Fulani localities,” adding that members should “call on [their] relatives to disassociate themselves from the forces of evil [Islamist armed groups].” “Otherwise,” he said, “we will throw all our forces into the battle and there will be a lot of deaths. And it will be more complicated for your community. It’s not fun to kill, but if one has no choice, it’s death.”

Human Rights Watch found that the targeting of Fulani people stems in part from widely shared attitudes and stereotypes about their loyalties that pervade the military and the VDPs. The highest levels of government appear supportive of military action against Fulani people based on these attitudes. The evidence includes: the geographic scope of the targeting of civilians and the increase in the intensity of anti-Fulani violence since the current junta took power; anti-Fulani statements by senior officials including the president; and many attacks that demonstrate a close coordination between the military and the VDPs across military units and layers of military hierarchy. Taken together, this indicates that the targeting of the Fulani goes well beyond abuses by isolated, ill-disciplined individuals within the ranks of the military and the VDPs, and that it may represent government policy.

A civil society activist and critic of the junta who was kidnapped and unlawfully conscripted into a VDP group told Human Rights Watch that, when he was about to be released in September 2023, he met Lt. Aziz Pacmogda, at the time head of the presidential guard. The activist said that Pacmogda asked him and another person “if we think it is easy to secure the country.” Pacmogda said those who went to the frontlines “saw that it is the Fulani who are the terrorists. He said: ‘People say that this is discrimination, but we are going to kill them all!’”

Anti-Fulani rhetoric is widespread online, with charged social media posts frequently painting all Fulani people as members of Islamist armed groups and encouraging hate and violence against them. Social media influencers and supporters of the junta, called “Wayiyans,” who have a large social media presence, including through groups known as BIR-C (Bataillons d’Intervention Rapide de la communication, or Rapid Communication Intervention Battalions), appear to be presenting coordinated negative messaging about Fulani people.

Civilians Targeted by Warring Parties

While government forces and VDPs have disproportionately targeted Fulani civilians, other communities have not been spared. Civilians described feeling caught between a rock and a hard place. JNIM members threaten to kill them if they join the VDPs, are deemed to collaborate with the army, or fail to abide by JNIM’s requirements and strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law. Meanwhile, government forces demand that civilians provide

information about the presence of armed groups and carry out collective punishment, including mass killings, when people do not know or cannot provide such information.

The government's counterinsurgency strategy appears to be failing even on its own terms: belying the government's claims that it has regained control of territory, JNIM has been expanding its control and is present throughout most of the country. Moreover, abuses by the Burkinabè military and VDPs have fed further Islamist armed group recruitment.

Justice and Accountability

Amid the rampant abuses, the government has failed to bring to justice a single member of its armed forces for serious crimes. In November 2025, in a rare move, a military court in north-western Burkina Faso convicted six VDPs for murder and mutilating a corpse. On a few occasions, in response to reports filed by victims and information collected by human rights groups, international organizations and the media, the authorities promised to investigate reports of mass killings of civilians by the military and VDPs but subsequently failed to do so. Investigations by the Specialized Judicial Unit Against Terrorism-Related Crimes (Pôle judiciaire spécialisé dans la répression des actes de terrorisme), which deals with all alleged crimes by members of Islamist armed groups, have moved slowly. Additionally, the Specialized Judicial Unit's lack of sufficient resources has contributed to undermining suspects' fair trial rights.

The grievous harm suffered by civilians in the conflict and the junta's suppression of public dissent and criticism mean that Burkina Faso's international partners—including the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and their member states, and the United States—need to play a critical role to break the country's long-standing cycles of abuses and impunity and promote accountability.

The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) should open a preliminary examination into war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by all parties to the conflict in Burkina Faso since September 2022. The Burkinabè junta, alongside those of Mali and Niger, announced its intention to withdraw from the ICC in September 2025. Under the ICC's Rome Statute, withdrawal from the ICC only comes into effect one year after the state has formally notified the United Nations secretary-general of its decision.

All governments should investigate and, as appropriate, effectively prosecute individuals suspected of committing serious international crimes in Burkina Faso through the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws with international fair trial standards.

Burkina Faso's international partners should also consider imposing targeted sanctions against abusive military and JNIM commanders across levels of their respective hierarchies when responsibilities are clearly established, including those mentioned in this report.

There are limited regional avenues for victims to pursue justice. Burkina Faso's withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) means its citizens cannot appeal to the regional body's Community Court of Justice. Given Burkina Faso's turn away from ECOWAS, it is doubtful the government would comply with rulings from the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

Burkinabè Armed Forces and JNIM Commanders Responsible for Mass Killings and Other Abuses

The research found that the gravest and deadliest attacks on civilians by the Burkinabè military and VDPs during the period covered in this report, including the massacres of hundreds of civilians near Solenzo in March 2025 and in villages and hamlets north of Djibo in December 2023, were carried out as part of large-scale operations—Green Whirlwind 2 and Tchéfari 2, respectively—coordinated across government forces and involving soldiers from the regular army and the Rapid Intervention Battalions (Bataillons d'Intervention Rapide, BIR), a military force involved in counterinsurgency operations, and the VDPs, all acting in tandem. These operations indicate that the large-scale killing of civilians was a result of government policy.

For many of the incidents documented in this report, Human Rights Watch, in collaboration with the nongovernmental research group Security Force Monitor, established the chain of command identifying members of Burkinabè armed forces who had formal responsibility over the forces involved in the abuses. Under the doctrine of command responsibility, military commanders and civilian officials may be liable for serious international crimes committed by their subordinates when superiors knew or should have known of the crimes but failed to take reasonable measures to prevent the crimes or punish those responsible.

This report names senior military officials whom Human Rights Watch believes may be responsible for the mass killings and other abuses documented in this report as a matter of command responsibility.

As President of the Transition and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Capt. Ibrahim Traoré should be impartially investigated for criminal liability for all abuses by the Burkinabè military and VDPs documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of command responsibility. Brig. Gen. Kassoum Coulibaly, Brig. Gen. Célestin Simporé, Brig. Gen. Moussa Diallo, Col. Théophile Nikièma, Col. Maj. David Kabré, and Col. Adam Néré should also be investigated as to whether they are criminally liable as a matter of command responsibility for serious abuses documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes.

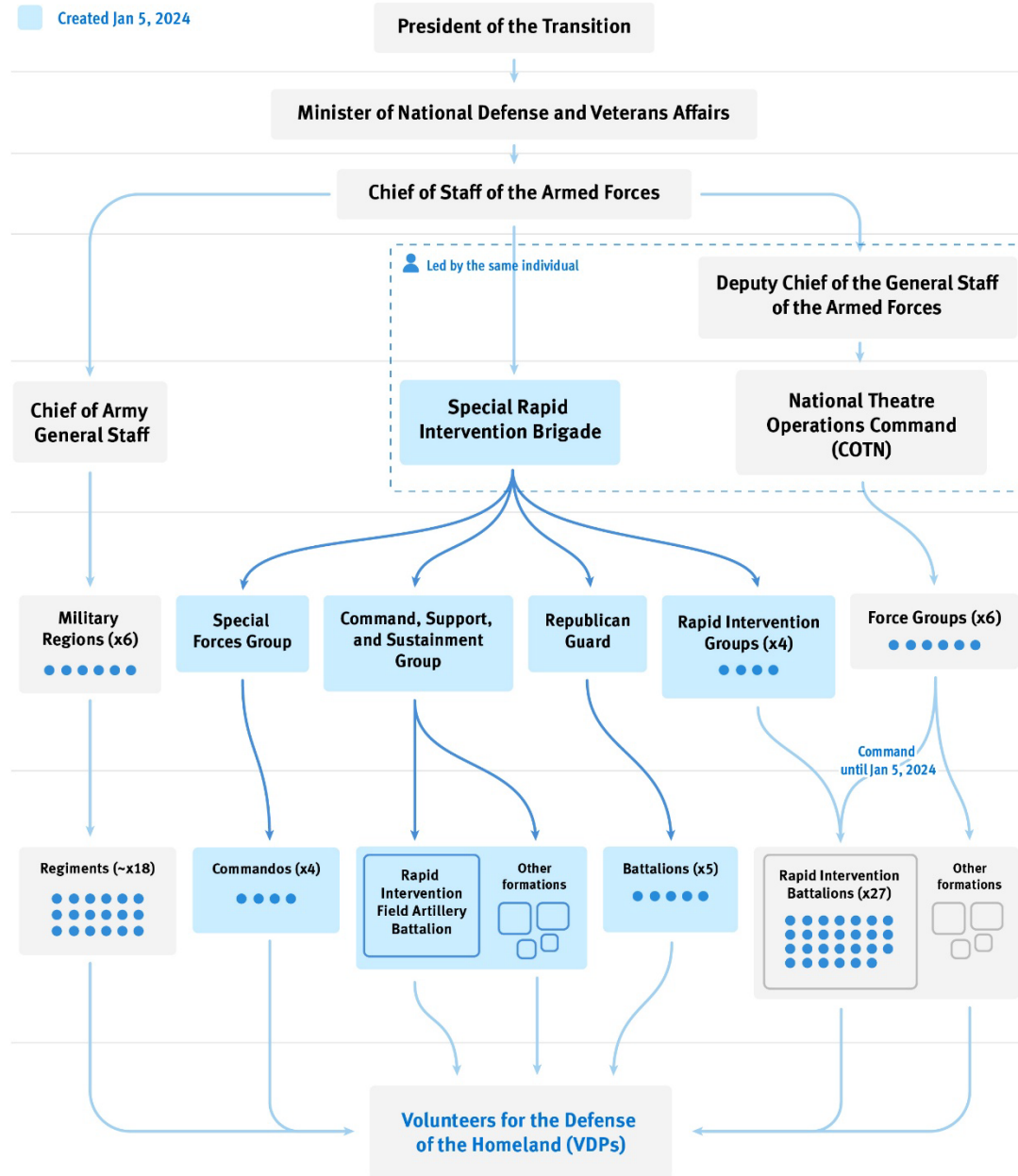
This report—which found that JNIM has systematically targeted civilians during numerous attacks across Burkina Faso—also names senior JNIM commanders implicated in abuses. Iyad Ag Ghaly, JNIM supreme leader, and Amadou Kouffa, JNIM second-in-command, should be impartially investigated for criminal liability for JNIM abuses documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of command responsibility. Jafar Dicko, leader of JNIM in Burkina Faso, Ousmane Dicko, Jafar Dicko’s brother and deputy commander of JNIM in Burkina Faso, and Abou Hanifa, JNIM leader in the Niger region but also operating in southeastern Burkina Faso, should all be investigated as to whether they are criminally liable for JNIM abuses documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of command responsibility.

The Burkinabè government should impartially investigate all individuals cited in this report for alleged legal responsibility for serious crimes in Burkina Faso and appropriately prosecute them in fair criminal proceedings.

The path toward a rights-respecting Burkina Faso will be difficult. In the meantime, civilians are bearing the terrible burden of both an insurgency and a military-led government that are committing atrocity crimes with impunity. Civilian protection and accountability cannot wait.

The Chain of Command in the Burkinabé Military

January 2023 – January 2024



Source: Human Rights Watch incident data with research support by Security Force Monitor.

© 2026 Matteo Bettini for Human Rights Watch

Key Recommendations

To the Government of Burkina Faso

- Investigate and appropriately discipline or prosecute, in accordance with international fair trial standards, security force personnel and VDPs and members of Islamist armed groups responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other international crimes. Promptly make findings of investigations public.
- Coordinate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to seek technical, financial, and logistical assistance for domestic investigative and judicial bodies.
- Suspend, pending investigations, security force personnel and VDPs credibly implicated in serious rights abuses.
- Adopt robust measures at the national level to counter discrimination, stigmatization, and violence against the Fulani community, including by publicly denouncing abuses against Fulani.
- Increase resources to provide mental health support for members of the armed forces.

To the Armed Forces of Burkina Faso

- Publicly order all armed forces and VDPs to fully abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law, including by taking all feasible measures to minimize civilian harm.
- Take all necessary measures to protect civilians during counterinsurgency operations and ensure that such operations are in line with international human rights and humanitarian law.

To JNIM

- Cease all unlawful killings, kidnappings, looting, forced displacement, and other serious human rights abuses, as well as threats of violence against civilians.
- Publicly order all JNIM fighters to abide by international human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Ensure lawful treatment of enemy combatants captured during operations, notably that all soldiers and VDPs captured should be treated humanely.

- Immediately lift sieges on villages and cities that unlawfully deprive civilians of access to food, water, necessities and humanitarian aid, and allow free movement of civilians.
- Allow full, safe, and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel and the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance in areas under JNIM control.

To the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court

- Open a preliminary examination into the situation in Burkina Faso, including alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity documented in this report.

To the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

- Conduct robust monitoring and regular public reporting on the rights situation in Burkina Faso and take measures to address impunity and advance accountability for serious abuses.

To all Governments

- Investigate and, as appropriate, effectively prosecute individuals suspected of committing serious international crimes in Burkina Faso through the principle of universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws with international fair trial standards.
- Use public and private diplomacy with Burkina Faso’s government to call on the authorities to conduct fair and effective domestic accountability efforts and to rescind any effort to withdraw from the International Criminal Court.

To Burkina Faso’s International Partners, Including the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States

- Impose targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, on military commanders, officials, and JNIM leaders responsible for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Burkina Faso, including the people identified in this report.
- Abstain from cooperating with and providing any military support to the Burkinabè military to avoid such support being used to commit abuses.

Methodology

This report is based on 450 interviews and verification and analysis of open-source material, including official media and other reports, videos, photographs, and satellite imagery. It documents 57 incidents in 11 regions of the country between January 2023 and August 2025.

Human Rights Watch conducted interviews remotely and in person between March 2023 and February 2026 in Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Mali. Interviewees included 380 victims and witnesses of attacks and their relatives as well as 70 religious and community leaders, VDPs, former Burkinabè government officials, experts on the political and security situation of the Sahel, journalists, Burkinabè civil society activists, members of international organizations, and foreign diplomats. At least 220 interviews were conducted in person in Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Ghana, and 160 were conducted by phone.

Nearly all victims and witnesses to abuse interviewed for this report expressed extreme anxiety about retaliation. For this reason, Human Rights Watch has withheld the names of all interviewees, as well as identifying details, including some locations. The names of interviewees have been replaced with initials that do not reflect those of their real names.

Interviews were conducted in French, Bambara, Fulfulde, Gourmantche, and Mooré, at times, through interpreters who translated into French or English.

Researchers informed all interviewees about the purpose and voluntary nature of the interviews and the ways in which Human Rights Watch would use the information as well as obtained consent from all interviewees. Every effort was made to abide by best practices for ethical research and the documentation of serious abuses, such as torture, and to minimize the risk of re-traumatization of survivors. For in-person interviews, we took measures to access and meet with victims and witnesses discreetly and in confidential settings. We informed all interviewees that they could stop or pause the interview at any time and could decline to answer questions or discuss topics. We did not pay for interviews but covered transportation costs to and from interview locations as needed.

The credibility of each source was assessed. Researchers also probed the veracity of their statements by corroborating information from several other sources and determining consistency with overall patterns that emerged during the research.

Researchers documented the abuses in this report in the face of serious challenges. Burkinabè authorities have brutally cracked down on opposition and dissent and blocked and suspended independent national and international media outlets, fostering an atmosphere of fear across the country. In addition, restrictions on movement and risks of attacks on roads by the warring sides dissuaded some potential witnesses from traveling to meet researchers.

Documenting Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

During the research, the team heard several direct reports of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). These cases were difficult to further document without risking the safety, privacy, and well-being of victims and survivors. Human Rights Watch interviewed representatives of four multilateral and civil society organizations to whom victims and survivors of sexual violence might have reported their abuse or might have been referred to for medical attention.

Human Rights Watch also identified the presence of multiple warning indicators of CRSV as laid out in the UN’s “Early-Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.”¹

The indicators can signal that there is potential risk, impending risk, or ongoing sexual violence. Examples of indicators for potential risk of sexual violence include: retaliatory attacks against the civilian population for perceived support of/collaboration with the “enemy;” arms bearers undertaking house raids and searches, particularly where women are alone in the home. Examples of indicators of ongoing sexual violence include: observable signs of rampage (burned homes, destroyed crops, looted villages, torn clothing, displaced women/civilians); armed

¹ UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, “Matrix: Early-Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,” March 2022, <https://www.stoprabenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Matrix-Early-Warning-Indicators-of-CRSV-Online-Version.pdf> (accessed December 2, 2025).

elements engage in violent reprisals against civilians in the wake of military operations; attacks on villages in order to replenish supplies/on farmers en route to fields, or women returning from market, coupled with abduction of civilians to carry the stolen goods; women/girls fleeing an area where armed elements are stationed.

The absence of these factors does not rule out sexual violence, nor does their presence confirm it. Similarly, the absence of fully documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence in this report should not be taken as an indication that conflict-related sexual violence is not occurring in this context.

Human Rights Watch has in recent years documented cases of conflict-related sexual violence in Burkina Faso, as described in greater detail in the background section of this report.

There is no official death toll of people killed in the conflict in Burkina Faso, as no national mechanism exists to track civilian casualties. Human Rights Watch researchers used data from ACLED, an organization tracking conflict events worldwide, to assess the scale of violent events against civilians that were publicly reported and for which ACLED aggregated minimum estimate counts of civilians killed.

For the numbers of civilians killed in incidents documented in this report, Human Rights Watch has used the numbers witnesses provided, corroborated through other independent sources whenever possible. In cases of conflicting accounts, Human Rights Watch sought to verify the most reliable figures and indicated where numbers remain uncertain or inconsistent.

Human Rights Watch research found that in some of the cases documented in this report—especially those implicating the military in abuses—the casualty toll for civilians was higher than that reported by ACLED, including because sometimes ACLED used government-related sources. Human Rights Watch found that the government often downplayed or manipulated conflict-related data and information, making accurate reporting difficult.

Researchers also used ACLED, among other sources, to help determine approximate dates of incidents, as in many cases victims and witnesses could not remember the exact date, due to trauma and because months or years had passed since the incidents they witnessed had occurred.

Researchers analyzed photographs and videos taken during or after attacks and sent directly to them, as well as photographs, videos and written content posted across social media platforms, including ChirpWire (used by JNIM), Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp, and X.

Where possible, researchers geolocated the photographs and videos by matching key landmarks with satellite imagery and witness accounts. Researchers also analyzed timestamps of content posted on social media platforms.

Researchers analyzed satellite images of the locations where the incidents documented in this report occurred in order to geolocate photographs and videos, verify and establish the timeline of incidents, detect signs of burning and destruction. Researchers also used satellite images of the locations of the incidents to monitor the movement of military forces and equipment, reconstruct military convoy routes, confirm the construction and expansion of military trenches, analyze the expansion of gravesites after attacks, and document the abandonment of villages following forced displacement and the dismantling of camps for internally displaced people following attacks.

In addition, researchers analyzed visual content and any associated captions and narration to identify actors involved in attacks, and count the number of women, men, girls, and boys who were killed or injured. Human Rights Watch consulted with forensic pathologists who analyzed injuries on the photographs of bodies and shared their assessment of the circumstances of deaths. Arms experts at Human Rights Watch reviewed visual material showing bullet holes and weapons to identify the equipment used.

Human Rights Watch has securely preserved digital files of the photographs and videos referenced in the report. Where possible, researchers have included direct links to social media posts in the relevant footnotes. Researchers did not include links to distressing content, or to online content when doing so might create a security risk for the people visible in the footage or the person creating or posting it. Researchers used ChirpWire, a

social media platform used by JNIM, to access content JNIM fighters had posted. In these cases, Human Rights Watch has not directly linked to the Chirpwire posts so as to not amplify the channel and the content posted, but has preserved all the material, including metadata.

Human Rights Watch developed a software that extracted, transcribed, and analyzed 36,243 videos from the YouTube channel of Burkina Faso’s state broadcaster Radiodiffusion-Télévision du Burkina (RTB) as well as 2,476 posts from ChirpWire between September 15, 2022—shortly before the coup led by Captain Traoré—and April 23, 2025. The software then filtered this content and generated a searchable database that captured references to armed activity within Burkina Faso, including mentions of combat operations, geographic deployments of military units, names of members of the military and JNIM, changes in military ranks, and military unit affiliations. This information enabled researchers to identify key elements of the military hierarchy and to corroborate witness accounts on all sides of the conflict. (For a detailed description of the software and the methodology used, please refer to Appendix II.)

Human Rights Watch partnered with Security Force Monitor, a nongovernmental organization focused on investigating chains of command, to establish chain-of-command information about members of Burkinabè military forces implicated in abuses documented in this report. This part of the research draws almost entirely on publicly available sources, primarily official sources such as laws and decrees, and official websites. Researchers used state media and, to a lesser extent, independent media to track the continuation of chains of command established in laws and decrees, as well as changes in commanders of military units over time. Whenever possible, researchers identified the start and end dates of commanders’ tenure based on the time of handover ceremonies between one commander and their successor.

Human Rights Watch wrote to Burkina Faso’s justice and defense ministers on December 22, 2025, sharing research findings and requesting responses to specific questions.²

² Letter from Human Rights Watch to Edasso Rodrigue Bayala, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, December 22, 2025, in French, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/03/Lettre%20de%20HRW%20au%20Ministre%20de%20la%20Justice%20Burkinabe%20-%202022%20decembre%202025.pdf. Letter from Human Rights Watch to Célestin Simporé, Minister of Defense, Burkina Faso Ministry of Defense, December 22, 2025, in French,

Human Rights Watch also shared its findings with JNIM’s Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso (Comité chariatique du GSIM au Burkina Faso) on January 16, 2026.³

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/03/Lettre%20de%20HRW%20au%20Ministre%20de%20la%20Defense%20Burkinabe%20-%2022%20decembre%202025.pdf.

³ Letter from Human Rights Watch to JNIM’s Sharia Committee, January 16, 2026,

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/03/HRW%20letter%20to%20JNIM%20-%20January%2016%2C%202026.pdf.

Glossary

Key Actors and Alliances

- ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data): a nongovernmental organization that collects and analyzes data on conflicts around the world.
- AES (Alliance des États du Sahel, Alliance of Sahel States): intergovernmental alliance created by Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger in September 2023, as a “mutual defense pact.” In July 2024, the three AES leaders announced their intention to form a confederation.
- BIR (Bataillons d’Intervention Rapide, Rapid Intervention Battalions): special military units deployed in counterinsurgency operations.
- BSIR (Brigade Spéciale d’Intervention Rapide, Special Rapid Intervention Brigade): a large military unit headed by a commander who, since January 2024, controls the BIRs along with other rapid intervention units.
- CEMAT (Chef d’Etat-Major de l’Armée de Terre, Chief of Army General Staff): the head of the army (ground forces), under the command of the chief of staff of the Armed Forces.
- CEMGA (Chef d’Etat-Major Général des Armées, Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces): the commander of the armed forces, overseeing forces including the army, the air force, and the BIRs.
- CEMGAA (Chef d’Etat-Major Général Adjoint des Armées, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces): the deputy to the military chief of staff. Under President Traoré, this person has also simultaneously served as COTN commander (see below) and BSIR commander.
- COTN (Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National, National Theater Operations Command): a joint forces command center under the direct control of the CEMGA, tasked with designing, organizing, and supporting counterinsurgency operations.
- ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States): a regional political and economic union of 12 countries of West Africa. Burkina Faso, alongside Mali and Niger, officially left the bloc in January 2025.
- FDS (Forces de défense et sécurité): Defense and Security Forces.

- G5 Sahel Joint Force: a multinational military force created by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger in 2014 to address the Islamist insurgency in the Sahel. It disbanded in 2023.
- ICC (International Criminal Court): Pursuant to its treaty, the Rome Statute, the Hague-based ICC has a mandate to try individuals alleged to have committed genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of aggression that fall within its jurisdiction.
- IS Sahel (Islamic State in the Sahel Province): second most active Islamist armed group in Burkina Faso after JNIM, formerly called Islamic State in the Greater Sahara.
- JNIM (Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims): an Al-Qaeda affiliate, JNIM is the most active armed group in the Sahel region.
- VDPs (Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie, Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland): civilians recruited, trained, armed, financed, and coordinated by the Burkinabè armed forces to serve as auxiliaries to the military.

Ethnicities and Languages

- Bobo: a West African ethnic group primarily present in Burkina Faso, comprising 3.4 percent of the country's population. Bobo people speak the Bobo language.
- Fulani (Fulbe in their language or Peuls in French): a predominantly Muslim and pastoralist ethnic group present across west, central, and east Africa. Fulani people comprise 8 percent of the population of Burkina Faso and are the country's second largest community.
- Fulfulde (or Fula): the language spoken by Fulani people, one of Burkina Faso's four official languages.
- Gourmantche or Goulmacema: the language spoken by the Gurma people.
- Gurma: one of Burkina Faso's ethnic groups, mostly present in the country's eastern regions.
- Mossi: Burkina Faso's largest ethnic group, comprising 54 percent of the country's population.
- Mooré, the language of Mossi people, one of four official languages of Burkina Faso and the most widely spoken language in Burkina Faso.
- Rimaïbé: a Fulani subgroup of people who speak Fulfulde and are seen as descendants of people historically enslaved by Fulani people.

Note on Terminology

Human Rights Watch uses the term “insurgency” to describe the armed campaign waged by Islamist armed groups against the Burkinabè government forces in Burkina Faso since 2016.

Human Rights Watch uses the term “counterinsurgency” to describe the military operations undertaken by the Burkinabè security forces and allied VDPs against Islamist armed groups across the country.

Human Rights Watch uses the term “militia” or “militiamen” to describe the VDPs. Burkinabè authorities refer to the VDPs as “auxiliaries of the national armed forces.”⁴

On July 2, 2025, the junta announced it redrew the boundaries of the country’s “regions” and “provinces,” bringing the total number of regions to 17 (from the original 13) and the total number of provinces to 47 (from the original 45).⁵ It also renamed all 17 regions as well as 4 provinces, replacing colonial-era names with names it described as indigenous.⁶ According to the minister of territorial administration, Émile Zerbo, the new arrangement aims at strengthening the state’s presence in the territory.⁷ In this report, Human Rights Watch uses the previous names of regions and provinces because they were authoritative at the time of the events.

On January 12, 2026, Capt. Traoré carried out a cabinet reshuffle and renamed the Ministry of Defense and Veterans Affairs as the Ministry of War and Patriotic Defense.⁸ Human Rights Watch uses the previous definition of the Ministry because it was authoritative at the time of the events.

⁴ Letter from Edasso Rodrigue Bayala, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, to Tirana Hassa, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch, April 28, 2025, transferred to Human Rights Watch by Kassoum Coulibaly, Burkina Faso Ambassador to the United States, on May 19, 2025, in French, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/03/Reponse%20du%20gouvernement%20Burkinabe%20-%2019%20mai%202025.pdf.

⁵ Council of Ministers of July 2, 2025, Présidence du Faso, July 2, 2025, <https://www.presidencedufaso.bf/conseil-des-ministres-du-2-juillet-2025/> (accessed January 29, 2026).

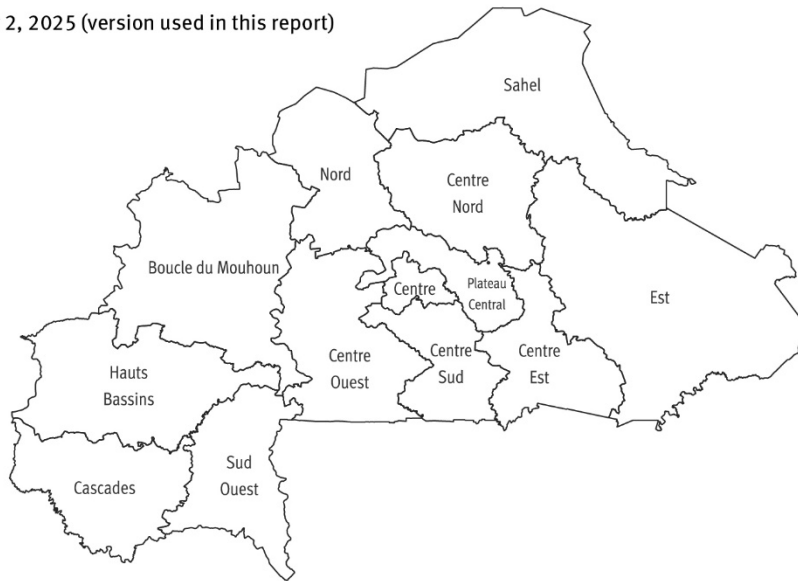
⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Benjamin Roger, “Au Burkina Faso, avec les ministères de la guerre, des serviteurs du peuple et de la construction de la patrie, Ibrahim Traoré poursuit sa « révolution »,” *Le Monde*, January 13, 2026, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2026/01/13/au-burkina-faso-avec-les-ministres-de-la-guerre-des-serviteurs-du-peuple-et-de-la-construction-de-la-patrie-ibrahim-traore-poursuit-sa-revolution_6662052_3212.html (accessed February 16, 2026).

The Regions of Burkina Faso

Before July 2, 2025 (version used in this report)



After July 2, 2025



©2026 Service d'information du Gouvernement du Burkina Faso (SIG)

50M

Caption: Maps of the former 13 regions used in this report and of the new 17 regions announced on July 2, 2025. Data © 2025 Service d'Information du Gouvernement du Burkina Faso. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

I. Background: The Conflict in Burkina Faso

Insurgencies by Islamist Armed Groups

The conflict in Burkina Faso began in 2016, when armed groups affiliated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State entered the country from neighboring Mali.⁹ Over the ensuing years, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Sahel Province (IS Sahel) expanded their areas of operations across Burkina Faso, carrying out attacks against both government security forces and civilians.¹⁰

JNIM and IS Sahel have destabilized the governments in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger—by mid-2023, all military governments—in their quest to establish an Islamist state in the broader Sahel region. The two armed groups differ in their interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law, and in their treatment of civilians, and frequently clash over territorial control, resources, and ideological dominance.

Weak governments in the region, the widespread availability of weapons, porous national borders, the lack of economic opportunities, and ethnic and social divisions have enabled these armed groups to recruit more members, increase attacks against regional security forces and civilians, and consolidate and expand their presence in various parts of Burkina Faso.¹¹ The insurgency, which initially centered on the Sahel administrative region of Burkina Faso, has since spread across the country: JNIM is present in at least 11 of the 13 Burkinabè regions and IS Sahel is present mostly in the Seno and Oudalan provinces of the Sahel administrative region.¹²

⁹ Human Rights Watch, *“By Day We Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists:” Abuses by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/05/21/day-we-fear-army-night-jihadists/abuses-armed-islamists-and-security-forces#1294>.

¹⁰ International Crisis Group, “Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence,” Africa Report n°287, February 24, 2020, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences> (accessed May 2, 2025).

¹¹ Center for Preventive Action, Council on Foreign Relations, “Violent Extremism in the Sahel,” updated September 4, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel> (accessed January 29, 2026).

¹² For JNIM presence, see “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 18, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/18/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-terrorize-civilians>. For IS Sahel presence, see Guillaume Soto-Mayor and Boubacar Ba, CRTG Working Group, “Generational Warfare in the Sahel: The Khilafa Cubs and the Dynamics of Violent Insurgency within the Islamic State Province,” November 2023, https://sahelresearch.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/170/The-Khilafa-Cubs_Sahel.pdf (accessed May 2, 2025).

The conflict in Burkina Faso—which has been punctuated by atrocities by all sides since the beginning—has led to tens of thousands of deaths. Figures from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), a nongovernmental organization that collects and analyzes data on conflict worldwide from various sources, show that over 10,600 civilians have been killed since 2016, more than half of them since the current military authorities took power in 2022. These figures are very likely a gross undercount.

The conflict has severely affected some of the most marginalized people in Burkina Faso, which ranks among the world’s poorest countries—over 40 percent of the population lives below the global poverty line and the country has a Human Development Index ranking of 186 out of 193.¹³ According to the United Nations, 6.3 million people, including 3.4 million children, needed humanitarian assistance across Burkina Faso in 2024. An estimated 1.1 million of these people lived in towns and villages besieged by JNIM.¹⁴

The conflict has exacerbated an existing humanitarian crisis and as of 2025 had displaced more than 2.3 million people, an estimated 10 percent of the population. Of these, over 2 million were internally displaced and over 270,000 had fled to neighboring countries, including Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Togo.¹⁵

Military Coups and Authoritarian Backsliding

Successive Burkinabè governments have been unable to contain the spread of the insurgency, and the military has used this failure as a justification for seizing power and prolonging a return to civilian democratic rule.

In January 2022, Lt. Col. Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba seized power in Burkina Faso.¹⁶ The coup took place when security forces were overstretched and suffering heavy losses, and communities in the north and east of the country were vulnerable to attacks by JNIM and IS Sahel. Damiba capitalized on grievances within the security forces and on the political

¹³ World Bank, Burkina Faso, <https://www.worldbank.org/ext/en/country/burkinafaso> (accessed on January 29, 2026).

¹⁴ UNICEF, “Burkina Faso Humanitarian Situation Report No. 10 - 1 January-31 December 2024,” February 22, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/unicef-burkina-faso-humanitarian-situation-report-no-10-1-january-31-december-2024> (accessed September 5, 2025).

¹⁵ UNHCR, Refugee Data Finder, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download> (accessed December 3, 2025).

¹⁶ “Burkina Faso: Coup Puts Rights at Risk,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 27, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/01/27/burkina-faso-coup-puts-rights-risk>.

isolation of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.¹⁷ He pledged to fight corruption and to work with the regional bloc, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) toward a return to democratic rule.¹⁸

Eight months later, in September 2022, Capt. Ibrahim Traoré overthrew Damiba in a second coup, accusing him of having failed to restore security.¹⁹ Damiba—who fled Burkina Faso in 2023 and sought refuge in Togo—was extradited from Togo to Burkina Faso in January 2026.²⁰ In March 2026, media reported that since Damiba’s extradition, his family members have not heard from him, no lawyers have been assigned to him, and his detention conditions are believed to be precarious.²¹

Traoré, born in 1988, joined the army in 2010, and participated in UN peacekeeping operations in Mali in 2018.²² He was appointed captain in 2020 and when he took power, was serving as commander of the artillery regiment stationed in Kaya, a town in central Burkina Faso.²³

¹⁷ “The Ouagadougou Coup: A Reaction to Insecurity,” International Crisis Group Q&A, January 28, 2022, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/linsecurite-facteur-determinant-du-putsch-de-ouagadougou> (accessed July 29, 2025).

¹⁸ “Burkina Faso coup leader Damiba sworn in as president,” *Reuters*, February 17, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/burkina-faso-coup-leader-damiba-sworn-president-2022-02-16/> (accessed August 11, 2025).

¹⁹ “Burkina Faso: Coup Raises Serious Rights Concerns,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 30, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/breaking-news/2022/09/30/burkina-faso-coup-raises-serious-rights-concerns>.

²⁰ Mensah, “Togo-Burkina: Damiba, exilé au Togo, souhaite retourner au bercaïl,” *Koaci*, June 13, 2023, https://www.koaci.com/article/2023/06/13/togo/politique/togo-burkina-damiba-exile-au-togo-souhaite-retourner-au-bercaïl_170044.html (accessed January 27, 2026). “Togo expels ex-Burkina Faso leader after coup plot claim, sources say,” *Reuters*, January 20, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/togo-expels-ex-burkina-faso-leader-after-coup-plot-claim-sources-say-2026-01-20/> (accessed January 27, 2026).

²¹ “Burkina Faso: les conditions de détention de Paul-Henri Damiba inquiètent ses proches,” *RFI*, March 12, 2026, https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20260312-burkina-faso-les-conditions-de-d%C3%A9tention-de-paul-henri-damiba-inqui%C3%A8tent-ses-proches?utm_slink=go.rfi.fr%2FxDy&utm_term=RFI&utm_campaign=twitter&utm_source=nonli&utm_medium=social (accessed March 12, 2026).

²² “Qui est le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré, le plus jeune chef d’État au monde ?,” *VOA Afrique*, October 6, 2022, <https://www.voaafricaine.com/a/burkina-ibrahim-traor%C3%A9-nouveau-putschiste-et-plus-jeune-chef-d-etat-au-monde/6778263.html> (accessed September 5, 2025).

²³ “Burkina Faso: Ibrahim Traoré proclaimed President, Damiba ousted,” *The Africa Report*, October 1, 2022, <https://www.theafricareport.com/245959/burkina-faso-ibrahim-traore-proclaimed-president-damiba-ousted/> (accessed on July 29, 2025).

After taking power, Traoré became the “president of the transition” by signing the Charter of the Transition on October 14, 2022.²⁴ This replaced the previous Transition Charter Damiba signed in March 2022, to replace Burkina Faso’s constitution.²⁵ Traoré promised elections, but instead consolidated authority and suspended democratic processes.²⁶

Traoré has directly commanded the armed forces and ruled the country without institutional checks. In September 2023, he announced that elections were no longer a priority due to the security situation.²⁷ In May 2024, following what the junta described as nationwide consultations—largely boycotted by the political opposition and civil society groups—he announced that his government would remain in power for five more years.²⁸

On April 1, 2025, Traoré announced that Burkina Faso was “no longer in a democracy,” but “in a progressive people’s revolution.”²⁹ He warned “traitors and collaborators of imperialism” against attempting to slow down “the revolution” and called on the population to play an active role in implementing it.

On July 16, 2025, the military junta passed a law abolishing the Independent National Electoral Commission in what it described as a cost-saving measure. The minister of territorial administration said the interior minister would oversee any future elections.³⁰

²⁴ “Clôture des assises nationales : la Charte de la Transition signée, le Capitaine Ibrahim TRAORE Président du Faso,” *Service d'Information du Gouvernement du Burkina Faso*, October 14, 2022, https://www.sig.gov.bf/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1333&cHash=c9ed1ec571f93c182b4525910caf0f1a (accessed March 6, 2026).

²⁵ “Au Burkina Faso, la charte de la transition adoptée, Damiba au pouvoir pour trois ans,” *TV5MONDE*, March 1, 2022, <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/au-burkina-faso-la-charte-de-la-transition-adoptee-damiba-au-pouvoir-pour-trois-ans-130797> (accessed August 11, 2025).

²⁶ “Burkina Faso: Elections not a 'priority,' junta leader says,” *DW*, September 30, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/burkina-faso-elections-not-a-priority-junta-leader-says/a-66967872> (accessed August 11, 2025). “Burkina Faso extends military regime by five years after national consultations,” *France 24*, May 25, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20240525-burkina-faso-s-military-rule-extended-for-five-years> (accessed July 29, 2025).

²⁷ Nadia Colombe Gbane, “Burkina Faso: ‘elections not a priority compared to security,’ says military leader,” *Africanews*, August 13, 2024, <https://www.africanews.com/2023/09/30/burkina-faso-elections-not-a-priority-compared-to-security-says-military-leader/> (accessed May 2, 2025).

²⁸ “Burkina Faso extends military rule by five years,” *Aljazeera*, May 26, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/26/burkina-faso-extends-military-rule-by-five-years> (accessed May 2, 2025).

²⁹ Samuel Benshimon, “Burkina Faso : Proclamation officielle de la Révolution progressiste populaire,” *Sahel Intelligence*, April 2, 2025, <https://sahel-intelligence.com/37602-burkina-faso-proclamation-officielle-de-la-revolution-progressiste-populaire.html> (accessed February 4, 2026).

³⁰ Chris Ewokor and Damian Zane, “Burkina Faso military rulers scrap electoral commission, taking control of future polls,” *BBC*, July 17, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/clyzj2k2pmvo>, (accessed July 29, 2025).

The new junta has proven no more successful than the previous governments in combatting the insurgency. On April 13, 2023, the junta issued a “general mobilization” decree—a sweeping emergency law—as part of a plan to recapture territory under the control of JNIM and IS Sahel. It has used provisions in this law to crack down on the political opposition, the media and dissent, and to silence and unlawfully conscript critics, journalists, civil society activists, and judicial personnel.³¹ The military authorities assert that conscription is authorized under the decree, which gives the president extensive powers to combat the insurgency, including by requisitioning people and goods and curtailing civil liberties.³²

Dozens of critics of the junta, including Burkinabè human rights activists, journalists, judges, lawyers, and political opponents, have been unlawfully conscripted into the military or VDP groups since 2023 and sent to participate in military operations.³³ Between July and October 2025, at least six journalists and three activists who had been previously conscripted were released, while others who had been conscripted are still missing, and more are feared to have been conscripted.³⁴

³¹ “‘General mobilisation’ declared in Burkina Faso after series of terrorist attacks,” *France 24*, April 14, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20230413-general-mobilisation-declared-in-burkina-faso-after-series-of-jihadist-attacks> (accessed July 29, 2025). “Burkina Faso: Emergency Law Targets Dissidents,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 8, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/08/burkina-faso-emergency-law-targets-dissidents>. Ilaria Allegrozzi, “Prominent Burkina Faso Activist Feared Forcibly Disappeared,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, March 19, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/19/prominent-burkina-faso-activist-feared-forcibly-disappeared>.

³² Décret n°2023-0475/PRES-TRANS/PM/MDAC/MATDS/MJDHRI portant mobilisation générale et mise en garde, https://lefaso.net/IMG/pdf/decret_sur_la_mobilisation_generale-1.pdf (accessed March 13, 2026).

³³ Ilaria Allegrozzi, “‘Disappeared’ Burkina Faso Journalists Feared Unlawfully Conscripted,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, April 7, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/04/07/disappeared-burkina-faso-journalists-feared-unlawfully-conscripted>. Allegrozzi, “Prominent Burkina Faso Activist Feared Forcibly Disappeared,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch. “Burkina Faso: Conscription Used to Punish Prosecutors, Judges,” Human Rights Watch news release, August 21, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/21/burkina-faso-conscription-used-punish-prosecutors-judges>. “Burkina Faso: Journalist, Junta Critics Feared Disappeared,” Human Rights Watch news release, July 10, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/07/10/burkina-faso-journalist-junta-critics-feared-disappeared>. “Burkina Faso: Judicial Officers Feared Forcibly Disappeared,” Human Rights Watch news release, October 22, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/22/burkina-faso-judicial-officers-feared-forcibly-disappeared>.

³⁴ “Burkina Faso : libération de deux journalistes et un militant des droits de l'Homme,” *RFI*, July 19, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250718-burkina-faso-lib%C3%A9ration-de-deux-journalistes-et-un-militant-des-droits-de-l-homme> (accessed July 29, 2025). “Burkina Faso: libération de plusieurs journalistes arrêtés et détenus depuis plusieurs mois,” *RFI*, July 24, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250724-burkina-faso-lib%C3%A9ration-de-plusieurs-journalistes-arr%C3%AAt%C3%A9s-et-d%C3%A9tenus-depuis-plusieurs-mois> (accessed January 30, 2026). “Burkina Faso : l'avocat et homme politique Hermann Yaméogo a été «enlevé», affirment ses proches,” *RFI*, July 27, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250727-burkina-faso-l-avocat-et-homme-politique-hermann-yam%C3%A9ogo-a-%C3%A9t%C3%A9-enlev%C3%A9-affirment-ses-proches> (accessed September 5, 2025). Ilaria Allegrozzi, “Two Burkina Faso Activists Unlawfully Conscripted are Released,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, October 10, 2025,

On August 15, 2025, the junta expelled the top UN representative in the country, Carol Flore-Smerezniak, declaring her persona non grata following a UN report on violations against children in the country.³⁵ Flore-Smerezniak is the second senior UN official to be expelled by the junta, after Barbara Manzi, the seniormost UN official in the country at the time, was declared persona non grata in 2022, highlighting the junta’s growing intolerance for independent scrutiny.³⁶

On December 4, 2025, the junta’s Council of Ministers approved a bill amending the penal code and reintroducing the death penalty for crimes including “high treason, terrorism, and acts of espionage,” nearly a decade after Burkina Faso abolished the practice.³⁷ The last known judicial execution in Burkina Faso took place in 1988.³⁸

On January 29, 2026, the junta’s Council of Ministers approved a decree dissolving all political parties in Burkina Faso and a draft law repealing the legislation governing their operations and financing.³⁹ The minister of territorial administration, Émile Zerbo, said the action is part of a broader effort to “rebuild the state,” following what the junta describes as “abuses” and “division of citizens” caused by the multiparty system.⁴⁰

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/10/two-burkina-faso-activists-unlawfully-conscripted-are-released>. “Burkina Faso: Judicial Officers Feared Forcibly Disappeared,” Human Rights Watch news release.

³⁵ “Burkina Faso declares UN coordinator persona non grata,” *Reuters*, August 18, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/burkina-faso-declares-un-coordinator-persona-non-grata-2025-08-18/> (accessed September 4, 2025). For the UN report, see United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict in Burkina Faso, S/2025/101, March 19, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/101> (accessed September 4, 2025).

³⁶ Sam Mednick, “Burkina Faso expels top UN official in West African country,” *AP News*, December 23, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/violence-united-nations-burkina-faso-f4dc3bd50b16bd49c74d95472d5ec5f6> (accessed September 3, 2025).

³⁷ Ilaria Allegrozzi, “Burkina Faso Junta Restores Death Penalty,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, December 8, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/08/burkina-faso-junta-restores-death-penalty>.

³⁸ “Burkina Faso: Abolition of death penalty a hard-won victory,” Amnesty International press release, June 1, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/06/burkina-faso-abolition-of-death-penalty-a-hardwon-victory/> (accessed December 9, 2025).

³⁹ Allegrozzi, “Burkina Faso’s Junta Pulls the Plug on Political Life”, commentary, Human Rights Watch, dispatch.

⁴⁰ Council of Ministers of January 29, 2026, Présidence du Faso, January 29, 2026, <https://www.presidenceufaso.bf/conseil-des-ministres-du-29-janvier-2026-2/> (accessed February 4, 2026).

Information Control and Official Narratives

The junta rejects characterizations of the situation in Burkina Faso as an armed conflict or a humanitarian crisis. State-controlled media has developed a cult of personality around President Traoré, and he has cultivated a powerful image of himself as a charismatic pan-Africanist leader resisting Western influence—especially that of the former colonial power, France.⁴¹

This messaging draws on grievances widely shared in Burkinabè society about historical and ongoing external influence, which remain a powerful element of public discourse. It is also reinforced by a repressive information environment in which journalists critical of the junta have been unlawfully conscripted, threatened, forcibly disappeared, and forced to flee, and independent national as well as international media outlets have been suspended.⁴²

Social media accounts, including those linked to pro-government sources, have circulated deep-fake videos celebrating Traoré's leadership by showing fabricated achievements and speeches to project stability and development.⁴³ Deliberate misinformation interspersed with more straightforward patriotic messaging appears to have had a strong impact on public perception, especially in a context where independent media is restricted.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Farouk Chothia, "Why Burkina Faso's junta leader has captured hearts and minds around the world," *BBC*, May 11, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1e9ely9v3go> (accessed July 29, 2025).

⁴² Allegrozzi, "'Disappeared' Burkina Faso Journalists Feared Unlawfully Conscripted," commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch. "Burkina Faso: Journalist, Junta Critics Feared Disappeared," Human Rights Watch news release. RSF, Burkina Faso, <https://rsf.org/en/country/burkina-faso> (accessed October 6, 2025). Kate Hairsine, "Why Burkina Faso is muzzling foreign media," *DW*, April 29, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-burkina-faso-is-muzzling-foreign-media/a-68952181> (accessed October 6, 2025).

⁴³ Quang Pham, "Hundreds of deepfake music videos are celebrating the president of Burkina Faso... why?," *The Observers, France 24*, May 30, 2025, <https://observers.france24.com/en/africa/20250530-deepfake-music-videos-burkina-faso-ibrahim-traore-beyonce> (accessed September 11, 2025). See also "Burkina Faso : révélations sur la propagande numérique d'activistes pro-Ibrahim Traoré," *Jeune Afrique*, February 19, 2026, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1767257/politique/burkina-faso-revelations-sur-la-propagande-numerique-dactivistes-pro-ibrahim-traore/> (accessed February 22, 2026).

⁴⁴ According to a January 2026 *Jeune Afrique* investigation, Kassoum Traoré—the younger brother of President Ibrahim Traoré, and close to the junta's supporters known as the Wayiyans—holds an unofficial position within the government focused on promoting a positive image of the President. "With the support of the BIR-C (Rapid Communication Intervention Battalion), he runs influence campaigns spread through a network of fake social media accounts that transform his brother into a hero of the Popular Progressive Revolution through AI-made edits and videos." Matteo Maillard, "Sécurité, propagande et business : au Burkina Faso, comment Ibrahim Traoré gère les affaires d'État en famille," *Jeune Afrique*, January 25, 2026, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1758659/politique/securete-propagande-et-business-au-burkina-faso-ibrahim-traore-gere-les-affaires-detat-en-famille/> (accessed January 27, 2026).

In February 2026, following a major JNIM attack on the city of Titao, North region, during which the Islamist fighters killed at least 34 civilians and overran a military position, Jeune Afrique analyzed a series of conversations held in a WhatsApp group called “BIR-C, Eagle Unit” and leaked on social media.⁴⁵ The BIR-C (Bataillons d’Intervention Rapide de la communication, or Rapid Communication Intervention Battalions), are groups of pro-junta social media influencers. The leaked conversations showed “the mechanisms of a coordinated disinformation strategy: deny, downplay, divert attention, and point to an external enemy.”⁴⁶

According to reports by media and think tanks, Russia has also led and conducted several disinformation campaigns in Burkina Faso, drawing on widespread dissatisfaction with the role of France in the country to depict Russia as a counterweight in support of Traoré.⁴⁷

The Fulani Question: Marginalization, Stigmatization and Targeting with Impunity

The Fulani people are a predominantly Muslim and historically nomadic or semi-nomadic group of people who often move cattle between grazing areas across large swathes of western, central, and eastern Africa. They constitute Burkina Faso’s second-largest ethnic group, after the Mossi people.

Analysts consider the Fulani community in Burkina Faso to be marginalized, underrepresented in the country’s government and military, and with its traditional pastoralist livelihoods continually eroded.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ On the attack in Titao, see “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Group Commits New Atrocities,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 12, 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/03/12/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-group-commits-new-atrocities>.

⁴⁶ “Burkina Faso : révélations sur la propagande numérique d’activistes pro-Ibrahim Traoré,” *Jeune Afrique*.

⁴⁷ David Ehl and Monir Ghaedi, “Russian propaganda: How Moscow uses disinformation in Africa,” *DW*, February 3, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/how-russias-propaganda-machine-sows-disinformation-in-africa/a-71453082> (accessed July 29, 2025). Torianna Eckles, “The Consequences of Russian Disinformation: Examples in Burkina Faso,” post to Africa Up Close, Wilson Center (blog), January 22, 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/consequences-russian-disinformation-examples-burkina-faso> (accessed July 29, 2025). This is part of a larger effort by Russia to support military juntas in the Sahel, including through the provision of military equipment and training. Georges Ibrahim Tounkara, “La propagande russe au Burkina : mode de fonctionnement,” *DW*, September 6, 2025, <https://www.dw.com/fr/propagande-russe-afrique-wagner-russie-burkina-sahel/a-73538457> (accessed September 9, 2025).

⁴⁸ James Courtright, Megatrends Afrika, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, “Fulani Responses to Pastoralist Crisis and Mass Violence,” February 2025, https://www.swp-berlin.org/assets/afrika/publications/policybrief/MTA-PB32_Courtright_vers3.pdf (accessed September 11, 2025). James Courtright, “Ethnic Killings by West African Armies Are Undermining Regional Security,”

Islamist armed groups have actively recruited among Fulani communities in Burkina Faso by exploiting their longstanding marginalization, poverty, and the erosion of traditional livelihoods. Many Fulani people have joined these armed groups out of frustration with economic hardship, government corruption, and especially excesses by Burkinabè security forces and allied militias in counterinsurgency operations. This dynamic has triggered a dangerous cycle in which state forces and VDPs increasingly perceive the Fulani as collectively aligned with Islamist armed groups and subject them to harassment, violence, and discrimination, which in turn deepens resentment and mistrust toward the state and fuels recruitment into armed Islamist groups' ranks.

While anti-Fulani prejudice existed before the 2022 military coup, Human Rights Watch found that hate speech, stigmatization, and violent attacks against Fulani communities have intensified since Traoré came to power and expanded the recruitment of VDPs. Counterinsurgency operations have frequently failed to distinguish Fulani civilians from Islamist fighters, resulting in mass killings and other abuses with near-total impunity.

Increased Stigmatization Since 2022

Stigmatization, discrimination, and ethnic hate against the Fulani community were common prior to the 2022 military coup.⁴⁹ However, according to community members, as well as the media and civil society groups, the expression of such sentiments, including extensively on social media, has significantly increased since the junta led by Traoré seized power and VDP recruitment increased, leading to direct incitement of violence. Supporters of the junta, who call themselves “Wayiyans,” frequently post content on social media promoting hate, intolerance, and violence against Fulani people, and encouraging hate speech.⁵⁰ A prominent Fulani human rights activist said:

Foreign Policy, March 7, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/03/07/mali-burkina-faso-fulani-ethnic-killings-by-west-african-armies-are-undermining-regional-security/> (accessed September 11, 2025).

⁴⁹ Sophie Douce, “Au Burkina Faso, les Peuls de plus en plus stigmatisés : « Nous sommes devenus les premiers suspects »,” *Le Monde*, September 15, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2022/09/15/nous-sommes-devenus-les-premiers-suspects-au-burkina-faso-les-peuls-de-plus-en-plus-stigmatises_6141793_3212.html (accessed September 11, 2025). Nina Soyeze, “Pourquoi une telle stigmatisation des Peuls au Sahel ?,” *TV5MONDE*, August 25, 2022, <https://information.tv5monde.com/afrique/pourquoi-une-telle-stigmatisation-des-peuls-au-sahel-1167546> (accessed September 11, 2025). “Burkina : « Aujourd’hui, être Peulh est une source d’inquiétude au quotidien », déclare Dr Daouda Diallo, Collectif contre l’impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés,” *LeFaso.net*, January 6, 2020, <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article94181> (accessed September 5, 2025).

⁵⁰ “Au Burkina, Ibrahim Traoré a « ses comités de vigilance »,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 10, 2024, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1566613/politique/au-burkina-ibrahim-traore-a-ses-comites-de-vigilance/> (accessed September 11, 2025). “Ibrahim Maïga, activiste burkinabè et âme damnée du Président,” *Mondafrique*, April 8, 2025,

Two worrying new concepts were born under this government. The first is the idea of “zero Fulani,” which has been created by pro-junta influencers, who have led a social media campaign around it, calling for the elimination of the entire Fulani community. The second is the concept of the “war of independence,” launched by the president. He said we are no longer in a war against terrorism, but in a war of independence that can only be won by fighting the enemies of the state and their accomplices. This means we, the Fulani, are now considered the enemies from inside.⁵¹

A 32-year-old man said that in February 2023, VDPs arrested him and four other Fulani men at an aid distribution site in the city of Fada Gourma, East region. The VDPs mocked them, threatened to kill them, and took them to the local military camp, where they were thrown into a dark room, beaten, denied food and water for 24 hours, and referred to as “meat.” He said, “A VDP told another [militiaman], ‘Do to them what you did to those of yesterday. Zero Fulani, zero Fulani.’” The next morning, he said, they were transported outside Fada Gourma, blindfolded, lined up on the ground, and shot. The witness survived because no bullet hit him, but the other four men were killed instantly.⁵²

Increased Targeting Since 2022

Since Traoré seized power, violence against Fulani communities has sharply increased, mostly because of the increased use of VDPs.⁵³ Counterinsurgency operations against Islamist armed groups have blurred the line between Islamist fighters and Fulani civilians, leading to widespread abuses.

A Fulani herder, 60, who narrowly escaped a large-scale VDP attack on March 11, 2025, in the Boucle du Mouhoun region, said:

<https://mondafrique.com/politique/ibrahim-maiga-activiste-burkinabe-et-ame-damnee-du-president/> (accessed September 11, 2025). Laura Sanders, Katharine Dow and Victoria Scott, “Surge of Hate Speech in the Sahel, Including on WhatsApp, Signals Atrocity Risk,” *Just Security*, January 31, 2025, <https://www.justsecurity.org/107051/sahel-hate-speech-violence/> (accessed September 5, 2025). The term “Wayiyans” come from the Mooré language and means “come out” (i.e. “let’s come out,” a call to mobilize).

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a Fulani human rights activist., April 8, 2025.

⁵² Human Rights Watch in-person interview with G.D., Benin, November 20, 2025.

⁵³ Marie Toulemonde, “Burkina Faso : face aux jihadistes, quel est le vrai bilan des VDP d’Ibrahim Traoré ?” *Jeune Afrique*, October 25, 2025, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1731794/politique/burkina-faso-face-aux-jihadistes-quel-est-le-vrai-bilan-des-vdp-dibrahim-traore/> (accessed March 19, 2026).

Since Ibrahim Traoré arrived ... with the massive recruitment of VDPs, things changed. Even the presence of jihadists has become stronger, jihadists come more frequently. If the VDPs had not been put in place, we would not have had to leave our village..... The VDPs are a threat to us Fulani and to social cohesion.⁵⁴

A member of the Burkinabè judiciary said that the majority of defendants facing terrorism-related charges since 2018 were Fulani.⁵⁵

The increase in such targeting is starkly illustrated by the killing of at least 130—likely many more—Fulani civilians during the Operation Green Whirlwind 2 (Tourbillon Vert 2), a coordinated offensive carried out between March 8 and 13, 2025, by Burkinabè military forces, including BIRs and VDPs, in the western Boucle du Mouhoun region, near the town of Solenzo. Video evidence Human Rights Watch analyzed, along with witness accounts, shows that Fulani civilians were singled out based on their ethnicity. In some cases, VDPs backed by the military, issued explicit calls for their extermination.⁵⁶

The operation demonstrated a high degree of coordination among Burkinabè military forces, an extensive geographical reach, mass killings, and the consequent large-scale displacement of Fulani civilians from the area.

A Fulani human rights activist from the Sahel administrative region said:

There had been attacks against the Fulani before....But since these military authorities came and decided to change the strategy and rely heavily on the VDPs, everything changed ... and Fulani people became the number one target.... [T]he tragic events in Solenzo were a turning point, both for the extent of the attacks and for the ... words used by the VDPs.... What we heard in the videos ... is a clear indication that they want to finish us.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with N.P., April 15, 2025.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a member of the Burkinabè judiciary., August 14, 2025.

⁵⁶ “Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 12, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/12/burkina-faso-army-directs-ethnic-massacres>.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a Fulani human rights activist from the Sahel region, March 29, 2025.

Impunity For Abuses Against Fulani People

There have been few, if any, actions by judicial authorities to address discrimination, end the violence against the Fulani people, and investigate and prosecute those responsible for incitement to violence or other abuses. In at least one case, security forces unlawfully conscripted into military service a prosecutor investigating abuses by VDPs against Fulani people.

In March 2023, Burkinabè military and VDPs arrested and presumably killed five Fulani men in Zambanga, a village in the Centre-Nord region. Villagers found the men's bodies riddled with bullets at the Zambanga cemetery the same day they were arrested. Relatives of the victims and residents said when they went to the gendarmerie in Boulsa, nine kilometers away, to report the incident, the gendarmes dismissed their allegations, threatened them with death and accused the Fulani community of supporting Islamist fighters.

A relative of the victims in Zambanga who spoke to the gendarmes said:

The gendarmes wanted us to say that the jihadists had killed our people, or that they died fighting against the VDPs. They started calling us “jihadists.” ... We told them that those killed were civilians ... and that we wanted them to come to our village and investigate..... But the gendarmes threatened us with death if we didn't leave..... Disappointed by their behavior, we left thinking that it was over for us, the Fulani, that we no longer had a place to complain.⁵⁸

In November 2023, VDPs killed 13 civilians, including six women and four children, in a Fulani settlement about four kilometers from Bassé village, Hauts-Bassins region. They also burned at least 20 homes, and looted hundreds of animals. Some of the bodies were found blindfolded with their hands tied up behind their backs. Shortly after the attack, relatives of victims filed a complaint with the judicial authorities. There has been no progress on the case, and one of the investigating judges had been conscripted into military service.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with P.M., Ghana, March 9, 2025.

A colleague of the conscripted judge, a judge himself, said, “He was notified in August 2024, and sent straight to the front for four months. No one heard from him until he was released.”⁵⁹

In March 2025, following the mass killings of Fulani civilians near Solenzo, the high court prosecutor in Ouagadougou opened an investigation into calls on social media for the “extermination” of an ethnic group. The statement, which did not explicitly refer to Fulani people, does not appear to have resulted in any action by government officials.⁶⁰

The judge cited above said, “Today, we are helplessly witnessing the massacre of Fulani populations by the military and VDPs, without there being any prosecution, without there being a voice to denounce it.”⁶¹

Even calling on the government to protect Fulani people during large-scale government operations appears to be risky. In February 2023, shortly after VDPs killed at least 80 Fulani civilians in Nouna town in the Boucle du Mouhoun region, Fulani community leaders met with President Traoré in Ouagadougou to advocate for better protection of Fulani civilians caught in the conflict.⁶² Traoré’s response, according to credible sources who spoke to Human Rights Watch, was to call on the Fulani leaders to “acknowledge that the epicenter of terrorism is in Fulani localities.” Traoré recommended that Fulani leaders “call on [their] relatives to disassociate themselves from the forces of evil [Islamist armed groups].” “Otherwise,” he said, “we will throw all our forces into the battle and there will be a lot of deaths. And it will be more complicated for your community. It’s not fun to kill, but if one has no choice, it’s death.”⁶³

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a Burkinabè judge, August 19, 2025.

⁶⁰ “Le procureur ouvre une enquête pour « appels à extermination ethnique »,” *Burkina Yawana*, March 20, 2025, <https://burkinayawana.com/2025/03/20/le-procureur-ouvre-une-enquete-pour-appels-a-extermination-ethnique/> (accessed September 11, 2025).

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a Burkinabè judge, August 19, 2025.

⁶² For the Nouna killings, see “Burkina Faso: Perpetrators of Nouna killings must face justice,” Amnesty International news release, January 10, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/burkina-faso-perpetrators-of-nouna-killings-must-face-justice/> (accessed September 5, 2025). For the meeting with President Traoré, see X, @BintaDeSIDIBE, <https://x.com/BintaDeSIDIBE/status/1899877886728761547>, March 12, 2025 (accessed on September 5, 2025)

⁶³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a Fulani human rights activist., April 8, 2025.

National and Community-Led Initiatives to Address Discrimination against Fulani People

In a letter to Human Rights Watch dated April 28, 2025, Burkinabè Justice Minister Edasso Rodrigue Bayala said that “promoting living together and peaceful cohesion among all communities in Burkina Faso” is a priority for the Burkinabè government. He said that “the national strategy on social cohesion 2021-2025” aims at strengthening “social dialogue and fight against exclusion.”⁶⁴ He added that Burkina Faso’s action plan for stabilization and development 2023-2025 focuses on national reconciliation and social cohesion.⁶⁵

There have been some local initiatives by religious groups in support of grassroots peacebuilding and to counter hate speech and incitement to violence.⁶⁶

“At the local level, community and religious leaders are being very careful and do their best to adopt a language that debunks myths, eliminates bias, and promotes social cohesion,” said a member of Burkinabè civil society. “The problem is at the national level, where authorities have not taken any concrete action to approach, confront, and disrupt the discriminatory narrative against the Fulani.”⁶⁷

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

The United Nations defines conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) as: rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. That link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a state or non-state armed group, which includes terrorist entities; the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a political,

⁶⁴ Letter from Edasso Rodrigue Bayala, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, to Tirana Hassa, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch, April 28, 2025, transferred to Human Rights Watch by Kassoum Coulibaly, Burkina Faso Ambassador to the United States, on May 19, 2025, in French, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/03/Reponse%20du%20gouvernement%20Burkinabe%20-%2019%20mai%202025.pdf.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Burkina Faso: les associations islamiques se mobilisent contre les discours haineux sur les réseaux sociaux,” *RFI*, July 14, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250714-burkina-faso-associations-islamiques-mobilisent-contre-les-discours-haineux-r%C3%A9seaux-sociaux-sensibilisation> (accessed September 5, 2025).

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a member of Burkinabè civil society, January 12, 2025.

ethnic, or religious minority group or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; or the climate of impunity, which is generally associated with state collapse, cross-border consequences such as displacement or trafficking, and/or violations of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence or exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict.”⁶⁸

Human Rights Watch’s research identified indicators that warn of the potential risk of or ongoing CRSV, such as combatants undertaking house raids and searches, particularly where women are alone in the home; observable signs of rampage such as burned homes, destroyed crops, looted villages, torn clothing, displaced civilians; and attacks on villages, coupled with abduction of civilians.⁶⁹

Multilateral and civil society organizations have documented many cases of rape and sexual violence in Burkina Faso in recent years, and believe the risk of CRSV remains high, particularly in situations involving kidnapping. A medical doctor in Burkina Faso said that although they had not treated many cases, among those they had treated the victims most frequently attributed culpability to the military and VDPs.⁷⁰ A staff member of a humanitarian organization said that they have limited access to conflict-affected areas or information about what abuses are occurring in those areas due to: insecurity; the collapse and destruction of previously existing mechanisms, limited though they were, to report, treat and provide services to victims and survivors of sexual violence; and the government’s control over information and its retaliation against critics, which has created a climate of fear across humanitarian actors.⁷¹

The UN secretary-general’s report to the UN Security Council on Burkina Faso for the period of July 2022 to June 2024 highlighted that CRSV mainly targeted girls and

⁶⁸ United Nations Department of Peace Operations, “Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,” 2020, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2020.08-UN-CRSV-Handbook.pdf> (accessed December 3, 2025).

⁶⁹ UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, “Matrix: Early-Warning Indicators of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,” March 2022.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a doctor part of a humanitarian organization, November 26, 2025.

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a senior staff member of an international humanitarian organization, December 1, 2025.

remained severely underreported due to stigma, fear of reprisals, harmful social norms, widespread impunity, safety risks, and limited access to medical and psychosocial support.⁷² The report documented that “20 children, all girls between the ages of 12 and 17, were subjected to rape,” and that seven violations were attributed to JNIM, six to unidentified individuals, four to VDPs, and three to IS Sahel.⁷³ Six of the twenty victims, the report states, were “raped and maimed, and one died following collective rape.”⁷⁴ In only one case was the alleged perpetrator, a VDP, was arrested.⁷⁵

The UN report also states that “in many cases, sexual violence was preceded by abduction, with girls being targeted while on the way to or from collecting firewood or fetching water.”⁷⁶

A December 2025, report issued by the Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) research program, funded by UK International Development, on Fulani women’s lives under JNIM in Central Sahel’s countries, including Burkina Faso, and based on interviews with 77 Fulani women from Mali and Burkina Faso, noted that “[d]espite credible reports of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by armed Islamist groups in the Sahel, none of the women interviewed accused JNIM of perpetrating rape in their communities. Three respondents [including one from Burkina Faso] did, however, accuse JNIM fighters of threatening rape should women refuse to respect behavioral dictates. Moreover, double that [including a woman from Burkina Faso] accused the group of forced marriage, and several more [including a

⁷² United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict in Burkina Faso.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “For example, in July 2023, in Sanmantenga Province, Center-Nord Region, several girls were ambushed by JNIM while fetching water at a water point over five kilometers from their homes. Four of the girls, ages 13 and 14, were caught, raped, beaten and severely bruised while attempting to escape. One of the survivors sustained serious spinal injuries. The four girls received psychological support and medical care.” United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict in Burkina Faso.

woman from Burkina Faso] of coercing adolescent girls, women, and widows into marriage.”⁷⁷

Human Rights Watch reporting in 2022 documented several cases of sexual violence by Islamist armed groups that occurred between late 2021 and mid-2022, primarily affecting women and girls in the Centre-Nord region.⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch recorded several dozen rapes, interviewing 14 survivors—many of whom witnessed additional assaults—and gathered anonymized accounts from elders and medical workers. Women and girls were typically attacked while collecting firewood, traveling to markets, or fleeing assaults on their villages. Health workers described treating large numbers of survivors, including more than 55 cases in one area between September and December 2021, while also noting that many women did not seek medical care. Accounts from survivors of sexual violence also detailed abductions, group assaults, severe beatings, and threats, often carried out while trying to extract information about soldiers or local defense volunteers. Islamist fighters attacked women of all faiths, frequently using intimidation and physical violence—including whipping with cords—alongside rape. Several accounts described brutal assaults on women and girls, and instances where attackers stated that the intent of the violence was punishment or to force communities to abandon their villages.

Regional Alliances to Counter JNIM and IS Sahel, and Global Influences

In 2017, under the leadership of then President Kaborè, Burkina Faso joined in the creation of a multinational force to promote security, known as the G5 Sahel Joint Force, committing troops alongside Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger. The force received political and financial backing from France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, the African Union, and the European Union.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Corinne Dufka, Niccola Milnes, and Rida Lyammouri, Cross-Border Conflict Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT), “Peuhl women’s lives under JNIM in the Central Sahel,” December 2025, <https://www.xcept-research.org/publication/peuhl-womens-lives-under-jnim-in-the-central-sahel/> (accessed December 10, 2025).

⁷⁸ “Burkina Faso: Armed Islamists Kill, Rape Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 16, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/05/16/burkina-faso-armed-islamists-kill-rape-civilians>.

⁷⁹ “West Africa: G5 Sahel Force Should Prioritize Rights,” Human Rights Watch news release, December 13, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/13/west-africa-g5-sahel-force-should-prioritize-rights>.

The G5 Sahel established a compliance framework to prevent and address violations of international humanitarian and human rights law during military operations, including a mechanism to track civilian casualties and training curricula with a strong human rights component for serving personnel.⁸⁰ The force faced challenges in implementing its mission, due to disagreements among member states over approaches to counter the threat from Islamist armed groups, perceptions that the force was mostly driven by France, and regional political instability.⁸¹

In September 2023, following military coups across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, the three ruling juntas created a mutual defense pact, the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), which obligates the signatories to assist one another, including militarily, in the event of an attack on any one of them.⁸² The creation of the AES came as a response to the economic and financial sanctions imposed by ECOWAS on Niger following the July 2023 military coup there and the threat of an ECOWAS military intervention in Niger.⁸³ In January 2024, the three governments announced they would leave ECOWAS, a move that took effect a year later.⁸⁴ In July 2024, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger signed a confederation treaty, strengthening their diplomatic, defense, security, and economic cooperation. In a joint press release, the military leaders of the three countries said they were taking “an additional step toward deeper integration.”⁸⁵ As of February 2026, the AES had yet to establish a permanent structure and did not have headquarters, a dedicated budget, or personnel.⁸⁶ However, on September 30, 2025, the leader of the military junta in Niger,

⁸⁰ “The Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) Compliance Framework: 2021,” IHL in Action, International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed September 11, 2025, <https://ihl-in-action.icrc.org/case-study/the-group-of-five-for-the-sahel-g5-sahel-compliance-framework-2021>.

⁸¹ Dr. David Doukhan, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), “The G5 Sahel: The End of the Road,” February 2024, https://ict.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Doukhan_The-G5-Sahel_The-End-of-the-Road_2024_13_02.pdf (accessed July 29, 2025).

⁸² “Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso establish Sahel security alliance,” *Al Jazeera*, September 16, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/16/mali-niger-and-burkina-faso-establish-sahel-security-alliance> (accessed September 6, 2025).

⁸³ Papa Atou Diaw, “Quels sont les défis de l’Alliance des Etats du Sahel (AES) ?,” *BBC News Afrique*, September 23, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/articles/c72e2vrqno> (accessed September 11, 2025).

⁸⁴ Ilaria Allegrozzi, “Sahel States’ Withdrawal from ECOWAS Undermines Accountability,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, February 4, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/04/sahel-states-withdrawal-ecowas-undermines-accountability>.

⁸⁵ Premier Sommet des Chefs d’Etat de l’Alliance des Etats du Sahel Niamey, le 6 juillet 2024, Présidence de la République du Mali, July 8, 2024, <https://koulouba.ml/premier-sommet-des-chefs-detat-de-lalliance-des-etats-du-sahel-niamey-le-06-juillet-2024-communique-final/> (accessed September 11, 2025).

⁸⁶ “Sommet des chefs d’État de l’Alliance des États du Sahel : sécurité, économie, justice... où en est vraiment l’intégration ?,” *Jeune Afrique*, July 5, 2025, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1703103/politique/alliance-des-etats-du-sahel-ou-en-est-vraiment-lintegration/> (accessed September 6, 2025).

Gen. Abdourahamane Tiani, said that the AES unified military force, which was announced in January 2025, was operational and that the first battalions were formed.⁸⁷ He said the unified force has its headquarters in Niger’s capital, Niamey, within Air Base 101, formerly used by the French-led Operation Barkhane.⁸⁸ In December 2025, the leaders of the three AES countries met in Bamako, Mali, for an AES summit, the second such meeting since the alliance was formed. They announced the creation of a new Sahel Investment and Development Bank and a television channel and stated that the unified military force would soon be operational.⁸⁹

Analysts say the creation of the AES has not led to significant gains in operations against Islamist armed groups but instead enabled the Sahel’s military juntas to shield themselves from external calls for the reinstatement of democratic governance.⁹⁰ Since Traoré assumed power, Burkina Faso’s international relations have undergone a broader realignment. Traoré shifted away from Burkina Faso’s traditional Western allies, particularly France, toward non-Western powers, including Russia and Türkiye. Russia has provided military equipment and military instructors to Burkina Faso since at least 2024 to boost its capabilities to fight Islamist armed groups.⁹¹ Türkiye’s defense and security cooperation in Burkina Faso has grown to include both the sale of sophisticated

⁸⁷ “La «Force unifiée» de l’Alliance des États du Sahel entre en phase opérationnelle au Niger,” *RFI*, October 2, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251002-la-force-unifi%C3%A9e-de-l-alliance-des-%C3%Agtats-du-sahel-entre-en-phase-op%C3%Agrationnelle-au-niger> (accessed October 2, 2025). On January 21, 2025, Niger’s defense minister announced the creation of a 5,000-strong AES unified military force. See Damien Glez, “La Force unifiée de l’AES, un G3 Sahel défrancisé ?,” *Jeune Afrique*, January 22, 2025, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1650696/politique/la-force-unifiee-de-laes-un-g3-sahel-defrancise/> (accessed October 2, 2025).

⁸⁸ “La «Force unifiée» de l’Alliance des États du Sahel entre en phase opérationnelle au Niger,” *RFI*.

⁸⁹ Nicolas Haque, “A marriage of three: Will Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso bloc reshape the Sahel?” *Al Jazeera*, December 31, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2025/12/31/a-marriage-of-three-will-mali-niger-burkina-faso-bloc-reshape-the-sahel> (accessed January 27, 2026). In February 2026, Niger’s military leader, Gen. Abdourahamane Tiani, announced that the strength of the AES Unified Force, initially planned at 5,000 troops, had been raised to 6,000 soldiers. See “AES : La Force unifiée passe à 6 000 hommes pour contrer les menaces “haute technologie”,” *MaliJet*, February 18, 2026, <https://malijet.com/actualite-sur-aes/308067-aes--la-force-unifiee-passe-a-6-000-hommes-pour-contrer-les-mena.html> (accessed February 19, 2026).

⁹⁰ “A Splinter in the Sahel: Can the Divorce with ECOWAS Be Averted?” International Crisis Group Q&A, December 5, 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso-mali-niger/splinter-sahel-can-divorce-ecowas-be-averted> (accessed September 3, 2025). According to ICG, “Creation of the AES has enabled these military regimes to at least partially insulate themselves from outside pressure for a return to civilian rule. ECOWAS, as well as Western states, initially pressed the military regimes to hasten the transition. All three governments have said they are disposed at some stage in the future to return power to civilians, but have put off taking the steps to do so.” See also David Baché, “Un an après sa création, quel bilan pour l’Alliance des États du Sahel?” September 16, 2024, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240916-un-an-apr%C3%A8s-sa-cr%C3%Agration-quel-bilan-pour-l-alliance-des-%C3%Agtats-du-sahel> (accessed September 3, 2025); “Sommet des chefs d’État de l’Alliance des États du Sahel : sécurité, économie, justice... où en est vraiment l’intégration ?”, *Jeune Afrique*.

⁹¹ “Dozens Of Russian Military Instructors Land In Burkina: Sources,” *Barron’s*, June 18, 2024, <https://www.barrons.com/news/dozens-of-russian-military-instructors-land-in-burkina-sources-c244872a> (accessed September 7, 2025).

armaments such as surveillance and armed drones, and training for the government security forces.⁹² The military has used Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones acquired in 2022 to carry out attacks, including against civilians.⁹³

Since late 2025, relations between the United States and Burkina Faso began to reset, after diplomatic strains following the military coups. In January 2026, Lieutenant General John Brennan, deputy commander of United States Africa Command (AFRICOM), said in an interview that the United States “still collaborates” with AES countries, including on intelligence sharing.⁹⁴ In March 2026, Nick Checker, a senior official within the Department of State’s Bureau of African Affairs, travelled to Ouagadougou, where he met with the Burkinabè Minister of Foreign Affairs “to reaffirm the United States’ respect for Burkina Faso’s sovereignty and to advance shared priorities.”⁹⁵

Peace Negotiations

Before the coup, the Kaboré government undertook sporadic national negotiations with Islamist groups, and there were also local attempts at negotiations. These did not bear fruit and were not repeated by military juntas.

Between late 2020 and 2021, government officials under former President Kaboré held secret peace talks with JNIM to achieve ceasefire agreements in the administrative Sahel region, especially in Djibo and Soum provinces.⁹⁶ According to media reports, in 2021, community leaders in the same region also initiated talks with JNIM leaders that led to the

⁹² Clingendael Institute, “Unravelling Turkish involvement in the Sahel,” July 2023, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/Policy_brief_Unravelling_Turkish_involvement_in_the_Sahel.pdf (accessed September 8, 2025).

⁹³ “Burkina Faso: Drone Strikes on Civilians Apparent War Crimes,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 25, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/25/burkina-faso-drone-strikes-civilians-apparent-war-crimes>. “Le Burkina Faso étouffe sa flotte de drones achetés à la Turquie,” *RFI*, April 9, 2024, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20240409-le-burkina-faso-%C3%A9touffe-sa-flotte-de-drones-achet%C3%A9s-%C3%A0-la-turquie> (accessed September 1, 2025).

⁹⁴ “Les États-Unis « collaborent toujours » avec les armées du Burkina Faso, du Mali et du Niger,” *Jeune Afrique*, January 26, 2026, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1759611/politique/les-etats-unis-collaborent-toujours-avec-les-armees-du-burkina-faso-du-mali-et-du-niger/> (accessed January 27, 2026).

⁹⁵ Bureau of African Affairs’ X account, @AsstSecStateAF, March 12, 2026, <https://x.com/AsstSecStateAF/status/2032149468422775249?s=20> (accessed March 17, 2026).

⁹⁶ “Burkina Faso’s secret peace talks and fragile jihadist ceasefire,” *The New Humanitarian*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2021/03/11/exclusive-burkina-faso-s-secret-peace-talks-and-fragile-jihadist-ceasefire> (accessed September 5, 2025).

armed group lifting military sieges on some communities, allowing people to move more freely.⁹⁷

Peace talks continued under Damiba, whose minister for social cohesion and national reconciliation, Yéro Boly, supported dialogue with Islamist armed groups and encouraged them to lay down weapons.⁹⁸

Traoré, who has called for a total war against Islamist groups, ended such local dialogue efforts soon after seizing power and arrested individuals who participated in or led previous peace talks.⁹⁹ In a June 2025 speech to soldiers in Pô, Center-South region, Traoré said, “Burkinabè [people] will not negotiate with their enemies, we will fight and we will win.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ “Can local dialogues with jihadists stem violence in Burkina Faso?,” *The New Humanitarian*, December 16, 2021, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/2021/12/16/can-local-dialogues-jihadists-stem-violence-burkina-faso> (accessed September 3, 2025).

⁹⁸ “Burkina Faso to support local talks with jihadists: A Q&A with the minister of reconciliation,” *The New Humanitarian*, April 27, 2022, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/interview/2022/04/27/dialogue-with-jihadists-interview-with-burkina-fasos-minister-of-reconciliation> (accessed September 3, 2025). Daouda Kiekieta, “Burkina Faso : Yero Boly, l’homme qui a toujours prôné la diplomatie dans la lutte contre le terrorisme,” *Libre info*, April 27, 2022, <https://libreinfo.net/burkina-faso-yero-boly-lhomme-qui-a-toujours-prone-la-diplomatie-dans-la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme/> (accessed September 3, 2025). “Réconciliation au Burkina : « Des terroristes satisfaits du message du président du Faso », affirme le ministre Yéro Boly,” *Lefaso.net*, August 12, 2022, <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article115342> (accessed September 3, 2025).

⁹⁹ “How Burkina Faso’s military junta outlawed local peace talks with jihadists,” *The New Humanitarian*, November 18, 2024, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/11/18/how-burkina-faso-military-junta-outlawed-local-peace-talks-jihadists> (accessed September 3, 2025).

¹⁰⁰ “RTB-Message du Capitaine Ibrahim TRAORÉ aux Forces combattantes au camp Thomas-SANKARA Pô/Centre-Sud,” YouTube live, *Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, July 17, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6l4DiURPko> (accessed November 28, 2025).

II. Parties to the Conflict

Government Security Forces

The Transition Charter, adopted in October 2022 and amended in May 2024, names Capt. Ibrahim Traoré as the supreme commander of the National Armed Forces, and state media and other official sources refer to him as such.¹⁰¹

In December 2025, speaking about Traoré, Gen. Célestin Simporé, Minister of National Defense and Veterans Affairs since December 2024, was reported saying: “In terms of development, Comrade President has accomplished a lot, because the fight he is leading is not limited to the battlefield for the reconquest of territory; it is a fight on all fronts. [...] I'll tell you a secret: he is the one who practically does everything.”¹⁰²

Since seizing power, Traoré has presided over a significant reorganization of the military, and made two military formations central to counterinsurgency operations, including by dramatically increasing their size and capacity. These are the Rapid Intervention Battalions (Bataillons d'Intervention Rapide, BIR), special military units spearheading counterinsurgency operations and the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie, VDPs), an auxiliary force recruited from civilians, who are trained, armed, financed, and coordinated by the Burkina Faso armed forces to support military operations.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Charte de la Transition, October 14, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20221015153729/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/CHARTE-ET-ACTE-1.pdf>, (accessed September 12, 2025), arts. 4-5. Charte de la Transition (Modifiée), May 25, 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20240526050535/https://www.sig.gov.bf/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1832&cHash=afb8ddaea2be62f10e92420ec40b5b4b, (accessed September 12, 2025), arts. 4-5. Most recently in “Echanges entre le Président du Faso et les familles des forces combattantes tombées au front : – Des écoles pour les pupilles de la Nation – Soutien à l'insertion socioprofessionnelle des veuves et orphelins – Des fonds pour soutenir l'entrepreneuriat,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, March 13, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250314033352/https://www.aib.media/echanges-entre-le-president-du-faso-et-les-familles-des-forces-combattantes-tombees-au-front-des-ecoles-pour-les-pupilles-de-la-nation-soutien-a-linsertion-socioprofessionnelle-des-veuves-et-o/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹⁰² Aly Asmane Ascofaré, “Burkina Faso : 10 choses à savoir sur Célestin Simporé, le « super ministre » de la Guerre d'Ibrahim Traoré,” *Jeune Afrique*, February 5, 2026, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1757508/politique/burkina-faso-10-choses-a-savoir-sur-celestin-simpore-le-super-ministre-de-la-guerre-dibrahim-traore/> (accessed February 15, 2026).

¹⁰³ “Echanges entre le Président du Faso et les familles des forces combattantes tombées au front : – Des écoles pour les pupilles de la Nation – Soutien à l'insertion socioprofessionnelle des veuves et orphelins – Des fonds pour soutenir l'entrepreneuriat,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

Traoré exercises command over the military forces through the minister of Defense and Veterans Affairs.¹⁰⁴ Below the minister in the chain of command is the chief of general staff of the armed forces (CEMGA), who commands the day-to-day military operations.¹⁰⁵ All military formations eventually report up the chain of command to CEMGA. Thus, Traoré, the minister of defense, and CEMGA are connected to all operations conducted by the Burkinabè military.

Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIRs)

The Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIRs) are the backbone of the military under Traoré. The opaque nature of these forces combined with their shifting chain of command over time complicates accountability efforts.

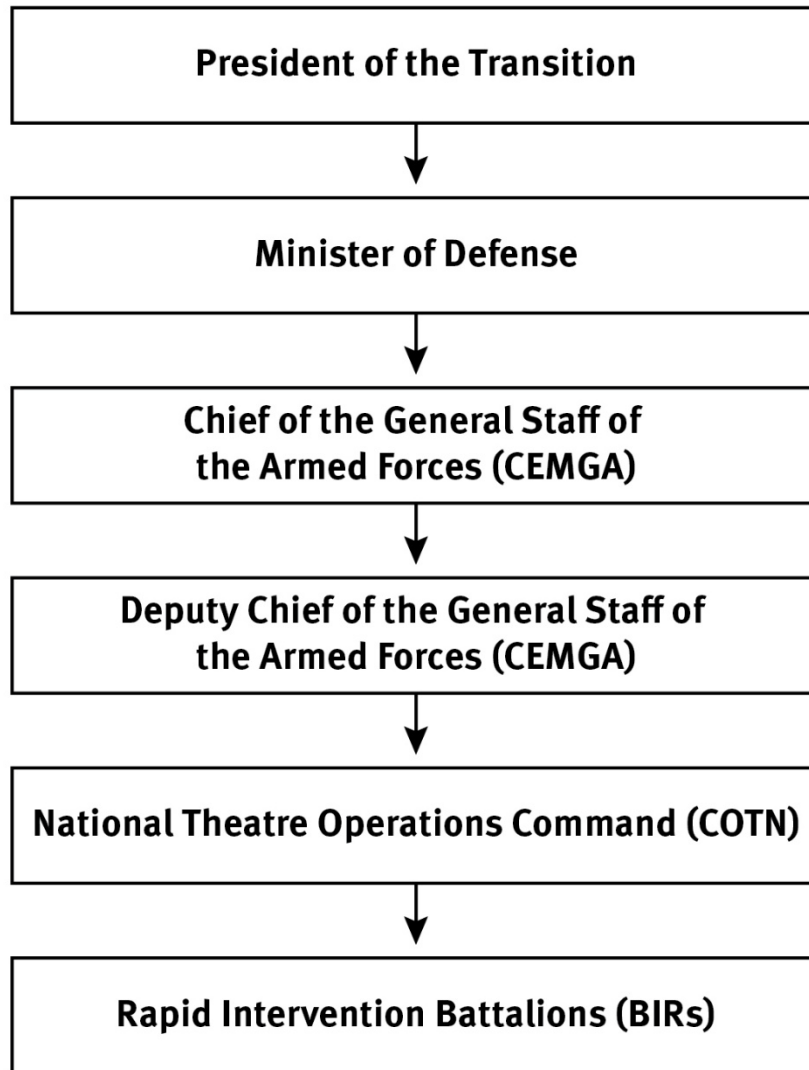
The first two BIRs were created under former military leader Damiba by an August 2022 decree.¹⁰⁶ Shortly after coming to power, Traoré engaged in extensive expansion and restructuring of the military. He placed the BIRs under the operational command of the National Theater Operations Command (COTN) and in turn placed COTN under the command of the chief of general staff of the armed forces (CEMGA).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Décret N°2022-0943/PRES-TRANS/PM/MDAC portant organisation et fonctionnement de l'Etat-Major Général des Armées, <https://web.archive.org/web/20221120221017/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/decret-portant-organisation-et-fonctionnement-de-LEMGA.pdf> (accessed September 11, 2025), art. 10. “Organigramme,” L’Organisation, Ministère de la Défense et des Anciens Combattants, accessed April 14, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250414153248/https://www.defense.gov.bf/le-ministere/lorganisation#c245> ; “L’organigramme,” Ministère de la Défense Nationale et des Anciens Combattants, created October 13, 2015, last modified November 6, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20171106145650/http://www.defense.gov.bf/index.php/le-ministere/2013-01-17-07-37-34/l-organigramme>.

¹⁰⁵ Décret N°2022-0943 portant organisation et fonctionnement de l'Etat-Major Général des Armées, arts. 10, 20-21.

¹⁰⁶ BIRs 1 and 2 were created by Décret n°2022-0659/PRES-TRANS/PM/MDAC du 29 août 2022 portant création du 1er Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (1er BIR) et du 2eme Bataillon d’Intervention Rapide (2eme BIR), which was repealed by the following decree which created BIRs 1 through 6: Décret n°2022-0977/PRES-TRANS portant création de Bataillons d’intervention rapide (BIR), <https://web.archive.org/web/20221201124439/https://netafrique.net/decret-portant-creation-de-bataillons-d-intervention-rapide-bir/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

¹⁰⁷ The BIRs technically functioned as an “operational reserve” of CEMGA that reported directly to CEMGA, but were placed “at the disposal of and under the operational command of COTN,” see Décret n°2022-0976/PRES-TRANS/MDAC/MATDS/MJDHRI/MEFP/MEEA portant organisation, attributions et fonctionnement du Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National (COTN), https://web.archive.org/web/2022115210829/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_Portant-organisation-attribution-et-fonctionnement-du-COTN.pdf (accessed March 13, 2026), arts. 18 and 33.



Chain of command of the Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIRs), August 2022 – January 2024

Traoré also dramatically expanded the BIRs during his first year in power. In November 2022, about a month after he led the coup, he increased the number of BIRs from the initial two Damiba created, to a total of six.¹⁰⁸ A few months later, in May 2023, he created an additional six BIRs and in October 2023, he created seven more BIRs, for a total of 19.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ For BIRs numbered 1 through 6, see Décret n°2022-0977/PRES-TRANS portant création de Bataillons d'intervention rapide (BIR), <https://web.archive.org/web/20221201124439/https://netafrique.net/decret-portant-creation-de-bataillons-dintervention-rapide-bir/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

¹⁰⁹ For BIRs numbered 7 through 12, see Décret n°2023-0606/PRES-TRANS portant modification du décret n°2022-0977/PRES-TRANS du 14 novembre 2022 portant création de Bataillons d'Intervention Rapide (BIR), https://web.archive.org/web/20230531213512/https://lefaso.net/IMG/pdf/decret_modif_bir-min.pdf (accessed March 13,

Three decrees issued in 2022, 2024, and 2025 establish the mission of the BIRs as follows: “intervene as quickly as possible and as far forward as possible, prioritizing mobility and firepower in the face of any threat to the integrity of the national territory;” “provide escorts for large logistical convoys for the benefit of the National Armed Forces or any other organization;” “participate in the fight against organized crime alongside internal security forces,” and “preserve and perpetuate military traditions.”¹¹⁰

In January 2024, Traoré built an entirely new chain of command for the BIRs, while again increasing their number as well as creating new operational and support units to be deployed alongside these BIRs. He created a Special Rapid Intervention Brigade (Brigade Spéciale d’Intervention Rapide, or BSIR) with the BSIR commander overseeing all BIRs through one of four Rapid Intervention Groups (RIG).¹¹¹

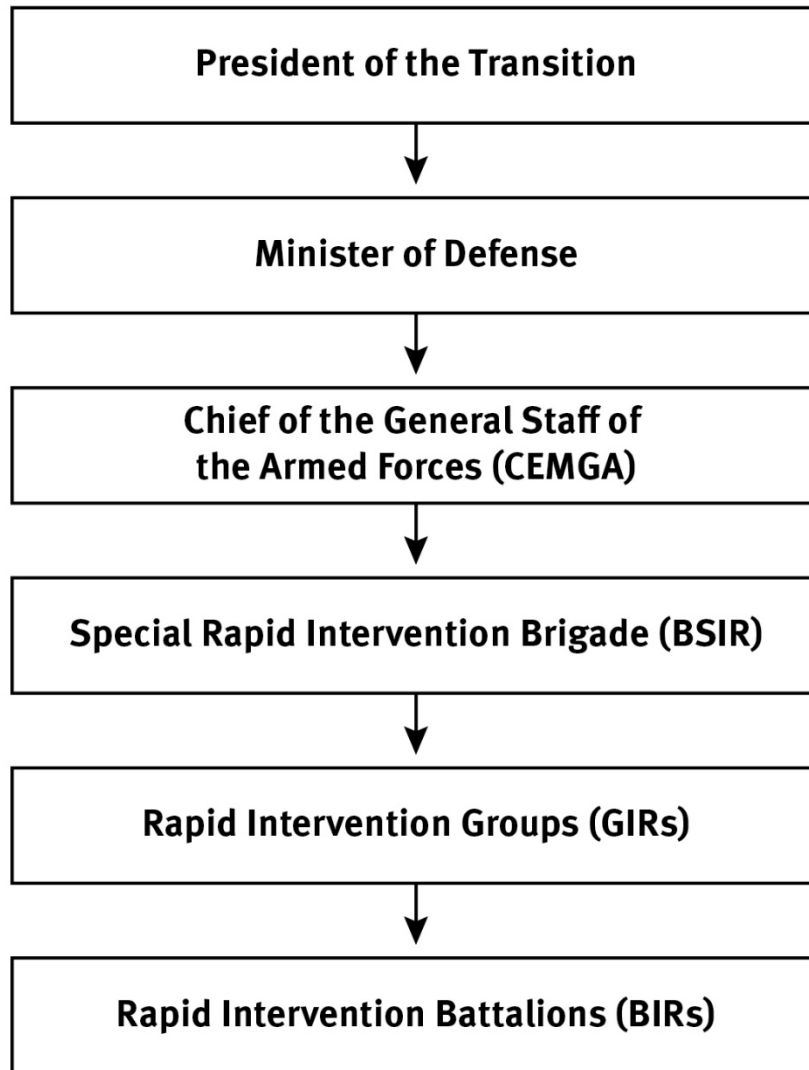
The BSIR commander directly reports to CEMGA.¹¹² There were two BSIR commanders during the period covered by this report: Moussa Diallo and Théophile Nikièma. The BSIR commander is a person of particular importance in the military hierarchy as in practice this office holds three different positions simultaneously: since the brigade was created, Diallo and Nikièma have each simultaneously served as CEMGAA and COTN commander.

2026). For BIRs numbered 14 through 20 (there is no BIR 13), see “Burkina : Création de sept nouveaux Bataillons d’intervention rapide dans l’armée,” *Minute.bf*, October 26, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240806200701/https://www.minute.bf/burkina-creation-de-sept-nouveaux-bataillons-dintervention-rapide-dans-larmee/> (accessed February 2, 2026). Prisca F. Konkobo, “Burkina Faso : Le chef de l’État crée sept nouveaux Bataillon d’intervention rapide (BIR),” *24heures.bf*, October 26, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240222084140/https://www.24heures.bf/burkina-faso-le-chef-de-letat-cree-sept-nouveaux-bataillon-dintervention-rapide-bir/> (accessed February 2, 2026).

¹¹⁰ Décret n°2022-0977 portant création de Bataillons d’intervention rapide (BIR). Mensah Degbetchi, “Burkina Faso : Ibrahim Traoré crée 5 nouveaux Bataillons d’intervention rapide,” *Afrique sur 7*, January 7, 2024, <https://www.afrique-sur7.fr/burkina-faso-ibrahim-traore-cree-5-nouveaux-bir> (accessed September 11, 2025). Décret n°2024-0004/PRES-TRANS/MDAC portant création de Bataillons d’Intervention Rapide. Décret n°2025-0001/PRES/MDAC portant création de Bataillons d’intervention rapide, <https://web.archive.org/web/2025011043727/https://www.aib.media/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/DECRET-2025-0001.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2026).

¹¹¹ Décret n°2024-0003/PRES-TRANS/MDAC portant création, organisation et fonctionnement d’une Brigade spéciale et d’intervention rapide, document on file with Human Rights Watch, art. 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, art. 15.



Chain of command of the Rapid Intervention Battalions (BIRs), January 2024 — ...

With this new BSIR structure in place, Traoré continued to expand the number of BIRs, creating four new BIRs in January 2024, and three more in January 2025¹¹³. There are a total of 27 BIRs stationed across the country at time of writing.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ For BIRs numbered 21 through 25, see Degbetchi, “Burkina Faso : Ibrahim Traoré crée 5 nouveaux Bataillons d’intervention rapide,” *Afrique sur 7*, which includes Décret n°2024-0004 portant création de Bataillons d’Intervention Rapide. For BIRs numbered 26 through 28, see Décret n°2025-0001 portant création de Bataillons d’intervention rapide.

¹¹⁴ “Action plan for stabilization and development: activities implemented at 73.4% in 2023,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, May 17, 2024, <https://www.aib.media/?p=84010> (accessed March 20, 2026). “Burkina Faso: The Prime Minister welcomes the commitment of the Burkinabe people to finance the fight against terrorism with endogenous and sovereign resources,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, March 14, 2025, <https://www.aib.media/?p=109777> (accessed March 20, 2026).

As documented in this report and in previous Human Rights Watch publications, members of the BIRs have been involved in serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and looting and destruction of civilian property.

National Theater Operations Command (Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National, COTN)

The National Theater Operations Command is a joint forces command center charged with designing, organizing, and supporting what the government calls “counterterrorism operations” throughout the country.¹¹⁵ Besides conducting its own operations, the COTN is responsible for coordinating the actions of all defense and security forces as well as VDPs, and can requisition people, services, and goods as needed.¹¹⁶

Damiba created the COTN.¹¹⁷ Traoré restructured it in November 2022, roughly a month after he seized power. He placed the COTN under the chief of general staff of the armed forces (chef d’état-major général des armées, CEMGA) with the deputy chief of general staff of the armed forces (chef d’état-major général adjoint des armées, CEMGAA) exercising operational control over the COTN commander. Traoré replaced Lt. Col. Yves Bamouni, the COTN commander who had been appointed by Damiba, with his own appointee, Col. Maj. Célestin Simporté, in December 2022.¹¹⁸ Since then, every COTN commander has also served as CEMGAA, and, after it was created in January 2024, as BSIR commander as well.

Traoré organized the COTN into six operational units, known as Force Groups, one for each military region.¹¹⁹ The Force Groups are headed by officers appointed by the president and

¹¹⁵ Décret n°2022-0976 portant organisation, attributions et fonctionnement du Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National (COTN), art. 4.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., arts. 4-5.

¹¹⁷ Former President Damiba created the COTN through a February 2022 decree, and tasked it with designing, organizing, and supporting security operations across Burkina Faso. It was headed by an officer who reported directly to the president and exercised authority over all defense and security forces, VDPs, as well as their resources engaged in the field. See Daouda Zongo, “Attaques armées: le COTN, la nouvelle arme du Burkina,” *Wakat Séra*, February 4, 2022, <https://www.wakatsera.com/attaques-armees-le-cotn-la-nouvelle-arme-du-burkina/> (accessed August 11, 2025).

¹¹⁸ “Burkina Faso: Le Colonel-Major Célestin Simporté nommé Commandant des opérations du théâtre national,” *Faso7*, December 8, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20221209144203/https://faso7.com/2022/12/08/burkina-faso-le-colonel-major-celestin-simporte-nomme-commandant-des-operations-du-theatre-national/> (accessed February 2, 2026).

¹¹⁹ Décret n°2022-0976 portant organisation, attributions et fonctionnement du Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National (COTN), art. 16.

are tasked with securing the areas under their control.¹²⁰ Force Group commanders lead military operations in their areas by establishing joint command posts that gather representatives from all participating units, enabling information sharing and coordination. This structure, first established in November 2022, continued throughout the period documented in this report.¹²¹

The commanders of the Force Groups consult COTN when they need reinforcements from other regions, or when they must take difficult decisions in case of a major attack against them but otherwise enjoy significant autonomy.¹²²

In addition to the six Force Groups, the COTN also commands a logistics group, an air force group, and an artillery group.¹²³

Provost Marshals

On February 16, 2023, Burkina Faso's transitional parliament passed a bill to beef up the role of provost marshals, who are responsible for discipline in the armed forces and the protection of detainees' rights during military operations and at military posts.¹²⁴

Under article 241 of Burkina Faso's Code of Military Justice, provost marshals previously operated mainly at military command centers and seldom accompanied soldiers on military operations. These restrictions undermined their core function of protecting detainees' rights and reducing abuses.¹²⁵ In addition to expanding their role, the law provides for provost marshals to have the status of judicial police officers, who are trained in judicial investigations.

¹²⁰ Ibid., art. 32. Force groups include a range of military, police, intelligence, support, and auxiliary units, including VDPs, allowing them to coordinate key security forces involved in counterterrorism operations within their regions. Force group commanders are in charge of commanding all these forces, providing them with logistical and administrative support and managing operational finances.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with M.O., April 24, 2025.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Décret n°2022-0976 portant organisation, attributions et fonctionnement du Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National (COTN).

¹²⁴ Cryspin Laoundiki, "Droits de l'homme et lutte anti-terroriste au Burkina : Des prévôtés sur les théâtres des opérations pour prévenir et réprimer," *LeFaso.net*, February 16, 2023, <https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article119538> (accessed March 7, 2026).

¹²⁵ Carine Kaneza Nantulya, "Burkina Faso Acts to Tackle Armed Forces Abuses," commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, March 17, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/03/17/burkina-faso-acts-tackle-armed-forces-abuses>.

Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (Volontaires Pour la Défense de la Patrie, VDPs)

Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland were created by a 2020 decree issued by then President Kaboré to serve as an auxiliary force to the military in counterinsurgency operations.¹²⁶

Traoré significantly increased VDP recruitment after he seized power. In October 2022, the military authorities launched a campaign to recruit an additional 50,000 VDPs.¹²⁷ According to the Burkinabè authorities, it is estimated there are currently around 90,000 VDPs.¹²⁸

VDPs are trained and armed by the military. They are given 14 days of training “on the rules of engagement, discipline, and respect for human rights.”¹²⁹ The structure and chain of command governing VDPs has changed since they were first formed.

The VDPs were originally coordinated across three tiers: at the village or sector level, at the department or commune level, and at the military region level under the supervision of the COTN.¹³⁰

On November 16, 2022, the structure of the VDPs changed with the creation of the Brigade des Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (Brigade of the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland, VDP Brigade).¹³¹

¹²⁶ Décret n°2020-0115/PRES/PM/MDNAC/MATDC/MSECU/MINEFID portant statut du Volontaire pour la Défense de la Patrie, <https://ekladata.com/Va7Pcizrclq53C7yYwf4tPLIPA.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2026).

¹²⁷ Fahiraman Rodrigue Koné and Hassane Koné, “Risks of Burkina Faso’s new military approach to terrorism,” *Institute for Security Studies*, January 9, 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/risks-of-burkina-fasos-new-military-approach-to-terrorism> (accessed September 2, 2025).

¹²⁸ It is difficult to ascertain the true number of VDPs due to inconsistent reporting, limited oversight, and deployment across parts of the country. In May 2023, then-Prime Minister Apollinaire Joachim Kyélem de Tambèla announced that the initial recruiting target of 50,000 had been reached and that the number of volunteers was “set to grow ... to ensure security even in the most remote parts of the country.” On August 28, 2024, Burkina Faso’s justice minister clarified to Human Rights Watch that by that date, 90,000 VDPs in total had been recruited. According to ACLED, as of 2022, the number of active volunteer fighters under the VDP umbrella was estimated to be 28,000. See Héni Nsaibia, “Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP), Detailed exploration of Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) in Burkina Faso,” *ACLED Actor Profile*, March 26, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/actor-profile/volunteers-defense-homeland-vdp> (accessed March 17, 2026).

¹²⁹ Loi n°002-2020/AN portant institution de Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie, <https://www.assembleenationale.bf/storage/Loi/4V2N9d2UYWgCrXaIX7jjBDbzmKYQwQ4qEydFmOz.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2026), art. 2.

¹³⁰ Décret n°2020-0115 portant statut du Volontaire pour la Défense de la Patrie.

¹³¹ “Compte rendu du Conseil des ministres du Conseil des ministres du mercredi 16 novembre 2022,” *Service d’Information du Gouvernement du Burkina Faso*, November 16, 2022, https://www.sig.gov.bf/actualites/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1361&cHash=fa8ea255342de30f40dd7341bc539a8c (accessed September 11, 2025).

VDPs are under the command and control of the CEMGA as well as under the supervision of whichever military or security force they are supporting in a given area.¹³²

In December 2022, the junta passed a new law governing the VDPs and establishing two categories of VDPs: those who serve locally, within their village or commune, and those who operate across the country.¹³³ VDP fighters who operate at the local level must be residents of the village or commune their group is operating in.

VDPs serve on a 12-month contract that can be renewed.¹³⁴ They receive allowances for food during operations, as well as other forms of financial support, including compensation for any temporary or permanent disability and payment of burial costs in the event of death.¹³⁵

VDPs are liable to local courts for any wrongdoing committed while serving and are specifically prohibited from committing “any act contrary to the laws, regulations, customs and traditions of war, as well as international conventions to which Burkina Faso is a party.”¹³⁶

VDP recruitment has favored sedentary communities and sidelined pastoralists, including Fulani people.¹³⁷ Many members of the military and VDPs oppose the recruitment of Fulani people into VDP groups because they suspect them of sympathizing with Islamist armed

¹³² Letter from Harouna Kadio, on behalf of the Minister of Justice of Burkina Faso, to Human Rights Watch, “Réponses du Gouvernement aux conclusions des recherches menées par Human Rights Watch (HRW) au Burkina Faso entre février et juin 2024,” response to questions 4 and 5, August 2024, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/09/Africa_BurkinaFaso_ROR_Response.pdf.

¹³³ Loi n°028-2022/ALT instituant les Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP), <https://web.archive.org/web/20250214221835/https://academiedepolice.bf/index.php/services-en-ligne/telechargement/category/32-securite-interieure?download=193:loi-n-028-2022-alt-instituant-les-volontaires-pour-la-defense-de-la-patrie-vdp> (accessed September 11, 2025). The law states that VDPs operate under the direct command of the military or internal security forces they are supporting, see Hamadou Ouedraogo, “Burkina : La loi instituant les Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP) adoptée à l’unanimité à l’ALT,” *Burkina24*, December 17, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241009105512/https://burkina24.com/2022/12/17/burkina-la-loi-instituant-les-volontaires-pour-la-defense-de-la-patrievdp-adoptee-a-lunanimite-a-lalt/> (accessed February 2, 2026), includes Rapport n°2022-029/ALT/CAGIDH, Dossier n°32 : relatif au projet de loi instituant les Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP), Assemblée législative de transition, Commission des affaires générales, institutionnelles et des droits humains (CAGIDH), December 2022.

¹³⁴ Loi n°028-2022/ALT instituant les Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP), art. 6.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, arts. 8-9, 11.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, arts. 12, 14.

¹³⁷ International Crisis Group, “Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion?,” Africa Report n°313, December 15, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/burkina-faso/313-armed-civilians-at-the-cost-of-social-cohesion> (accessed September 4, 2025).

groups. This marginalization, compounded by the fear of retaliation by Islamist armed groups, has, in turn, led almost all Fulani people to avoid joining VDPs.

As extensively documented by Human Rights Watch in this report and previous publications, VDPs have committed serious human rights abuses.¹³⁸ Their recruitment and actions have also fueled communal tensions and exposed civilians to deadly retaliatory attacks by JNIM.¹³⁹

Army

The army (*armée de terre*) is commanded by the chief of army general staff (chef d'état-major de l'armée de terre, CEMAT, not to be confused with the chief of general staff of the armed forces, CEMGA) and is organized into military regions that oversee army operations in their territory.¹⁴⁰ The army has been restructured and expanded since Traoré seized power and added three new military regions in November 2022, bringing the total number of military regions to six.¹⁴¹ Regiments are the main operational units of the army that report to the military region commander.

Determining Dates of Service for Military Commanders

Military commanders from BIRs to senior levels of command are appointed by decree. Like in many militaries around the world, commanders formally assume their position in a ceremony. These can be “swearing-in” where the person assumes their command position, or “handover” ceremonies where the previous commander transfers command to the new commander. Whenever possible, Human Rights Watch has used the date of these ceremonies as the start or end date for commanders named in this report. If no ceremony

¹³⁸ “Burkina Faso: Government-Allied Militias Linked to Massacre,” Human Rights Watch news release, March 14, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/14/burkina-faso-government-allied-militias-linked-massacre>.

¹³⁹ International Crisis Group, “Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion?”. “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 18, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/18/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-terrorize-civilians>.

¹⁴⁰ Décret n°2022-0943 portant organisation et fonctionnement de l'Etat-Major Général des Armées, art. 22.

¹⁴¹ Décret n°2022-0975/PRES-TRANS portant organisation du territoire national en Régions Militaires, https://web.archive.org/web/20241213001445/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_Portant-organisationdu-territoire-nationalen-region-militaire-RM.pdf (accessed September 11, 2025). The army previously had six Military Regions between 1985 and 1994, before reducing to three. For more details, see “L'Organisation,” Ministère de la Défense et des Anciens Combattants, last modified April 14, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250414153248/https://www.defense.gov.bf/le-ministere/lorganisation>.

can be found, this report notes the date of appointment and then uses the earliest date a source indicates the commander was in their position.¹⁴²

Islamist Armed Groups

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims, JNIM)

JNIM is an Al-Qaeda-affiliated armed group that, according to ACLED, seeks to challenge the authority of regional governments and establish “an alternative jihadist social and political order across the central Sahel.”¹⁴³

JNIM was created in Mali on March 2, 2017, when the Sahara branch of the armed group Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) merged with other Islamist armed groups: Ansar al-Dine, Al-Mourabitoun, and Katiba Macina.¹⁴⁴ The armed group has since expanded its military operations across the Sahel region, attacking civilians as well as armed forces and militias.¹⁴⁵

JNIM has also been in conflict since 2019 with the Islamist armed group IS Sahel.¹⁴⁶ JNIM views IS Sahel, which follows a stricter interpretation of Islamic law, as heretical, due to its

¹⁴² In November 2022, commanders for all six military regions were appointed and there were significant delays before their swearing in ceremonies, ranging from six months to over a year. This is an anomaly as most ceremonies occur within days to weeks after appointment. However, sources indicate that many of these commanders were in their roles before their swearing in ceremonies. For these cases, Human Rights Watch uses the dates evidenced by these sources.

¹⁴³ Héni Nsaibia, Dr. Eleanor Beevor, and Flore Berger, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), “Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa, Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM),” October 2023, <https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/JNIM-Non-state-armed-groups-and-illicit-economiesin-wWest-Africa-GI-TOC-ACLED-October-2023.pdf> (accessed February 12, 2026).

¹⁴⁴ “Mapping armed groups in Mali and the Sahel – The Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimeen, JNIM),” European Council on Foreign Relations, https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping/jnim (accessed July 29, 2025).

¹⁴⁵ Centre for Information Resilience, “A hidden war: Violent extremism rules in the Sahel, and is spreading south,” July 30, 2025, <https://www.info-res.org/articles/a-hidden-war-violent-extremism-rules-in-the-sahel-and-is-spreading-south/> (accessed August 1, 2025). Human Rights Watch, “*We Found Their Bodies Later That Day*: Atrocities by Armed Islamists and Security Forces in Burkina Faso’s Sahel Region (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2019), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/03/22/we-found-their-bodies-later-day/atrocities-armed-islamists-and-security-forces>. “Niger: Surging Atrocities by Armed Islamist Groups,” Human Rights Watch news release, August 11, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/11/niger-surging-atrocities-armed-islamist-groups>. “Mali: Islamist Armed Groups, Army Target Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, November 1, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/01/mali-islamist-armed-groups-army-target-civilians>.

¹⁴⁶ Wassim Nasr, New Lines Institute, “ISIS in Africa: The End of the ‘Sahel Exception’,” June 2, 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/nonstate-actors/isis-in-africa-the-end-of-the-sahel-exception/> (accessed September 11, 2025).

harsh stance toward other Muslim communities and fundamental disagreements over religious doctrine.¹⁴⁷

Since 2017, JNIM has been headed by Iyad Ag Ghaly, former head of Ansar al-Dine. Ag Ghaly works closely with his deputy, Amadou Kouffa, former head of Katiba Macina and one of JNIM's most visible faces.¹⁴⁸

JNIM's revenue stems from *zakat*, or Islamic tax, it raises in areas it controls, and from involvement in illicit economies, including artisanal mining, the informal gold trade, kidnapping for ransom, livestock theft, and extortion.¹⁴⁹

In some areas of Burkina Faso, as well as Mali and Niger, JNIM seeks to assert control by establishing some forms of governance, including providing a modicum of services such as dispute resolution, justice, religious education, and security, to gain local support.¹⁵⁰

JNIM has engaged in both conventional warfare, including large-scale, conventional attacks on important military positions, and asymmetric warfare, such as hit-and-run attacks.¹⁵¹ JNIM fighters primarily use motorcycles, which allow them to be fast and mobile.¹⁵² The armed group increasingly uses drones to carry out strikes, as well as intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance operations.¹⁵³ JNIM also uses technology, such as satellite internet from Starlink, to coordinate attacks and communicate in remote areas.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁷ Paul Cruickshank, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, "Answers from the Sahel: Wassim Nasr, Journalist, France24, on His Interview with Deputy JNIM Leader Mohamed (Amadou) Kouffa," vol. 18, issue 1, January 2025, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/answers-from-the-sahel-wassim-nasr-journalist-france24-on-his-interview-with-deputy-jnim-leader-mohamed-amadou-kouffa/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

¹⁴⁸ "Amadou Kouffa," Counter Extremism Project, accessed July 30, 2025, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/amadou-kouffa>.

¹⁴⁹ Nsaibia, Beevor, and Berger, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and ACLED, "Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)."

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Samuele Minelli Zuffa and Moreblessing Takura Madzikatire, Intelligensis, "Extremism in the Sahel – Jama'at Nasr Al-Islam Wal Muslimin (JNIM)," March 14, 2024, <https://intelligensis.com/extremism-in-the-sahel-focus-on-jnim/> (accessed August 3, 2025).

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Rida Lyammouri and Niccola Milnes, Policy Center for the New South, "Countering JNIM's Drone Proliferation in the Sahel," July 14, 2025, <https://www.policycenter.ma/publications/countering-jnims-drone-proliferation-sahel?s=09>, July 14, 2025 (accessed August 3, 2025).

¹⁵⁴ Célia Cuordifede, "Starlink: The newest asset for rebel and jihadist groups in West Africa," *Le Monde*, July 5, 2025, <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/07/05/starlink-the-newest-asset-for-rebel-and-jihadist-groups-in-west>

Areas of Operation

Mali is the historical base of JNIM's operations, but since 2017, JNIM has expanded from Mali into Burkina Faso through its affiliated Burkinabè armed groups known as Ansaroul Islam, headed by Jafar Dicko, and Katiba Hanifa, headed by Abou Hanifa, also known as Oumarou.¹⁵⁵ Ansaroul Islam and Katiba Hanifa have both been integrated into JNIM, despite retaining their own identities to a certain degree. While Ansaroul Islam operates across Burkina Faso, and particularly in northern and western regions, Katiba Hanifa carries out its operations predominantly in southeastern Burkina Faso.¹⁵⁶

According to ACLED, JNIM's "influence and reach extend across much of the central Sahel and into the West African littoral states," and has expanded from its traditional stronghold in Mali to Burkina Faso, Niger, Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Togo.¹⁵⁷

JNIM is present throughout Burkina Faso's territory and most of JNIM's operations are concentrated in Burkina Faso.¹⁵⁸

Ansaroul Islam

Ansaroul Islam was founded in late 2016 by Islamic preacher Malam Ibrahim Dicko, a native of Burkina Faso's northern Soum province. Dicko gained popularity by denouncing corruption, inequality and abuses by the state, Fulani clan leaders, and traditional

africa_6743055_4.html#:~:text=From%20Mali%20to%20Chad%2C%20Starlink,created%20by%20billionaire%20Elon%20Musk (accessed on September 20, 2025). Solomon Ekanem, "Jihadist groups exploiting Starlink amid African expansion, new report warns," *Business Insider Africa*, July 7, 2025, <https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/lifestyle/jihadist-groups-exploiting-starlink-amid-african-expansion-new-report-warns/qlsfzcm> (accessed September 19, 2025).

¹⁵⁵ WAMAPS, "JNIM in the Sahel: Recent Developments and Area of Influence," April 24, 2025, <https://westafricamaps.com/en/analysis/jnim-in-the-sahel-recent-developments-and-area-of-influence?> (accessed September 2, 2025). Wamaps' X account, @Wamaps_news, April 16, 2025, https://x.com/Wamaps_news/status/1912525671189918002 (accessed September 2, 2025).

¹⁵⁶ Africa Center For Strategic Studies, "The Shifting Front of Militant Islamist Violence in the Sahel," April 7, 2025, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/militant-islamist-violence-sahel/> (accessed November 30, 2025).

¹⁵⁷ Héni Nsaibia, ACLED, "Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM): A detailed profile of JNIM, their operations, economic warfare, and influence in the Sahel," November 13, 2023, <https://acleddata.com/report/jamaat-nusrat-al-islam-wal-muslimin-jnim> (accessed February 14, 2026). See also International Crisis Group, "Le Jnim et le dilemme de l'expansion au-delà du Sahel," *Rapport Afrique n°321*, February 20, 2026, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2026-02/321-jnim-expansion-sahel-fr%20%281%29.pdf> (accessed February 21, 2026). According to the International Crisis Group, "JNIM does not limit its fight to a single bounded territory," and "[T]oday, the territory of JNIM is roughly divided into two main types of areas: on one hand, the countries of the central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger), which are the heart of its fight, and on the other hand, the coastal countries, which have so far been considered as peripheral theaters of operations."

¹⁵⁸ "Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians," Human Rights Watch news release.

chiefs.¹⁵⁹ From around 2009, he began spreading his message in local mosques and radios, primarily in the Sahel administrative region of Burkina Faso, by way of a local religious association to promote Islam he founded, called Al-Irchad.¹⁶⁰ Dicko's popularity and the membership in Al-Irchad steadily grew, but his discourse became progressively more radical and, in 2012, he joined up with Islamist armed groups that had taken over northern Mali.¹⁶¹ He eventually allied himself with Katiba Macina, a Malian AQIM affiliate, and in 2016, formed Ansaroul Islam. He died in 2017 and was replaced by his brother Jafar Dicko as leader of Ansaroul Islam in Burkina Faso.¹⁶²

Jafar Dicko, who is believed to be a close ally of Kouffa and trusted by Ag Ghaly, serves as the *amir*, or supreme leader, of JNIM in Burkina Faso.¹⁶³ Dicko's deputy is his younger brother Ousmane Dicko, aka Owais, who has appeared in several videos published on social media.¹⁶⁴

An August 2022, report by the nongovernmental organization Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime states that while there has been no official announcement, "Ansaroul Islam has cooperated closely with JNIM (and its forerunners) from its first attack on Burkinabè soil in 2016, and over time appears to have been quasi-absorbed into the JNIM coalition."¹⁶⁵

The report continues: "there is little documentation of how the relationship between Ansaroul Islam and JNIM changed throughout 2020 and 2021, but attacks by the two

¹⁵⁹ International Crisis Group, "The Social Roots of Jihadist Violence in Burkina Faso's North," Africa Report n°254, October 12, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/burkina-faso/254-social-roots-jihadist-violence-burkina-fasos-north> (accessed April 23, 2018).

¹⁶⁰ Morgane le Cam, "Comment est né Ansaroul Islam, premier groupe djihadiste de l'Histoire du Burkina Faso," *Le Monde*, April 11, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/04/11/comment-est-ne-ansaroul-islam-premier-groupe-djihadiste-de-l-histoire-du-burkina-faso_5109520_3212.html (accessed February 3, 2026).

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch, "*By Day We Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists.*"

¹⁶² "Jafar Dicko," Counter Extremism Project, accessed September 20, 2025, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/jafar-dicko>.

¹⁶³ International Crisis Group, "Le Jnim et le dilemme de l'expansion au-delà du Sahel."

¹⁶⁴ "Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Massacre Civilians," Human Right Watch news release, September 15, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/15/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-massacre-civilians>.

¹⁶⁵ Eleanor Beevor, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "JNIM in Burkina Faso, A strategic criminal actor," August 2022, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Burkina-Faso-JNIM-29-Aug-web.pdf> (accessed September 2, 2025).

groups have become essentially indistinguishable. JNIM now claims attacks from units in areas that were previously Ansaroul Islam strongholds, which suggests the latter has been effectively absorbed into the JNIM coalition.”¹⁶⁶

Two videos recorded and posted online in April and May 2025 by Ansaroul Islam featuring Jafar Dicko and his brother Ousmane Dicko both display the logo of the Az-Zallaqa Foundation, the JNIM media foundation.¹⁶⁷

In January 2026, Sahel analysts reported that Saa’d or Sadou, a JNIM commander in Burkina Faso, defected to IS Sahel, bringing with him several fighters.¹⁶⁸

Recruitment

JNIM’s ranks are estimated to number several thousand fighters. As of 2024, the United Nations reported there were between 5,000 and 6,000 JNIM fighters, largely in Burkina Faso, but also in Niger and Mali.¹⁶⁹

Most JNIM fighters are young men and boys from poor communities.¹⁷⁰ Ansaroul Islam has recruited from all communities in Burkina Faso, but predominantly from the Fulani community. A combination of economic hardship, ethnic marginalization, and frustration at military abuses have all helped JNIM recruit.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Wassim Nasr’s X account, @SimNasr, April 8, 2025, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1909546883288072663> (accessed September 2, 2025); May 13, 2025, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1922255521664385380> (accessed September 2, 2025).

¹⁶⁸ Wassim Nasr’s X account, @SimNasr, February 10, 2026, <https://x.com/simnasr/status/2021339938432876848?s=46&t=9jUlfzulX1hVufzW4a82ng> (accessed February 16, 2026). Brant’s X account, @BrantPhilip_, February 15, 2026, https://x.com/brantphilip_/status/2023057986155921746?s=48&t=kZkodXsSjnKEbtZu6eZ31Q (accessed February 17, 2026).

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Security Council, Letter dated 19 July 2024 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2024/556, July 22, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/556> (accessed September 2, 2025).

¹⁷⁰ United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and armed conflict in Burkina Faso.

¹⁷¹ Corinne Dufka (Human Rights Watch), “Sahel: Atrocities by the security forces are fueling recruitment by armed Islamists,” commentary, *Le Monde*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/01/sahel-atrocities-security-forces-are-fueling-recruitment-armed-islamists>. Human Rights Watch, “*By Day We Fear the Army, By Night the Jihadists.*”

Structure and Chain of Command

JNIM has a three-tier administrative system. This structure consists of a central leadership body (the Shura council), a middle layer structured around administrative regions known as *manatiq* and military units called *katiba*, and a local level made up of smaller fighting units referred to as *markaz* and *saryat*.¹⁷²

JNIM has a decentralized, yet hierarchical structure, designed to allow for cohesion and discipline despite the group's wide geographical reach. JNIM subgroups operate with relative autonomy, but the central leadership sets the overall political and military direction and enforces discipline.¹⁷³

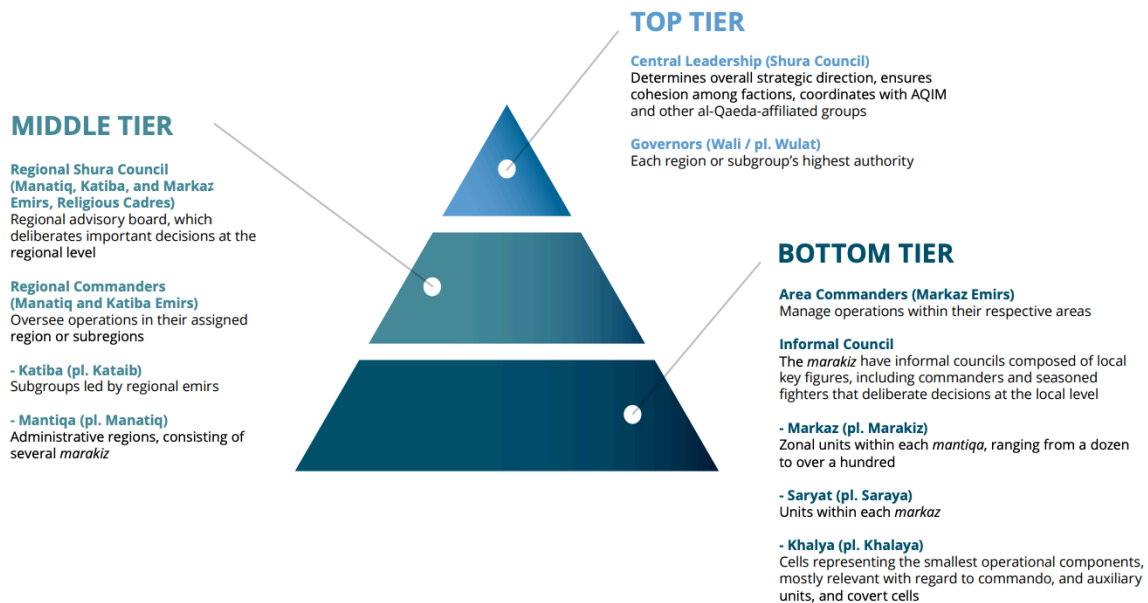
According to a 2023 report by ACLED and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, JNIM's chain of command is deliberately structured to transcend administrative boundaries and national borders, allowing the armed group to maintain unity, impose strategic direction, and diffuse any potential internal tensions. The report states that a key feature of this system is the deployment of senior commanders to sensitive areas, particularly the Gourma region, to prevent fractures and coordinate among diverse units.¹⁷⁴

As of July 2025, Human Rights Watch researchers analyzed all 67 videos posted to the official JNIM media channel on Chirpwire between April 25, 2022, and April 24, 2025, and observed that only the top leaders had their faces uncovered. Most fighters have their faces covered or blurred in videos, suggesting that lower chains of command are deliberately obscured in material shared outside JNIM.

¹⁷² International Crisis Group, "Le Jnim et le dilemme de l'expansion au-delà du Sahel." Nsaibia, Beevor, and Berger, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), "Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)."

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with a specialist on JNIM, April 17, 2025. See also Eleanor Beevor, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, "JNIM in Burkina Faso, A strategic criminal actor."

¹⁷⁴ Nsaibia, Beevor, and Berger, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and ACLED, "Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)."



The Structure of JNIM. Source: Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime. Credit: Héni Nsaiba, 2023.

Propaganda Dissemination

The Az-Zallaqa Foundation is the official propaganda outlet for JNIM and was established in 2017 when the armed group was created. It produces content to spread JNIM’s ideology, claim attacks, recruit fighters, and influence public opinion.¹⁷⁵

According to analysts, JNIM inherited media capabilities from the groups that formed it, particularly AQIM, resulting in significant similarities in narrative themes, visual style, and technical aspects of audiovisual content between AQIM’s propaganda outlet Al-Andalus and JNIM’s Az-Zallaqa media outlets.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. See also Maj. Ryan CK Hess, “Lassoing the Haboob: Countering Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin in Mali, Part I,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Air University Press, November 24, 2020, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2425320/lassoing-the-haboob-countering-jamaat-nasr-al-islam-wal-muslimin-in-mali-part-i/> (accessed March 7, 2026).

¹⁷⁶ Héni Nsaibia and Rida Lyammouri, “Digital Dunes and Shrublands: A Comparative Introduction to the Sahelian Jihadi Propaganda Ecosystem,” *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, October 27, 2020, <https://gnet-research.org/2020/10/27/digital-dunes-and-shrublands-a-comparative-introduction-to-the-sahelian-jihadi-propaganda-ecosystem/> (accessed March 8, 2026).

JNIM maintains its primary media channel, Az-Zallaqa Foundation, on Chirpwire, an encrypted social media application.¹⁷⁷

ACLED analyst and JNIM expert Héni Nsaibia told Human Rights Watch that Az-Zallaqa content is also distributed through Signal, Telegram, and Matrix and that “battlefield footage, including videos of attacks and seized materiel, often circulates rapidly through WhatsApp networks.” Nsaibia said while Az-Zallaqa’s outputs are generally produced in Arabic, French, and English, “JNIM has diversified its media outputs through initiatives including the Darul Murabitin weekly bulletin, which features audio briefings and news-style video broadcasts in local languages, as well as more specialized platforms like Minbar al-Bayan and Chaîne al-Fath, and ad hoc media outlets such as al-Nafir, al-Taghur, and al-Qamar, typically used for public outreach, specific operations, or other messaging purposes.”¹⁷⁸

Sanctions and Accountability

Leaders of JNIM have faced several kinds of sanctions and investigations. In June 2024, a pretrial chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) unsealed an arrest warrant against Ag Ghaly.¹⁷⁹ The warrant, initially issued under seal in July 2017, states that Ag Ghaly is wanted on charges of war crimes, including sexual violence, and crimes against humanity, committed in northern Mali between January 2012 and January 2013.¹⁸⁰ Ag Ghaly has also been on a UN sanctions list since February 25, 2013.¹⁸¹

In October 2018, the UN added JNIM as a whole to its sanctions list.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Sebastian Vandermeersch, “Mali Under Siege: Tracking the Fuel Blockade Crippling Bamako,” *Bellingcat*, December 3, 2025, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2025/12/03/mali-under-siege-tracking-the-fuel-blockade-crippling-bamako/> (accessed March 7, 2026).

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Héni Nsaibia, March 18, 2026.

¹⁷⁹ “Situation in Mali: ICC unseals arrest warrant against Iyad Ag Ghaly,” International Criminal Court press release, June 21, 2024, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-mali-icc-unseals-arrest-warrant-against-iyad-ag-ghaly> (accessed September 2, 2025).

¹⁸⁰ “Mali: ICC Unseals Arrest Warrant for Armed Group Leader,” Human Rights Watch press release, June 26, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/06/26/mali-icc-unseals-arrest-warrant-armed-group-leader>.

¹⁸¹ “Iyad Ag Ghali,” Narrative Summaries, Sanctions List Materials, Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities, United Nations Security Council, last modified November 14, 2023, https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1267/aa_sanctions_list/summaries/individual/iyad-ag-ghali.

¹⁸² “Jama’a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM),” United Nations Security Council, last modified October 4, 2018, <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/content/jamaa-nusrat-ul-islam-wa-al-muslimin-jnim>.

In September 2018, the US State Department designated JNIM as a foreign terrorist organization.¹⁸³ The State Department also added Amadou Kouffa to the Specially Designated Global Terrorists list in November 2019, senior JNIM commanders Sidan Ag Hitta and Salem Ould Breihmatt in August 2021, JNIM leaders Talha Al-Libi, Messaoud Belhireche Jafar in April 2024.¹⁸⁴ Also in April 2024, the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control sanctioned Jafar Dicko for hostage-taking of a US national in West Africa.¹⁸⁵

In June 2022, the European Council added Jafar Dicko to the EU sanctions list, as well as Sidan Ag-Hitta and Salem Ould Breihmatt to the list.¹⁸⁶

Islamic State Sahel Province

IS Sahel aims to establish a caliphate in the Sahel region “no matter the means or time it necessitates,” according to a leader in the region.¹⁸⁷ It has carried out large-scale attacks against civilians as well as regional and international military forces.¹⁸⁸ IS Sahel has also been in conflict with JNIM.

IS Sahel operates in the northern and eastern regions of Burkina Faso, particularly in the Sahel administrative region. Its stronghold is in Niger's Tillabéri region and it is also present in Mali's Menaka region.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ US Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, “State Department Terrorist Designation of Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM),” Washington, DC, September 5, 2018, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/state-department-terrorist-designation-of-jamaat-nusrat-al-islam-wal-muslimin-jnim/index.html> (accessed September 2, 2025).

¹⁸⁴ US Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Executive Order 13224,” signed on September 23, 2001, <https://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/#current> (accessed September 11, 2025). “Specially Designated Global Terrorist Designations of Messaoud Belhireche, Talha al-Libi, Hamama Ould Khouier, and Hussein Ould Hammada,” *Federal Register*, July 9, 2024, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/07/09/2024-14940/specially-designated-global-terrorist-designations-of-messaoud-belhireche-talha-al-libi-hamama-ould> (accessed September 11, 2025).

¹⁸⁵ “U.S. Targets West African Hostage Takers,” US Department of Treasury press release, April 23, 2024, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2293> (accessed December 1, 2025).

¹⁸⁶ “Jafar Dicko,” EU sanctions tracker, European Commission, accessed September 11, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/apps/eusanctionstracker/subjects/141424>. “EU fight against terrorism: one group and three individuals added to the EU sanctions list over terrorism,” Council of the European Union press release, June 20, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/20/eu-fight-against-terrorism-one-group-and-three-individuals-added-to-the-eu-sanctions-list-over-terrorism/> (accessed September 2, 2025).

¹⁸⁷ Guillaume Soto-Mayor and Boubacar Ba, CRTG Working Group, “Generational Warfare in the Sahel: The Khilafa Cubs and the Dynamics of Violent Insurgency within the Islamic State Province.”

¹⁸⁸ Héni Nsaibia, ACLED, “IS Sahel's tactics cause mass, indiscriminate violence,” January 13, 2023, <https://acleddata.com/2023/01/13/is-sahels-tactics-cause-mass-indiscriminate-violence/> (accessed September 11, 2025).

¹⁸⁹ Guillaume Soto-Mayor and Boubacar Ba, CRTG Working Group, “Generational Warfare in the Sahel: The Khilafa Cubs and the Dynamics of Violent Insurgency within the Islamic State Province.” See also, “Niger: Islamist Armed Group Executes Civilians,

Adnan Abu Walid Al-Sahraoui created the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in 2015 after breaking from the Al-Qaeda affiliate Al-Mourabitoun due to ideological disagreements and seeking to establish a hardline, transnational jihadist presence in the Sahel under the banner of the Islamic State. The group renamed itself IS Sahel in 2022.¹⁹⁰

Human Rights Watch has previously documented serious abuses by IS Sahel against civilians in Burkina Faso, including attacks on schools and churches.¹⁹¹

In August 2021, a French military airstrike in a border area between Mali and Niger killed Adnan Abu Walid Al-Sahraoui, the group's founder.¹⁹² Since then, the group has reconsolidated its chain of command and reorganized, shifting away “from mass violence to more structured governance and expanded territorial control, particularly in the Malian regions of Menaka and Gao,” according to ACLED.¹⁹³

Burns Homes,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 10, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/10/niger-islamist-armed-group-executes-civilians-burns-homes>.

¹⁹⁰ Héni Nsaibia, ACLED, “IS Sahel's tactics cause mass, indiscriminate violence.”

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch, *“Their War Against Education”: Armed Group Attacks on Teachers, Students, and Schools in Burkina Faso* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2020) <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/05/26/their-war-against-education/armed-group-attacks-teachers-students-and-schools>. “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release.

¹⁹² Tom Wheeldon, “Sahrawi: The top Sahel jihadist killed in French 'opportunistic hit',” *France 24*, September 16, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20210916-the-assassinated-abou-walid-al-sahrawi-france-s-major-enemy-in-the-sahel> (accessed September 5, 2025).

¹⁹³ Héni Nsaibia, ACLED, “Newly restructured, the Islamic State in the Sahel aims for regional expansion,” September 30, 2024, <https://acleddata.com/2024/09/30/newly-restructured-the-islamic-state-in-the-sahel-aims-for-regional-expansion/> (accessed September 11, 2025).

III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs

The Burkinabè military and VDPs carried out grave abuses against civilians during several dozen operations, including unlawful killings and summary executions; arbitrary and incommunicado detention; torture and other ill-treatment; pillage and burning of homes; and looting of livestock. These abuses have also resulted in hundreds of thousands of people being displaced to other parts of the country and to neighboring countries.

Human Rights Watch documented 33 incidents in all six military regions, between January 2023 and April 2025, resulting in the killing of at least 1,255 civilians, including 193 children.

Circumstances of Abuses

These abuses have occurred in the context of small, medium, and large-scale operations.

Burkinabè military forces and VDPs in some incidents targeted civilians on suspicion of collaborating with JNIM, or as retaliation following JNIM attacks. In other cases, forces in convoys targeted civilians apparently because they lived in JNIM-controlled zones. Many of the attacks appear to have targeted Fulani communities and to have had a strong ethnic basis. In some cases, attacks appear to have been carried out on a purely ethnic basis.

Some of these abuses involved a small number of military personnel or VDPs, working jointly or separately, at the village level over the course of a few hours or a day. Other incidents involved a more significant number of soldiers, sometimes more than one unit, and members of more than one local VDP group, covering several villages or communes over a few days. Yet other incidents took place as part of large-scale operations, which have become frequent since the 2022 coup, especially in the northern and western regions. Such large-scale operations are organized by the central military command and can include hundreds of soldiers from both the army and BIRs, VDPs, as well as armored vehicles and air support such as helicopters or drones.

Witnesses identified government forces in various ways. They described those involved as wearing military uniforms, driving in state vehicles known to be used by the security forces and, in several cases, as presenting themselves as military. In other cases, witnesses also

saw military helicopters and tanks—equipment known to be used in Burkina Faso only by the Burkinabè military. Witnesses most simply described alleged assailants as “soldiers,” or “military,” but were unable to clearly differentiate between regular army soldiers and BIRs. When they could, the precision is reflected in the case descriptions. Most witnesses were unable to identify individual members of security forces, or commanders, or units involved in the violations by security forces described below. Witnesses identified VDPs based on the clothes they wore—partial military uniforms with no stripes—and by the rudimentary equipment they carried (no boots, no helmets, no bulletproof vests). At times, they also recognized VDPs as individuals coming from their own village or town.

Drone Strikes

The Burkinabè military carried out three drone strikes between August and November 2023 that killed at least 60 civilians, in serious violation of the laws of war. The strikes occurred on August 3, 2023, in Bourou, Sahel region; September 21, 2023, in Bidi, North region; and November 5, 2023, in Boulkessi, Mali. In each case, drones attacked civilian gatherings: a funeral (Bidi), and two crowded markets (Bourou and Boulkessi).

These attacks killed and injured civilians, with survivors describing scenes of devastation, including torn bodies and children among the dead. Witnesses said there were no warnings and, while in the two markets there were JNIM fighters, no apparent efforts were made to verify targets or protect civilians.

The use of armed drones in these contexts could amount to violations of the laws of war, which prohibit deliberate attacks on civilians and indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. In a January 2024 report, Human Rights Watch called on the Burkinabè government to investigate the strikes as apparent war crimes, hold those responsible to account, and provide adequate support for the victims and their families.¹⁹⁴ To date, no government investigation has been carried out into these strikes.

¹⁹⁴ “Burkina Faso: Drone Strikes on Civilians Apparent War Crimes,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 25, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/01/25/burkina-faso-drone-strikes-civilians-apparent-war-crimes>.

Attacks Against Fulani Civilians on the Basis of Ethnicity

Human Rights Watch documented that military forces and VDPs perpetrated numerous violations against Fulani people, including unlawful killings, summary executions, looting and destruction of their property, as well as forced displacement. Human Rights Watch found that the attacks targeting the Fulani civilian population were widespread and systematic and thus amount to the crimes against humanity of murder, persecution and forced displacement, among others.

Scores of Fulani civilians interviewed for this report told Human Rights Watch that during attacks or in their aftermath, military personnel or VDPs said that they would kill all Fulani people or chase them from their land.

Military forces and VDPs have targeted Fulani communities for their perceived collaboration with Islamist armed groups, which have recruited heavily among Fulani populations in Burkina Faso, as well as across the Sahel region. This perception, entrenched in longstanding ethnic bias, social, economic and political marginalization, and the geographical intersection between Fulani settlements and Islamist armed group strongholds, has led the military and their allied militias to conflate the Fulani with Islamist fighters.

Attacks Against Civilians for Presumed Collaboration with JNIM

Military forces and VDPs have targeted civilians, Fulani and non-Fulani, for their presumed collaboration with JNIM. They have also carried out extensive retaliatory attacks against civilians in the aftermath of JNIM attacks against government forces and VDPs.

The laws of war prohibit reprisal attacks against civilians, as well as collective punishment.¹⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch research indicates that the Burkinabé military and VDPs carried out many attacks against civilians in the aftermath of JNIM attacks against military or VDP positions, and other strategic targets, including telecommunication infrastructure.

¹⁹⁵ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, vol. I: Rules (Cambridge University Press, 2005), rule 146.

Attacks Against Civilians During Operations to Secure Supply or Other Convoys

Government forces carried out many attacks against civilians during operations to secure supply convoys heading to towns and villages besieged by JNIM or to other access-constrained areas.

A senior analyst from an international think tank said massacres of civilians have occurred during military efforts to secure or reopen supply routes in areas under jihadist siege or long-term insecurity. He said that soldiers often entered regions they do not control and treat anyone they encounter as presumed Islamist fighters simply because they live in a territory under the control of armed groups. This “clearing the road” strategy—essentially shooting on sight near convoy routes—reflects a tactical approach that unlawfully prioritizes military gains over civilian protection, he said, resulting in severe harm to local populations.¹⁹⁶

JNIM has repeatedly disrupted access to villages and cities under siege, planting IEDs along roads, destroying road infrastructure, and attacking supply convoys. These attacks have led the government to require military escorts for convoys.¹⁹⁷

French state-owned international radio Radio France Internationale (RFI) and Burkinabè rights group Collective Against Impunity and Community Stigmatization (CISC) reported that on February 1, 2023, security forces escorting a convoy to the Boungou industrial mine in Burkina Faso’s East region killed at least 30 civilians, including seven women, in Piega, Sakoani, and Kankagou.¹⁹⁸ The government announced an investigation on February 3, 2023, but its status remains unknown.¹⁹⁹

French newspaper *Libération* reported that between April 27 and May 19, 2024, BIR soldiers and VDPs escorting two separate convoys organized to bring supplies to localities

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a senior analyst from an international think tank, February 19, 2025.

¹⁹⁷ Amnesty International, “Death was slowly creeping on us’: Living under siege in Burkina Faso,” Index Number: AFR 60/7209/2023, November 2, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr60/7209/2023/en/> (accessed March 16, 2026).

¹⁹⁸ “Burkina Faso: un convoi minier tire sur des civils, au moins 30 morts,” *RFI*, February 3, 2023, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20230203-burkina-faso-un-convoi-minier-tire-sur-des-civils-au-moins-30-morts> (accessed July 29, 2025). Wamaps’ X account, @Wamaps_news, February 3, 2023, https://x.com/Wamaps_news/status/1621446128435712000 (accessed September 3, 2025).

¹⁹⁹ Elie Kaboré’s X account, @eliekabore, February 3, 2023, <https://x.com/eliekabore/status/1621604022749696002> (accessed September 3, 2025).

besieged by JNIM fighters killed up to 400 civilians on their way to those localities and on their return.²⁰⁰ According to *Libération*, one convoy left Dori, Sahel province, on April 27, 2024, escorted by BIR 5 and BIR 9, as well as VDPs, before reaching the besieged town of Mansila, in the same region, on May 4, 2024, and returning to Dori on May 10, 2024. A second convoy left the city of Fada N’Gourma, East region, on May 4, 2024, escorted by BIR 4, BIR 12, BIR 19, and BIR 20 and VDPs, reached the town of Foutouri, in the same region, on May 7, 2024, or thereafter, before returning to Fada N’Gourma on May 19, 2024.

RFI reported that on May 21, 2025, more than 100 civilians were killed in several villages in the district of Dori and Gorgadji, Sahel region. Citing local sources, RFI said the massacre was committed by soldiers and VDPs escorting a supply convoy that was on its way back from Arbinda, a town besieged by JNIM since at least 2022.²⁰¹ RFI quoted residents in the villages of Tafagou and Nobiol, who stated that at least 105 people were killed and buried in mass graves. Human Rights Watch spoke to a woman from Tafagou who fled the village when the soldiers and VDPs arrived and returned when they left. She said she saw the bodies of at least 13 civilians, including two women, of whom one was pregnant, two girls, and a newborn. Human Rights Watch also spoke to a woman who fled Nobiol when the military convoy arrived and returned when the assailants left. She said she found at least 100 bodies lying on the ground, mostly of women and children. On May 31, 2025, the Burkina Faso defense minister rejected the allegations made by RFI as “grave and defamatory,” “aimed at destabilizing the country,” and “tarnishing the image” of the military and VDPs.²⁰²

Human Rights Watch documented two additional cases of attacks against civilians by the Burkina Faso military and VDPs during convoy operations in April 2023 and between January and March 2025.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Célian Macé and Agnès Faivre, “« Les soldats ont tiré sur tout ce qu’ils ont vu » : au Burkina Faso, des centaines de civils exécutés par deux convois militaires,” *Libération*, July 17, 2024, https://www.liberation.fr/international/afrique/les-soldats-ont-tire-sur-tout-ce-qu'ils-ont-vu-au-burkina-faso-des-centaines-de-civils-executes-par-deux-convois-militaires-20240717_l4YZVCP4FHERO7IP6CS3D7FOM/ (accessed September 3, 2025).

²⁰¹ “Burkina Faso: plus de 100 civils tués dans plusieurs villages dans le nord, l’armée et des VDP accusés,” *RFI*, May 29, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250529-burkina-faso-plus-de-100-civils-tues-dans-plusieurs-villages-l-armee-et-des-vdp-accuses> (accessed September 3, 2025).

²⁰² “Burkina Faso: le ministre de la Défense conteste les accusations de massacre dans le nord,” *RFI*, May 31, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250531-burkina-faso-le-ministre-de-la-d%C3%A9fense-conteste-les-accusations-de-massacre-dans-le-nord> (accessed July 29, 2025).

²⁰³ Gangaol, Sahel Region, April 3, 2023, and Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel Region, January-March 2025.

The following section provides the details of the laws-of-war and human rights violations that Human Rights Watch documented involving the Burkinabè military and allied militias across the country's six military regions. Drawing on witness accounts and other available sources and material, it describes patterns of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, looting, and forced displacement attributed to military forces and VDPs during counterinsurgency operations.

1st Military Region (North and Center-North administrative regions)

Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North Region, February 2023

In early February 2023, Burkinabè military and VDPs killed at least eight Fulani men and a boy and forcibly disappeared another man in two separate, but coordinated, sets of attacks on Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, two villages six kilometers apart in the North region, according to witnesses. Witnesses said the VDPs spoke in Mooré and wore military uniforms without epaulettes, unlike soldiers' uniforms. They said the forces came from Ouahigouya, about 12 kilometers east of Bonsonmoré, and attacked Fulani people, alleging they were collaborating with Islamist fighters. JNIM later forcibly expelled many of the two villages' residents.

The Bonsonmoré attack took place in an area where JNIM was operating. A 70-year-old man from Bonsonmoré said JNIM fighters had been present in their area before the attack, pressuring the population to join their ranks. However, he said, "The Fulani refused to help them, [even though] the pressure [on them] was strong.... [T]his led to a false association between the terrorists and us, as the VDPs and military thought we were collaborating with the terrorists."²⁰⁴

Government forces first targeted Bonsonmoré's Fulani neighborhood. They shot indiscriminately at people who were fleeing. Two witnesses said the assailants killed three men there, then burned several motorbikes. The forces continued to Goutoula, where, according to two other witnesses, they searched Fulani homes and killed a 16-year-old boy and four men. VDPs returned to Bonsonmoré the following day and abducted two more Fulani men. The body of one was later found, while the other's fate was unknown.

²⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with K.L., Ivory Coast, November 24, 2024.

A 50-year-old woman who lost her brother in the first attack in Bonsonmoré said she saw the military enter her neighborhood “in four pickup trucks with machine guns on top,” and saw VDPs riding motorbikes. “They started shooting, so I hid in the house, frightened,” she said, saying there was heavy shooting for about 30 minutes.²⁰⁵

The 70-year-old Bonsonmoré man said he hid in a house and saw VDPs execute two of his nephews:

As the shooting started, people ran in panic. My nephew was trying to calm people who were running, and a VDP took him by the arm, while another one shot him in the back of the neck.... My other nephew kneeled and raised his hands in the air, showed a VDP his identity card, but was shot in the left side.²⁰⁶

The man said that when the military and VDPs left, he recovered his two nephews’ bodies as well as that of another man, who had been shot in the right eye. He buried the three in his field. “A delegation from Bonsonmoré asked the military for permission to bury them,” the man said. “The military agreed but did not say anything about the fact that they killed innocent people.”²⁰⁷

After Bonsonmoré, the security forces attacked Goutoula. A 41-year-old man said he fled to the nearby bush when he saw military vehicles and VDPs on motorbikes approach the town. When he returned later, he found the bodies of his brother, three other men, and a teenage boy. He said his brother had been shot in the left side of his abdomen. “We buried them in individual graves,” the man said. He also said he found that “almost all homes in the Fulani neighborhood had been broken into and some looted.”²⁰⁸

The next day, four VDPs returned to Bonsonmoré and abducted two men. The 70-year-old man said the VDPs blindfolded the men and tied their hands behind their backs, saying, “Kill them! Kill them all!” before taking one of the detainees toward a well. The man said

²⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with A.P., Ivory Coast, November 24, 2024.

²⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with K.L., November 24, 2024.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with M.E., Ivory Coast, November 24, 2024.

he heard gunshots minutes later and subsequently found one body in the well. He did not know what happened to the second man.²⁰⁹

Human Rights Watch reviewed two lists of victims compiled by residents that included the names of the four men killed in Bonsonmoré, ages 30 to 75; the teenage boy and four men killed in Goutoula, ages 16, 29, 30, 32, and 44; and the 32-year-old man missing in Bonsonmoré.

About a week after the second attack in Bonsonmoré, JNIM fighters went to both Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, accused the population of collaborating with the VDPs and the military, and ordered them to leave or face death. “They gave us 24 hours,” a 41-year-old Bonsonmoré resident said. “We asked for more time, but they said if we stayed longer, we would all be killed.”²¹⁰ Residents said many people fled both villages and sought shelter in nearby localities.

Zambanga, Center-North Region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023

On March 29, 2023, Burkinabè military and VDPs appear to have summarily killed five Fulani men in Zambanga, a village populated by ethnic Mossi and Fulani people. Two witnesses and a resident said that, after the security forces entered the village, they arrested five Fulani men. Later that day, villagers found their bodies, riddled with bullets, at the Zambanga cemetery. Residents said the incident, occurred in a context of “continuous fighting” between JNIM and the military and VDPs, as well as of growing anti-Fulani sentiment.²¹¹

A 46-year-old man said:

There were almost daily clashes.... The jihadists passed [by the village] and the VDPs would chase them.... We would see the VDPs coming back with their wounded and dead.... The clashes occurred close to the village, in the bush, three to six kilometers from Zambanga and near the surrounding

²⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with K.L., November 24, 2024.

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.J., January 25, 2025.

²¹¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with N.V. and G.F., Ghana, March 9, 2025.

villages.... The more fighting occurred, the more the VDPs would target us, the Fulani.²¹²

Witnesses said the military and the VDPs arrested the five men in Zambanga the same day JNIM fighters killed one man and burned the telecommunication tower in Gaoga, a village about 10 kilometers from Zambanga. ²¹³ “They [Islamist fighters] came from the north side of the village [Gaoga] shooting, between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m.,” a 70-year-old man from Gaoga said. “They burned the tower, killed a *donso* [traditional hunter] and then continued toward Zambanga.”²¹⁴

Witnesses in Zambanga said the military came with four pickup trucks, accompanied by VDPs riding about 100 motorbikes and by a helicopter. “They surrounded the village, then a group of VDPs went to a house and took five young men,” a 40-year-old woman said. “Minutes later, we heard gunshots.”²¹⁵

Witnesses said that they identified some of the VDPs involved as Boulsa residents and named two of them.

The 46-year-old man said that when the military and VDPs left, he found the bodies of the five detained men “lying on their stomachs” with gunshot wounds. “One was shot in the chest, two in the head and the other two on the side,” he said. “One of them was still holding his identity card in his hand.... We buried them in the same grave.”²¹⁶

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list, compiled by witnesses and other Zambanga residents with the names of the five victims, all men ages 20 to 30.

²¹² Human Rights Watch interview with P.M., Ghana, March 9, 2025.

²¹³ ACLED has this incident on March 16, 2023. On 16 March 2023, presumed JNIM militants attacked the village of Gaoga (Namentenga, Centre-Nord). One civilian was killed. The militants also set fire to the local market and the cell phone installations.

²¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with N.V., March 9, 2025.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with D.T., Ghana, March 9, 2025.

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with P.M., Ghana, March 9, 2025.

The man said that he and other Fulani men later went to the gendarmerie in Boulsa, seven kilometers away, to report the incident, but that the gendarmes did not believe them and threatened to kill them.²¹⁷

Aftermath of the Incident

Following the killing of the five youths, Zambanga's Fulani community, increasingly concerned for its security as VDP raids and confrontations between the military and JNIM continued, fled the village.²¹⁸

Two weeks after the bodies of the five men were found, VDPs returned to Zambanga twice. The first time, they beat at least four Fulani women; the second time, days later, they killed the 80-year-old local Fulani traditional chief.

One of the women who was beaten said that all the men had left the village as the VDPs approached, and that she was home with three other women when two VDPs broke in. "They asked us: 'Where are your husbands?' We replied our husbands were at the borehole or in the fields," she said. "They said our husbands are jihadists, and all our homes are full of weapons." She added that the VDPs ordered her to take out everything she had in the house, and then searched the house for weapons but found none. "So, one VDP slapped me, and I almost fainted," she said. "Then he took out a whip and beat another woman who had her baby on her back, ... as well as the other two women."²¹⁹

Witnesses and other residents said the killing of the chief shocked the Fulani community, prompting many families to flee the area and seek refuge in the bush, in other regions, or in neighboring countries.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ According to ACLED, on 29 March 2023, volunteer fighters (VDPs) clashed with presumed JNIM militants in the village of Zambanga (Boulsa, Namentenga). Five VDP and about 10 militants were killed. Eight VDP were also injured. On April 7, 2023, the Burkinabè air force carried out airstrikes against presumed JNIM militants on about 30 motorcycles in the village of Zambanga (Boulsa, Namentenga). Several militants were killed. Fatality coded as 10. [Witnesses confirmed the bombing]

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with D.T., March 9, 2025.

Karma, North Region, April 20, 2023

In a May 4, 2023, report, Human Rights Watch documented that Burkinabè military killed 156 civilians, including 83 men, 28 women, and 45 children, in a brutal attack in April 2023 on the village of Karma and its vicinity.²²⁰ The forces also burned homes and looted property. Survivors, their relatives, and civil society groups publicly denounced the killings at a press conference.²²¹ The local prosecutor opened an investigation, but no one has been held accountable at time of writing.

Nearly all the bodies were found in Karma. Eleven of those killed had been bound and blindfolded. In addition to the victims found in Karma, nine more bodies were found in the nearby villages of Dinguiri, Kèrga, and Ramdola.²²²

Survivors said the killings occurred during a six-hour operation carried out by the military. They believed the massacre was in retaliation for attacks by Islamist armed groups against Burkinabè troops and VDPs earlier in the month. On April 15, 2023, JNIM fighters had killed six Burkinabè soldiers and thirty-four VDPs in Aeroma village, five kilometers from Karma.²²³

Witnesses said soldiers surrounded the village and went door to door, searching and looting homes, ordering residents to come outside, and beating them. The soldiers then rounded up the villagers in groups and opened fire, including on people who ran for cover, hid in houses, or begged for their lives. Witnesses in Ouahigouya said that, before the attack by the military, they saw members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion 3 in the convoy leaving Ouahigouya early on the morning of April 20, 2023, and heading toward Karma. “I saw ‘BIR 3’ on their uniforms,” said an Ouahigouya resident.²²⁴

The public prosecutor in the provincial capital, Ouahigouya, said on April 23, 2023, that “men wearing Burkinabè army uniforms” killed 60 people in Karma, and announced that

²²⁰ “Burkina Faso: Army Linked to Massacre of 156 Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 4, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/04/burkina-faso-army-linked-massacre-156-civilians>.

²²¹ David Rich, “Au Burkina Faso, la société civile demande des comptes après le massacre de 150 villageois,” *France 24*, April 30, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20230430-au-burkina-faso-la-soci%C3%A9t%C3%A9-civile-demande-des-comptes-apr%C3%A8s-le-massacre-de-150-villageois> (accessed September 12, 2025).

²²² “Burkina Faso: Army Linked to Massacre of 156 Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release.

²²³ “Forty dead in attack on army and volunteers in north Burkina Faso,” *Reuters*, April 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/forty-dead-attack-army-volunteer-defence-forces-north-burkina-faso-2023-04-16/> ((accessed July 29, 2025).

²²⁴ “Burkina Faso: Army Linked to Massacre of 156 Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release.

an investigation was underway. On April 27, 2023, Communications Minister Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo promised that the government would “do everything within its prerogatives for the total manifestation of the truth in this dramatic event.” More than two-and-a-half years later, there had been no progress in the investigation, and no one had been held accountable.

After the military attack, almost all residents fled Karma. As of July 2025, they had yet to return to the village.

Barsalogo, Center-North Region, April 20, 2023

On April 20, VDPs appear to have summarily killed five Fulani men in Barsalogo city. A 35-year-old Fulani man said that he was the only survivor of the attack and that the victims were his relatives. He said that at the time of the incident nearly “all Fulani people had fled Barsalogo,” and that his family had been about to leave too.²²⁵

“The jihadists had attacked the VDPs around Barsalogo multiple times, and even though my family was well-known in the city, we felt an increasing risk of reprisals, including through threats and rumors circulating in the community,” the man said. “So, we decided our wives and children should leave and that we would follow them after selling our homes and cattle.”²²⁶

The man said that on April 20, 2023, following a JNIM attack against VDPs north of Barsalogo, VDPs riding at least 20 motorbikes stormed his family home in the southeast of the city and started firing. “I managed to escape, and I sought protection at the gendarmerie station, where I remained for 24 hours until [the moment when] the gendarmes assigned four people to go with me back to my place and carry out the burials.”²²⁷

The man said he found the bodies of his five brothers and cousins outside his father’s house, all with bullet wounds to the chest and head, “except for my younger brother who had been mutilated.... [H]is hands and feet had been cut off.”²²⁸

²²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with R.G., Ghana, March 16, 2025.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

The man provided the names of the five people killed, all men ages 20 to 60. He said he fled Barsalogo after the incident to seek asylum in a neighboring country.

Nondin and Soro, North Region, February 25, 2024

Human Rights Watch documented in an April 2024 report that the Burkinabè military summarily killed at least 223 civilians, including at least 56 children, in the villages of Nondin and Soro, on February 25, 2024, in among the worst military atrocities in Burkina Faso since 2016.²²⁹ In Nondin, soldiers killed 44 people, including 20 children. Then, in nearby Soro, they killed 179 people, including 69 women, four of whom were pregnant, and 36 children, of whom 19 were boys and 17 girls.

Witnesses believe that the killings were perpetrated in retaliation for an attack earlier that day by JNIM against a military and VDP camp outside the provincial capital, Ouahigouya, about 25 kilometers from Nondin.

Witnesses said that between 8:30 a.m. and 9 a.m., about 30 minutes after a group of Islamist fighters passed near the village yelling “Allah Akbar!” (God is great), a military convoy with over 100 Burkinabè soldiers arrived in Nondin on motorbikes, in pickup trucks, and in at least two armored cars. They said the soldiers went door-to-door, rounded up villagers in groups before opening fire on them. Soldiers also shot at people trying to flee or hide. Villagers described a similar scenario in Soro, where soldiers arrived about an hour later and shot people who had been rounded up or who tried to hide or escape.

On February 25, 2024, the state broadcaster RTB reported “a major attack” by Islamist fighters around 7 a.m. “against the mixed battalion” military base in Ouahigouya.²³⁰ It said that soldiers from a BIR “chased the fighters fleeing toward Thiou” and “neutralized most of those who could not flee.”²³¹ The report, which made no reference to civilian casualties, stated that soldiers requested that drones not follow the fighters they were chasing and to “leave this group to them.”

²²⁹ “Burkina Faso: Army Massacres 223 Villagers,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 25, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/25/burkina-faso-army-massacres-223-villagers>.

²³⁰ “RTB – Edition Spéciale les Nouvelles du front du 25 février 2024,” YouTube live, *Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, February 25, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GxwMegzWrX8&rc0=1> (accessed September 5, 2025).

²³¹ *Ibid.*



Satellite imagery from November 22, 2024, shows concrete frames at the location of two mass graves previously geolocated by Human Rights Watch. On May 6, 2024, Human Rights Watch received two new videos from a survivor claimed to be recorded the day before showing people building concrete frames around two of the mass graves. On one of the frames the sentence “Here rest 39 people from the February 25, 2024, massacre. May their souls rest in peace. Village of Soro.” is engraved in French. Image © 2026 Airbus, Google Earth. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

On March 1, 2024, Aly Benjamin Coulibaly, prosecutor of the high court in Ouahigouya, said in a statement that he received reports of “massive deadly attacks” on the villages of Komsilga, Nondin, and Soro on February 25, 2024, with a provisional toll of “around 170 people executed,” and others injured, and that he ordered an investigation.²³² Coulibaly said that he had visited the sites of the incidents with the judicial police on February 29, but that he had not been able to locate the dozens of bodies he had been told were there.²³³

²³² Natasha Booty, “Burkina Faso says 170 dead in village ‘executions,’” *BBC*, March 3, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-68462144> (accessed September 11, 2025).

²³³ *Ibid.*

More than one year and a half later, there has been no reported progress in the investigation, and the authorities appear to have taken no steps to bring those responsible for the mass killings in Nondin and Soro to justice.

After the attacks, almost all residents of Nondin and Soro fled. “The majority to Ouahigouya, searching for protection and assistance.”²³⁴ As of April 30, 2025, Soro was still empty, while few people had returned to Nondin, according to local activists.

Torobo and Ouahigouya, North Region, May 2024

In late May 2024, VDPs attacked Torobo, a village mainly populated by Fulani people, and burned homes. Several witnesses said they believed VDPs targeted the community because they lived in a JNIM-held area. JNIM fighters had come to Torobo at least twice in April 2024, threatening the population, unsuccessfully attempting to recruit men into their ranks and collecting *zakaṭ*, or Islamic tax.

A 47-year-old man said that when JNIM fighters came the first time in April 2024, they rounded up all villagers in front of the mosque, told them “to quit their jobs,” and join the “jihad,” before returning a week later to collect the *zakaṭ*. “They counted my goats and sheep, there were 47,” he said. “They took one goat and left.”²³⁵ A 43-year-old man said, “They made ... threats, saying that we had to join them to be good Muslims and that if we didn’t, we would face the consequences.”²³⁶

Witnesses said on the day of the VDP attack, VDPs arrived in Torobo at about 4 p.m. on dozens of motorbikes, and shot at people, causing them to flee. “We all ran into the bush, and we could see smoke and flames coming from the village,” a 39-year-old woman said.²³⁷

Witnesses believed a 20-year-old man was killed in the attack, but Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm this.

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with R.R., May 2, 2025.

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with T.E., Ivory Coast, November 25, 2024.

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with V.A., Ivory Coast, November 25, 2024.

²³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with P.W., Ivory Coast, November 25, 2024.

Witnesses said they fled to the city of Ouahigouya, about 25 kilometers away, where some slept outside near a cattle pen, while others were sheltered by local families. They said that the next day, VDPs attacked them again in the city, leading the police to intervene.

The 43-year-old man said the VDPs at the cattle pen surrounded him and other displaced people and beat two of his brothers with their rifles. The police eventually intervened and brought the victims to the premises of the Burkinabè Movement for Human and Peoples' Rights (Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples), a local human rights group. "The VDPs were armed with Kalashnikovs [assault rifles] and very furious when they saw us," he said. "They called us terrorists in Mooré and said that we must all be executed on the spot."²³⁸

A 25-year-old woman said she fled Torobo with her 9-year-old son and four other women. She said she arrived in Ouahigouya early in the morning and was hosted by a local Bobo family:

A group of about 15-armed VDPs stormed the place and asked the owner whether there were any Fulani people in his house. The owner said, "There are only women." ... A VDP turned on his lamp and saw my son and said, "Here's a man." He grabbed him by one hand; I grabbed him by the other hand and started screaming.... Meanwhile, the police came and the VDPs let me and my child go.²³⁹

Touka, Center-North Region, July 13, 2024

On July 13, 2024, at about 8 a.m., Burkinabè military and VDPs entered Touka village, five kilometers south of the town of Kongoussi, followed by a military helicopter, and killed at least seven civilians, including five children. Twelve homes and 10 granaries were also destroyed. Several witnesses said they believed the attack was in retaliation for earlier attacks by JNIM against government forces, and that they thought the military and VDPs targeted the local community because they accused it of harboring Islamist fighters.

²³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with V.A., November 25, 2024.

²³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with E.R., Ivory Coast, November 25, 2024.

A Quranic teacher, 67, said:

About one week before the attack, the jihadists ambushed the military between Touka and Kongoussi and then retreated to Touka with their wounded and asked for water. We gave them water and they left. I think this is why we were attacked by the military. It's just a retaliation.²⁴⁰

A 45-year-old man whose wife, daughter, and older brother were killed in the attack said the military and VDPs came with hundreds of motorbikes, followed by a camouflage-painted helicopter. "We fled, but my relatives hid in the house, and we saw the helicopter dropping a bomb," he said. "When we returned to the village, we found seven charred bodies in the house. We couldn't really bury them. We just covered them with the debris of the destroyed house."²⁴¹

The Quranic teacher said that when he returned to Touka, he found "a village in ruins. The military and VDPs took everything. They looted my 30 cows, my home. They set on fire my millet granaries."²⁴²

Human Rights Watch reviewed three lists compiled by the witnesses with the names of the seven victims. Three were girls, ages 1, 6, and 10 two were boys, both 2 years old, and two were women estimated to be 30 to 40 years old.

2nd Military Region (Cascades, South-West, and Hauts-Bassins administrative regions)

Man, Hauts-Bassins Region, February 2023

In February 2023, hundreds of VDPs riding motorcycles entered Man village and shot indiscriminately at Fulani villagers, killing at least 10 men whom they accused of collaborating with Islamist fighters. JNIM has been known to operate in the area and to attack security forces. Several witnesses said the VDPs spoke Mooré, wore civilian clothes

²⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Q.I., January 18, 2025.

²⁴¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.L., January 20, 2025.

²⁴² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Q.I., January 18, 2025.

as well as military uniforms, and carried Burkinabè flags, and that they believed the VDPs came from several localities in the Tuy province.

A 43-year-old man said:

There wasn't any previous attack [against security forces] that could have triggered this massacre. The jihadists impose Sharia [Islamic law], they pass through, and they go away, we don't know where they go, we can't stop them from passing by our village. But the VDPs attacked Fulani people saying they are accomplices of the terrorists.²⁴³

A 60-year-old man said:

We thought they came for a regular patrol, so we approached them and one of us, in a welcome gesture, gave them water. But they said they did not come to drink water and shot [the person offering the water] in the head and belly, before opening fire on all of us.... People ran away, and they chased and shot at those fleeing, including me. I narrowly escaped. Two people fell behind me.²⁴⁴

A 54-year-old man who returned to Man after the attack said his brother, 45, had been shot dead.

He was killed on the outskirts of the village... hit by several bullets.... His boubou [a loose-fitting garment] was completely covered in blood.... We collected 10 bodies, scattered around the village, in front of homes or in the streets, and buried them in individual graves.²⁴⁵

Pê, Hauts-Bassins Region, mid-late May 2023

In mid-late May 2023, a group of at least six VDPs entered a Fulani settlement located about one kilometer from Pê village and killed four civilian men. Two witnesses said that

²⁴³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with O.K., January 20, 2025.

²⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with A.A., January 20, 2025.

²⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with M.H., January 17, 2025.

prior to this incident, government forces and JNIM fighters had both carried out attacks in Pê. They said that in late 2022, the military killed three farmers in Pê whom they accused of collaborating with JNIM after JNIM fighters had burned the telecommunication antenna in the area.²⁴⁶

Witnesses said the VDPs entered the hamlet on foot at about 6 p.m., shooting and causing people to flee.

A 35-year-old man who also fled the hamlet and returned after the incident said the four people killed were all his close relatives, including his brother. “I found my brother’s body in the courtyard of his home, with multiple bullet wounds, in the left side of his ribs, in his feet and legs, and also in his head,” the man said. “The other three men had all been shot in the head. We buried them the following day in separate graves.”²⁴⁷

A 65-year-old man who returned to the hamlet after the incident said he found the bodies of five men “who did not flee in time, including those of a father and son in the same courtyard ... and two others in front of their homes.” The man said he buried one of those killed.²⁴⁸

The witnesses said the VDPs all wore military uniforms, came from Pohin village, about three kilometers from Pê, and provided the names of three of them. They said that the day after the incident, residents called the gendarmes in Houndé, 25 kilometers away, and requested they investigate the incident, but that the gendarmes did not follow up.

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by the witnesses with the names of four victims, all Fulani men, ages 26 to 65.

Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins Region, July 8, 2023

On July 8, 2023, government forces detained and killed 11 members of a Fulani family, including two boys and five girls, at a checkpoint between the villages of Ramatoulaye and

²⁴⁶ ACLED has both incidents. Property destruction: On 8 October 2022, presumed JNIM militants burned a telecommunications antenna in the village of Pe (Koumbia, Tuy). On 3 December 2022, presumed gendarmes or soldiers killed three farmers in the village of Pe (Koumbia, Tuy).

²⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.L., March 13, 2025.

²⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with G.E., March, 14, 2025.

Kodomba, on the road linking the town of Bekuy to the city of Bobo-Dioulasso. A twelfth member of the family, a man, was killed in front of the family house in their hometown of Bekuy on July 9, 2023, by the same forces. Relatives filed a report on July 20, 2023, at the high court in Bobo-Dioulasso. As of March 2025, Human Rights Watch was not aware of any progress with the investigation.

On July 8, 2023, members of the Burkinabè security forces, including men in military fatigues, that witnesses described as soldiers, stopped a truck carrying 11 members of the family, including a man, three women, and seven children. There had been a JNIM raid on Bekuy earlier that day, and the family was fleeing out of fear of government reprisals.

A man from Bekuy said the head of the household was a respected member of the Fulani community who had supported VDP recruitment in the area, including with donations in kind, but that he was aware of the prevailing anti-Fulani sentiment and had expressed concerns about his safety and that of his family. “When the jihadists came to Bekuy, looted livestock and threatened the local population, he told me that he had decided to leave Bekuy the next day,” he said. “I advised him against this decision. I told him he had nothing to reproach himself for ... but he left anyway with all his relatives.”²⁴⁹

According to sources, the uniformed men checked the truck passengers’ identity cards, then pulled them out of the truck, threatened the driver with death, and drove off toward Bekuy with the family in a military pickup. Later that day, residents found the bodies of 10 of the 11 passengers near Ramatoulaye, all riddled with bullets, about 10 kilometers from Bekuy. Residents found the body of the eleventh passenger, also with bullet wounds, about two kilometers from Bekuy.

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list with the names of the 12 victims: five girls, ages 2, 3, 8, 9, and 15; two boys, ages 11 and 16; three women, ages 18, 34, and 42; and two men, ages 59 and 82.

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with J.D., July 20, 2023.

Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins Region, September 2023

In September 2023, VDPs killed three Fulani civilians in Djigouéma, in apparent retaliation following JNIM attacks in the area near Djigouéma.

Between July and September 2023, JNIM carried out raids on several villages in the Padéma district area, which includes Djigouéma, destroying civilian property, threatening residents, and forcing them to flee.²⁵⁰ Residents described the attacks as punishment against communities accused of joining the VDPs. On September 21, 2023, JNIM attacked VDPs in Djigouéma, about 4.5 kilometers from Padéma city, and killed one of them.²⁵¹

Days later, VDPs killed three Fulani civilians in Djigouéma.

Witnesses and residents said they believed the killings were driven by anti-Fulani sentiment, common among the VDPs. A 60-year-old ethnic Fulani woman from Djigouéma who moved to Padéma said:

Since Mossi [people] of Padéma [had also] joined the VDPs ... we felt [there was] a stronger mistrust toward the Fulani, the Fulani were discriminated against.... [W]e used to hear from the VDPs that they were going to finish off all the terrorists ... And when they said “terrorists,” they meant the Fulani.²⁵²

A 30-year-old woman said that on the day of the attack, a group of armed VDPs riding at least five motorbikes entered her Fulani neighborhood in Djigouéma at about 10 a.m. They went to a house and arrested a 30-year-old man, then entered her home and asked about her husband. “They held my neighbor by the arm,” she said. “Minutes after they left, I heard gunshots.”²⁵³

²⁵⁰ ACLED database, Property destruction: On 28 July 2023, presumed JNIM set fire to granaries in the town of Padema (Padema, Houet). ACLED database, Displacement: On 9 August 2023, several inhabitants left the village of Banwali (Padema, Houet) after JNIM militants threatened them to leave.

²⁵¹ ACLED database: On 21 September 2023, presumed JNIM militants attacked VDP in the village of Djigouema (Padema, Houet). A VDP leader was killed. Note that, on September 10, 2023, also according to ACLED, JNIM militants had already attempted to attack VDPs in Djigouema, but the attack had been repelled.

²⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with S.M., Ivory Coast, November 24, 2024.

²⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with W.K., Ivory Coast, November 24, 2024.

The woman's husband, a 57-year-old Fulani herder, said he also heard gunfire around the same time:

I called an acquaintance who's in the VDPs who told me there was nothing to worry about, but the gunshots continued, so I went to check, and found the body of my friend lying on his back. His left hand [was] on his chest, and his body was riddled with bullets from head to toe ... About 200 meters away, I found the body of my neighbor ... lying on his back, his right hand held his right leg, and his left hand was spread out, and his body was riddled with bullets.²⁵⁴

The couple, fearing another attack, left Djigouéma later that day and moved to Padéma with other relatives. "On our way to the city, we heard more gunshots," the herder said. "We later found out that our nephew had been killed." The man said he went back to Djigouéma the next day and recovered the body of his family member. "The body was about one kilometer north of Padéma.... [H]e had been shot in the left leg and the ribs, on the right side, and in the forehead."²⁵⁵

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by witnesses and family members with the names of the three men killed, ages 25, 30, and 32.

Bassé, Hauts-Bassins Region, late November 2023

In late November 2023, VDPs killed 13 civilians and carried out other abuses in a Fulani settlement about four kilometers from Bassé village. Witnesses said they came on a Sunday and murdered 11 civilians, including 5 women and 3 children, burned at least 20 homes, and looted hundreds of animals. Some of the bodies were later found blindfolded with their hands tied behind their backs. The next Sunday, VDPs returned and killed two more civilians, including a boy. Just after the attack, relatives of victims filed a complaint with the judicial authorities. There has been no progress on the case, and one of the investigating judges had been unlawfully conscripted into military service as apparent punishment.

²⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Z.E., Ivory Coast, November 24, 2024.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

JNIM has carried out attacks against the military, the VDPs, and the local population in the area.²⁵⁶ Several witnesses said they believed the VDPs targeted their hamlet because they believed Fulani people collaborate with Islamist armed groups. “There is a witch hunt against the Fulani,” a 41-year-old man said. “None of us [in Bassé] joined the jihadists. We don’t have weapons. Yet we are considered terrorists.”²⁵⁷

A woman described the first VDP attack:

We heard gunfire and people said that the VDPs were coming.... I hid my children in the chicken coop and jumped into a pile of grass ... Three VDPs broke into my house. One said in Mooré, “All the men fled because they are all terrorists.” ... They were masked, wearing black balaclavas.... I didn’t move until they left.... When I came out, I saw that many homes in the village had been set on fire.²⁵⁸

The 41-year-old herder said the assailants wore the government military uniform and civilian clothes and came on 20 motorbikes, shooting indiscriminately. “I fled to the bush,” he said, “and I could hear the shooting, the people screaming. I saw smoke and flames rising from the hamlet.”²⁵⁹ He said he returned the following day and found the bodies of 11 of his relatives, including his 18-year-old son, five women, ages 20 to 67, and three children, ages 4 to 13, killed in an apparent extrajudicial execution:

All the bodies, except for that of my son, were grouped together in the courtyard, blindfolded with their torn clothes and their hands tied behind their backs. Even the hands of the two girls were tied up. This broke my heart. The bodies were riddled by bullets.... My son’s body was just nearby, lying flat on the stomach. He had been shot in the back of the neck ... Four days later, we buried them in two mass graves, one for the women and children and one for the men.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ According to ACLED, on the night of December 20, 2023, JNIM fighters “fired several harassing shots in the vicinity of the village,” and that the following day, “about 3000 residents left Basse because of the deteriorating security situation.”

²⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with L.Q., Ivory Coast, November 23, 2024.

²⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with E.L., Ivory Coast, November 23, 2024.

²⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with L.Q., November 23, 2024.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Witnesses also said the VDPs looted livestock and burned at least 20 homes. “When I came back, I found complete desolation. Our homes had been burned,” a 34-year-old woman said. “There was nothing left of my house, just ruins.”²⁶¹ A 33-year-old woman said that the VDPs also “looted over 300 heads of cattle.”²⁶²

A week later, VDPs returned to the hamlet and killed two more civilians, including a 15-year-old boy and a woman. “They arrived between 11 a.m. and noon, and just started shooting, so we all ran away,” a 35-year-old woman said. “I saw the body of the woman [who had been killed]. She was sick and could not flee. She left two kids behind.”²⁶³

Witnesses and other local sources said that, after the second attack, all Fulani residents fled, fearing new attacks. “Everybody left,” the 35-year-old woman said. “We took nothing with us. All our animals had been stolen.”²⁶⁴



Caption: Screenshot of a video shared by a witness showing a burned hut geolocated by Human Rights Watch in a settlement near Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, Burkina Faso. © 2025 Private.

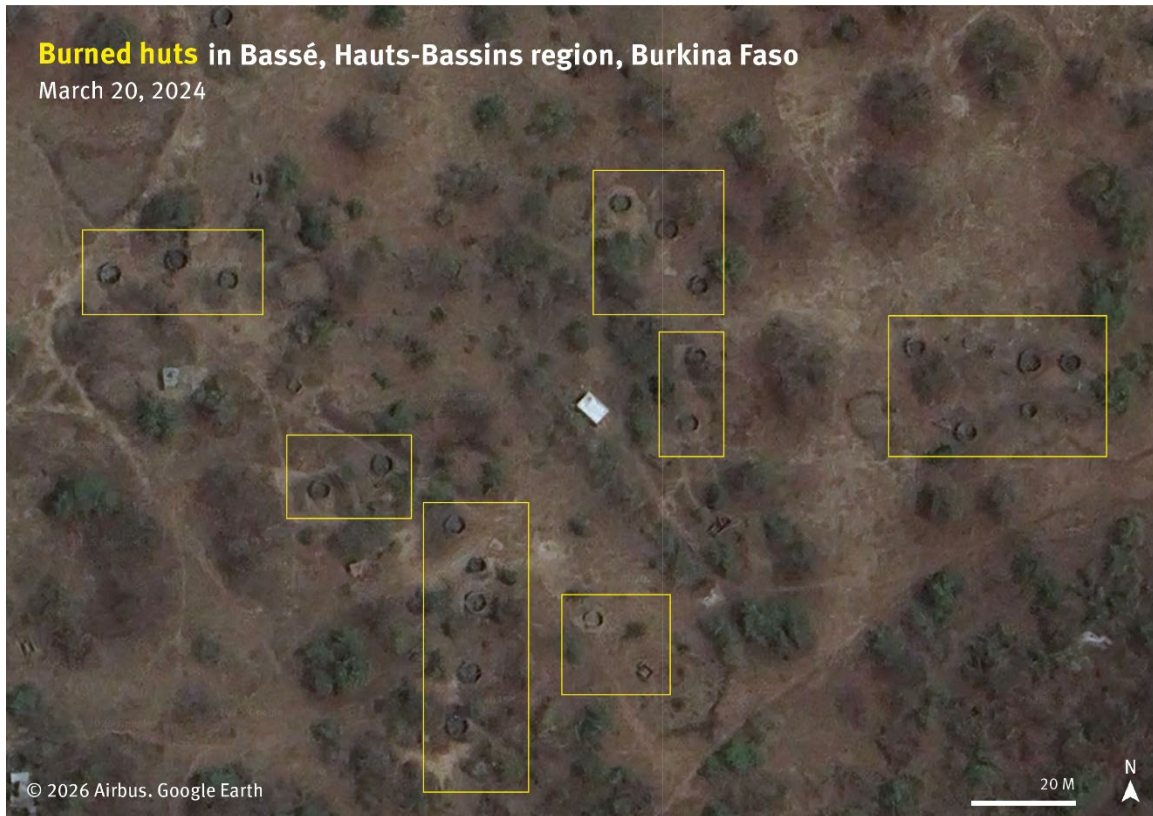
Human Rights Watch verified two videos a witness shared in November 2024 showing at least 10 burned huts and geolocated them to a settlement in a wooded area by the Mouhoun River, four kilometers west from Bassé. Satellite imagery from November 23, 2023, shows about 40 burned huts. A later image, from March 20, 2024, shows about 10 more.

²⁶¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with A.C., January 17, 2025.

²⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with K.A., Ivory Coast, November 23, 2024.

²⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with R.D., Ivory Coast, November 23, 2024.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.



Caption: Satellite imagery from March 20, 2024, shows burnt huts in a settlement near Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, Burkina Faso. Image © 2026 Airbus. Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch received a list that witnesses compiled of the names of 11 victims, ages 4 to 67. Researchers also reviewed four videos and three photos taken by one of the witnesses, showing the aftermath of the first attack, including burned homes.

Relatives of victims said that, days after the first attack, they filed a complaint at the high court in Boromo, 150 kilometers east from Bassé. Relatives said the court later referred the matter to the court in Bobo-Dioulasso, which instructed the local gendarmerie to investigate. There had been no progress at time of writing.

The authorities appear to have retaliated against the magistrates—low-level judges and prosecutors—who opened the investigation. Between August 9 and 12, 2024, Burkinabè security forces sent notices of conscription to at least seven magistrates, including the prosecutor at the high court in Boromo, summoning them to join security operations against Islamist armed groups in Kaya, Sanmatenga province, from August 14 to November

13, 2024.²⁶⁵ In an August 15, 2024, statement, a coalition of three Burkinabè magistrates' unions said that the authorities had targeted the seven magistrates because they dealt with cases implicating people "claiming to be staunch supporters of the current government," which in the context can be understood to refer to VDPs.²⁶⁶ The union said that the prosecutor of the Boromo high court was targeted for conscription for having initiated proceedings against VDPs, among other reasons.

Niangoloko, Cascades Region, June 14, 2024

On June 14, 2024, a group of VDPs shot at two Fulani men attempting to cross the border into Cote d'Ivoire to seek asylum. One man, 30, was apparently taken into custody and summarily executed. The men had fled after the Fulani community in their hometown of Banfora had faced threats from the VDPs.²⁶⁷

The survivor, a shepherd in his forties, said:

The VDPs surrounded us, but I ... ran away. They were on foot and some on motorcycles. They were armed with Kalashnikovs. They were masked and spoke Mooré.... They shot at me, but the bullets didn't hit me. But my boss ... they took him and killed him. I arrived in Ivorian territory at night and I alerted my boss's father.²⁶⁸

The father of the 30-year-old victim said he had fled Banfora days before his son was killed, following repeated threats by the VDPs against the Fulani community:

As the terrorists are mostly Fulani, they [VDPs] targeted us all, indiscriminately. So as ... not to run unnecessary risks, I took my family and

²⁶⁵ "Burkina Faso: Conscription Used to Punish Prosecutors, Judges," Human Rights Watch news release, August 21, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/21/burkina-faso-conscription-used-punish-prosecutors-judges>.

²⁶⁶ Hamadou Ouedraogo, "Réquisitions de magistrats : L'intersyndicale donne de la voix !," *Burkina24*, August 16, 2024, <https://burkina24.com/2024/08/16/requisitions-de-magistrats-lintersyndicale-donne-de-la-voix/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

²⁶⁷ In December 2023, Banfora was considered one of the cities with the highest numbers of VDPs in Burkina Faso. See International Crisis Group, "Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion?," Africa Report n°313, December 15, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/burkina-faso/313-armed-civilians-at-the-cost-of-social-cohesion> (accessed September 4, 2025).

²⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with M.Q., January 18, 2025.

came to [the Ivory Coast].... My son, a cattle dealer, was supposed to join me.²⁶⁹

On June 17, 2024, the victim's father and the survivor returned to the place of the killing, found the body, and buried him. The father said:

The body was lying on his back and riddled with bullets. Around him there were Kalashnikov cartridges, about 15 cartridges; I saw the shell casings, I saw the bullet holes in his body, at least 15.... We covered the body with sand and left because the area was very unsafe.²⁷⁰

Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins Region, January 31, 2025

On January 31, 2025, VDPs killed at least nine people and arrested ten others in two attacks on Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla villages, five kilometers apart.

In Dô-Diassa, the VDPs rounded up all residents, including women and children, in front of a house, and threatened to kill them all. They beat eight men and a 15-year-old boy and then drove off with them. Four witnesses said that, later that day, the VDPs killed the eight men and the boy near the village school.

In Fanfiéla, VDPs rounded up all the residents, including women and children, in front of the school, threatened them, and arrested 10 men. The VDPs then drove off with the men, likely to a military base in Sindo, 17 kilometers away, before executing nine of them in an unknown location. One of the 10 men from Fanfiéla survived.

The Attack on Dô-Diassa

On January 31, 2025, at about 5 a.m., a group of about 20 VDPs attacked Dô-Diassa. The VDPs surrounded the village, then went door –to door, ordering people out of their homes and rounding them up in the village center. Witnesses said that while the VDPs rounded up and threatened to kill all villagers, they focused their beatings on Fulani people.

²⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with R.A., January 18, 2025.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

A 34-year-old Fulani woman, whose husband and eight other family members were among those severely beaten, said that the VDPs first gathered the residents together. She said:

They [VDPs] undressed our husbands in front of us and started beating them savagely with their rifle butts, with sticks. They kicked them in their heads with their boots. They also beat small children from 8-years-old on.... They didn't beat us women like the men, but they slapped us in front of our husbands.... The VDPs didn't even need to shoot them to kill them, because some were already almost dead or dead.... The VDPs beat my husband savagely ... on the head, on the back, on the stomach.... He stopped making any sound ... so I thought that he had not survived.²⁷¹

An ethnic Bobo man in his forties said the VDPs rounded him up with his family—but spared them beatings. “The Fulani were the ones who really suffered the most torture, and insults,” he said. “The VDPs savagely beat the Fulani until they could hardly move, until they were almost dead.”²⁷²

Witnesses said that at about 11 a.m., the VDPs ordered all villagers, except for eight men and a 15-year-old boy, to leave immediately under the threat of death. “They said, ‘If you don't leave the village, we will massacre you,’” the Bobo man said.²⁷³ Witnesses said the VDPs put the nine people on a tractor and drove off with them to the village school where, residents believe, all were executed.

“They shot them there, finishing them off, in fact,” said the Bobo man. “Because from the moment the VDPs began torturing them, the nine people were already dying. I heard the gunshots, but I didn't see the VDPs shoot them.... I was hiding nearby.”²⁷⁴

Residents said they did not see the bodies as they had already left Dô-Diassa. They provided a list they compiled with the names of the nine people, ages 25 to 90, and the 15-year-old boy. Eight were Fulani and one was Bobo. Among the victims was the

²⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with F.T., Mali, April 20, 2025.

²⁷² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.E., April 20, 2025.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

90-year-old Fulani village chief. As of July 2025, neither the victims nor their bodies had been found.

The Attack on Fanfiéla

Witnesses said that on January 31, 2025, between 11 a.m. and 12 p.m., a group of VDPs entered Fanfiéla, went door-to-door and forced villagers from their homes before rounding them up in front of the local school.

A 34-year-old ethnic Bobo man from Fanfiéla said:

I was at home. They came to pick me up, took me to the front of the school with the others, and told us to sit down. We sat down and they started insulting us, saying that we are close to and work with the Fulani, who are all terrorists. They told us that we are with their enemies, the enemies of the country, with people who want to take their country and that ... instead of reacting, collaborating with them [the VDPs], helping them, we preferred to be traitors.²⁷⁵

Witnesses said the VDPs threatened to kill everyone gathered there. The VDPs then selected 10 men and tied their hands and blindfolded, then drove them toward Sindo.

The only survivor of the 10 men told Human Rights Watch that the VDPs took the group to what he presumed to be a military base in Sindo, where VDPs tortured the victims over nine days and deprived them of food and water. As they were beaten, the men were accused of collaborating with JNIM. The survivor said:

We were blindfolded until we arrived in a room—we assume in Sindo—which was probably part of a base where the VDPs stayed with the military. We couldn't see outside, but we felt that there were a lot of VDPs and soldiers too ... because we could hear the exchanges between them in Dioula [Burkina Faso's lingua franca]. I heard someone, a VDP, who was probably talking to the head of the VDPs, asking, "Are we going to lock

²⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with I.H., April 24, 2025.

them up or are we going to make them sit here until the lieutenant arrives?”
Another replied, “Lock them up, the lieutenant will come later.”²⁷⁶

The survivor described the conditions of their captivity:

They tortured us for at least one hour every day for nine days. In addition to physical torture, they gave us almost nothing to eat or drink. They gave us a cup of unsweetened porridge at 4 a.m. and that’s it. For water, they gave us a small bag of water every day that we had to share among the 10 of us....
Everyone drank a drop.²⁷⁷

The survivor said that on the night of the ninth day of detention, the VDPs blindfolded them again and drove them off to an unknown destination. He said:

Once we arrived at our destination, they untied our hands and ordered us to lie on the ground on our stomachs, blindfolded. We were lying in a line one after the other. I was the ninth in the row and there were eight people on my left and a tenth person on my right side. We had our faces on the ground. They started to fire upon us, one by one. They executed the first. Bam! Bam! The second, the third, and so on. Then they shot the eighth.... What saved me, I think, is that when they shot at the eighth person, the man fell on me, I don’t know if he tried to get up or what, but he fell on me, which coincided with the shots at me. In fact, I think that eighth man’s body protected me and made sure that the bullets didn’t hit me in the head. And then they shot the tenth and left.²⁷⁸

The survivor said that when the VDPs left, he got up and looked at the bodies. “I recognized everyone. All the people who had been taken with me from Fanfiéla and with whom I had been detained.” He said that he felt “a warmth” between his right arm and shoulder and knew he had been injured. He said that he fainted, and that people found him the next morning, and helped him to obtain medical care. Based on

²⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with U.D., April 25, 2025.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

conversations he had with those who rescued him, the man believed that the location where the nine people were killed is in northern Sindo, in or near a cemetery.

The survivor provided a list he compiled with the names of the nine men killed, ages 30 to 60.

Ethnic Basis for the Killings

The nine victims in Dô-Diassa were all Fulani, except for one Bobo. Two of the 10 men arrested in Fanfiéla were Fulani and eight were ethnic Senoufou.

In both incidents, witnesses said that VDPs accused non-Fulani villagers of collaborating with Fulani people, whom they said they considered terrorists, for failing to chase Fulani people out from their villages, and of having refused to join the VDPs.

A 56-year-old Bobo man from Fanfiéla said the VDPs told them: “You are working with the Fulani, the Fulani are all terrorists. Why didn't you join the VDP? Why didn't you chase the Fulani out of your village?”²⁷⁹

A 34-year-old Fulani woman from Dô-Diassa said:

They [the VDPs] spoke Dioula. They insulted and threatened us. They said we, the Fulani, are “bastards,” we are “terrorists,” we deserve only death. They said, “You, the Fulani, you want to take our country? As long as we are alive, it will not happen! You will die before you take our land.” They kept insulting us in front of our children. They said: “You deserve brutal death. We shouldn't even waste our bullets. We should just slit your throats here, that's all. We should decapitate you, cut you up.”²⁸⁰

Residents from Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla said their villages had come under JNIM control in 2021 and that they had had no choice but to strike a deal with the armed group. A Bobo man from Dô-Diassa said:

²⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with X.A., April 26, 2025.

²⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch-interview with F.T., April 20, 2025.

The jihadists have been here since 2021. At the beginning, there weren't many of them. They came on a few motorcycles, passing by. We had alerted the authorities, but the military never came to our village. And suddenly, the jihadists grew stronger and [their visits] became more frequent. One day, they came, gathered us together, explained their conditions.... They said they would leave us alone if we didn't inform the military and didn't collaborate with the authorities. We accepted, and it was calm.²⁸¹

A 34-year-old man from Fanfiéla said:

When the jihadists came the first time, they gathered us at the village mosque, they told us they were fighting for Islam and would not harm anyone if we complied with their orders not to collaborate with the military and the administration. They said we could keep doing what we were doing before, going to our fields to cultivate, going to the market, trading. They said they would not harm Christians, but they would not forgive animists and those who practice witchcraft and they would have no mercy with anyone who provide information about them to the army or collaborated in any way with the army. We accepted, and we never had a problem with them. We lived calmly.²⁸²

Witnesses from both villages also said that, sometime between the end of 2023 and the beginning of 2024, military authorities convened a meeting in Samorogouan, about 50 kilometers from Dô-Diassa, and that delegations from Dô-Diassa, Fanfiéla and Niamana, a village located four kilometers from Dô-Diassa, were invited, alongside with traditional chiefs, religious leaders, and a VDP representative. They said the military authorities asked members of the delegations to mobilize men in their respective villages to join the VDPs, as well as to chase Fulani people out of their villages, but that the representatives from the three villages refused.

A Bobo man in his forties from Dô-Diassa, who was among the delegation's members, said:

²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.E., April 20, 2025.

²⁸² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with I.H., April 24, 2025.

We explained that the situation prevailing in our area didn't allow us to join the VDPs because we knew that we couldn't protect our villages and if we joined the VDPs, the jihadists would come and force us out or kill us, and we knew that the state wouldn't intervene.... And on top of that, we had families to feed. We had our own jobs, our crops, and our animals to look after. We could not just abandon everything and join the VDPs.... We said that our Fulani neighbors were not jihadists and that we had no proof that they collaborate with the jihadists.²⁸³

The man added that, following “tense conversations,” the authorities said that if “we could not join the VDPs to protect our country, then the responsibility for our security was no longer theirs and fell to us ... and that whatever happened to us, they would not be responsible.”²⁸⁴

The 34-year-old man who was also at the Samorogouan meeting confirmed this. He said:

We disagreed with the way the military and other authorities were presenting things to us ... saying the Fulani are terrorists, that we must fight them, that we must ask them to leave our villages. We refused because we live together with Fulani people, we carry out the same activities. When the jihadists came, they spoke to everyone, and everyone accepted the jihadists' conditions, and we continued like that. So, for us, there was no reason or evidence to show us that our Fulani were terrorists and that we must expel them.²⁸⁵

3rd Military Region (Center-South, Center-West, and Plateau Central administrative regions)

Gomboussougou, Center-South Region, February 2023

In February 2023, VDPs killed at least 10 Fulani men in the village of Gomboussougou in three separate incidents, prompting the Fulani community to flee the area. Among the

²⁸³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.E., April 20, 2025.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with I.H., April 24, 2025.

victims was the local Fulani community leader. Several witnesses and other residents said they believed the killings were based on ethnicity, to the extent that there is a widespread assumption within the military and VDPs that Fulani people support JNIM, which has been sporadically present in the area since 2022.

In the first incident, witnesses said the VDPs in early February 2023 arrested a 40-year-old man at the market and then executed him in the bush outside the village. “I saw four VDPs armed with Kalashnikovs going toward the market and later the Fulani community leader told me they had killed one of us,” a 47-year-old Fulani man said.²⁸⁶ “We found [a man’s] body at the southern exit of the village, two bullets in the head,” a 45-year-old man said. “We took his body and buried him in the village cemetery.”²⁸⁷

A week later, Gomboussougou villagers found the bodies of eight Fulani men they knew at a stop on the 25-kilometer road between Gomboussougou and Gogo. Their hands were tied behind their backs, and they had bullet wounds to their heads. “We found the bodies all together—except one, which was a short distance away. The men’s hands were bound with their torn clothes,” said the 47-year-old Fulani man. “We used a motorbike to move them from the road to a kilometer away, where we buried them all in the same grave.”²⁸⁸

Three men who buried the bodies said they had heard from others that VDPs had murdered the eight men. “A Mossi friend told me he saw the VDPs stopping my friend [one of the eight men], with seven other people, as they were returning from the Gogo market in the afternoon,” a 55-year-old man said. “He [the Mossi friend] said he heard several gunshots later.”²⁸⁹

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by residents and relatives bearing the names of the eight victims, all men, ages 32 to 67. One was from Gomboussougou and seven were from surrounding hamlets.

²⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Y.G., Ghana, March 12, 2025.

²⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with B.A., Ghana, March 12, 2025.

²⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Y.G., March 12, 2025.

²⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with C.K., Ghana, March 12, 2025.

Witnesses and other residents said that after the killings they asked the Mossi chief of Gomboussougou, who had played an important role in recruiting local VDPs, to rein them in. The 47-year-old man said the chief responded, “The VDPs are going astray and have become uncontrollable.”²⁹⁰

A week after the eight men were found—around February 11—the 70-year-old Fulani community leader went missing near Gomboussougou. The son found his body three days later in the bush, about 10 kilometers from the village, “devoured by animals.” The son said, “After the killing of the eight men, my father had called on the Fulani community to leave Gomboussougou. He started receiving death threats from the VDPs, who said he was encouraging Fulanis to go to the bush and join the jihadists.”²⁹¹

Witnesses and other residents said members of the Fulani community had previously not responded to a VDP recruitment drive in Gomboussougou.²⁹²

A Fulani herder, 52, said:

Back in 2022, our chief informed us about the recruitment of VDPs, but no Fulanis responded. We thought that it wasn’t up to us—civilians—to go after the jihadists. For us, it was really the military who had to do that. We also had questions about whether we would be compensated or not. You join the VDPs, you’re given a weapon and then who’s going to take care of your cattle? We have our animals [to care for].²⁹³

Sissili province, Center-West Region, April 2023

In April 2023, two men in civilian clothes abducted a 52-year-old Fulani man in a village in Sissili province, drove off with him in a pickup truck and took him to a military base in Ouagadougou before transferring him to a private house, also in the capital.

²⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Y.G., March 12, 2025.

²⁹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with C.Z., Ghana, March 12, 2025.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with B.P., Ghana, March 12, 2025.

The victim identified the kidnappers as a soldier and a VDP. He said men in military uniforms tortured him during two-and-a-half months of incommunicado detention, using waterboarding and mock execution by near drowning, and repeated beatings with rubber ropes. He said:

They would fill a plastic barrel with water, and four people would lift me by my feet and put my head in the water for several minutes, then they would do it again. They did this to me every week, for almost two months. One day, in the middle of drowning, I threw up. Another time, they took a hose plugged into the tap, turned on the tap water and fit it directly into my nostrils.²⁹⁴

The victim said the uniformed men accused him of recruiting Islamist fighters in his city:

They interrogated me, they asked me “Where are the jihadists? How many did you recruit?” I replied that I had nothing to do with that. They held me for almost three months. I was beaten, hit everywhere, I didn’t eat well. They just gave me a little food and some water every three days. One day, two came in the morning to torture me. I asked them to kill me, so that this would stop, and I would stop suffering.²⁹⁵

The man said that during his detention at the private house, he saw and spoke with at least six other men who told him that they had been abducted and tortured:

Three days after I was kidnapped, one night, they ... brought four people in, probably political detainees. They took all of us and drove us the whole night until we reached a military camp, then they dropped us off. The four were sent for military training. I was taken back to the villa. The four men told me they had been arrested by the military in Ouagadougou.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with I.L., Ghana, March 13, 2025.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

The man said he was released in late June 2023: “One day, a military chief came and asked me: ‘Why are you still around?’ Then, they asked me to shower, put me in a car and left me at a roundabout in Ouagadougou.”²⁹⁷

4th Military Region (Sahel Administrative region)

Guide, Sahel Region, January-March 2023

VDPs summarily executed four men and forcibly disappeared another in Guide in three separate incidents between mid-January and mid-March 2023. Guide is a Fulani settlement about four kilometers south of Gorgadji, a VDP stronghold, in an area where IS Sahel is known to carry out attacks against both security forces and the population.²⁹⁸ Witnesses said the VDPs targeted the men after refusing to let them join the VDPs.

Several witnesses said that in these three incidents, VDPs arrested at least five Fulani men, and that villagers found the bodies of four of them days later, while the whereabouts of the fifth remain unknown.

Before the incidents, a minority of Guide residents had wanted to join the VDPs, a 37-year-old man said: “But the local VDPs didn’t agree because of prejudices against the Fulani whom they considered terrorists ... and so, they came for them.”²⁹⁹

Witnesses described the same dynamics in each of the three incidents: about 10 VDPs in civilian clothes and military uniforms, riding motorbikes and armed with Kalashnikov-type assault rifles, headed toward the victims’ houses and forcibly removed them.

A 50-year-old man said that in mid-January 2023, for the first time he saw VDPs take away three men from the same family. “Shortly after, we heard gunshots,” he said.³⁰⁰ Two days later, he and other villagers found the bodies of the three men in the bush about a kilometer from Guide. “Two had been shot in the heads, one in the belly,” he said.³⁰¹

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ International Crisis Group, “Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion?,” According to ACLED, on August 20, 2023, presumed IS Sahel militants attacked the village of Guide (Gorgadji, Seno). The militants killed three civilians and set fire to houses.

²⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with P.T., February 27, 2025.

³⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with L.H., Ivory Coast, November 23, 2024.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Witnesses said that after they discovered the three bodies, they had to seek permission from the military based in Gorgadji to bury them. “We dug a hole and put the three bodies inside, all together,” the 37-year-old man said.³⁰²

Four days later, the VDPs came for another man. Villagers found his body about a kilometer from Guide with a bullet wound in the head. Then, around mid-March 2023, VDPs came again and arrested another man. “[W]e never found his body,” the 50-year-old man said. “After this incident, all the people of Guide fled.”³⁰³

Ekeou, Sahel Region, February 15, 2023

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on February 15, 2023, military forces and VDPs appear to have killed at least nine men during a counterinsurgency operation in Ekeou and Goulgountou villages.³⁰⁴

That day, the military and VDPs arrested 16 men, all Fulani except for one Tuareg man, in Ekeou village.³⁰⁵ The forces then headed to Goulgountou, a nearby village, where they arrested two other Fulani men. Over three months later, on May 26, 2023, the bodies of at least nine of those arrested were found near the VDP base in Falagountou town.

Several witnesses and residents believed this attack was intended to punish the local Fulani community, whom the military and VDPs accused of collaborating with Islamist fighters.

Ekeou is in an area where IS Sahel fighters are known to operate and carry out attacks.

“Since the jihadists came here, the Fulani are having troubles,” a 61-year-old resident of Ekeou said. “The military and VDPs conflate us with the jihadists ... even before this attack, the Fulani lived in fear of being arrested by the military.... [T]here was intimidation with words and acts.”³⁰⁶

³⁰² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with P.T., February 27, 2025.

³⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with L.H., November 23, 2024.

³⁰⁴ “Burkina Faso: Unlawful Killings, ‘Disappearances’ by the Army,” Human Rights Watch press release, June 29, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/29/burkina-faso-unlawful-killings-disappearances-army>.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.D., May 5, 2023.

Relatives of the victims and other residents of Ekeou and Goulgountou provided identifying details of all 18 men who had been arrested, ages 30 to 65.

Interviewees said two days after the military operation, four older men from Ekeou went to the VDP camp in Falagountou to seek information about those who had been arrested. The VDPs did not provide any information and instead threatened the older men with death.

Relatives of victims said they sought information in the weeks that followed from the gendarmerie in Dori, the prosecutor of the high court in Dori, the regional human rights office in Dori, and the governor of the Sahel administrative region, to no avail.

On May 26, 2023, a herder from Ekeou discovered 17 bodies near the VDP base in Falagountou. He informed the relatives of those arrested in Ekeou on February 15, 2023. Relatives identified nine bodies as belonging to the group of 18 men arrested in Ekeou and Goulgountou. The remaining bodies were in an advanced state of decomposition and could not be identified, relatives said. Nevertheless, relatives believed they were of the other people arrested in Ekeou and Goulgountou on February 15, 2023.

Relatives said that from May 29 through 31, 2023, they reported the discovery of the bodies to the prosecutor of the Dori high court as well as to the gendarmerie in Dori and that they “received permission” from those authorities to bury them on June 5, 2023. At time of writing, no one has been held accountable for these crimes.

Gangaol, Sahel Region, April 3, 2023

Human Rights Watch previously reported that soldiers killed six civilians on April 3, 2023, in Gangaol village, while the military escorted supplies.³⁰⁷

The convoy had departed from Kaya, Center-North region, and headed toward the town of Dori, Sahel administrative region, escorted by a large number of military vehicles, motorbikes, and armored cars. The convoy stopped in Gangaol, having passed through an area where both JNIM and the IS Sahel are known to recruit youth, carry out raids, and occupy checkpoints. Soldiers from the convoy stepped off in the market where they

³⁰⁷ “Burkina Faso: Unlawful Killings, ‘Disappearances’ by the Army,” Human Rights Watch press release.

questioned people, asking them to show their identity cards. They then broke into a home and pulled out 10 men. Soldiers beat the men and later summarily executed six of them.

Mansila, Sahel Region, June 1, 2023

The town of Mansila is in an area where JNIM is known to operate and carry out attacks against security forces and civilians.³⁰⁸ On June 1, 2023, military and VDPs apparently killed at least 21 Fulani men after arresting them at the cattle market in town.

Two witnesses said that the military, on pickup trucks, and the VDPs, on motorbikes, surrounded the market at about 9 a.m. and entered on foot searching for Fulani men.

“There was no jihadists at the market and they [military] only stopped the Fulani. The [ethnic] Mossi who were at the market weren’t even worried,” said a 45-year-old Fulani cattle trader who had escaped the roundup. “They brutally arrested them and took them toward their vehicles.”³⁰⁹

That night, residents found the bodies of 21 men on top of a hill outside the town.

A 56-year-old man said he hid at a friend’s home during the raid:

My friend came and told me the soldiers had left the market with several Fulani men and gone toward the hill and that he had heard gunfire coming from there. ... At nightfall, we went to the hill and found the bodies of all those who had been caught at the market, their hands tied, their eyes blindfolded. The bodies were piled up, one on top of the other.... I was shocked. I knelt on the bodies for 30 minutes—I had never seen anything like that in my life.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ According to ACLED, on February 22, 2023, presumed JNIM fighters attacked soldiers and VDPs in Mansila. In a September 2024 report, Human Rights Watch documented that during a June 11, 2024, attack on an army base in Mansila, JNIM killed numerous soldiers as well as at least 20 civilians. “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 18, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/18/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-terrorize-civilians>.

³⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with G.H., Benin, November 25, 2025.

³¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with A.T., Benin, November 25, 2025.

The man said they did not bury the bodies that night out of fear that the military could come back. He said he returned to Mansila, where “almost all Fulani had already left and those who stayed behind were too scared to go out.” He said he contacted relatives of the victims and with them went back to the hill three days later to bury the bodies.

The 45-year-old said:

We wanted to bury the bodies according to the Islamic religious rites, which require that the bodies be washed, wrapped, and buried in a grave. But faced with the state of the bodies, which were decomposing and piled up, we couldn’t do that.... We dug a mass grave, where we put 13 bodies. For the remaining bodies, which were at the bottom and were the most decomposed, we covered them with sand, gravel, and rocks.³¹¹

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list, compiled by the two witnesses, with the names of the victims, all men, ages 20 to 70.

The witnesses believed the massacre was ethnically motivated and due to the widespread conviction among the military and VDPs that all Fulani were “jihadists” or their collaborators.

The 56-year-old said:

Many Mossi from Mansila joined the VDPs. They told the military that jihadists attended the market because, for them, every Fulani is a jihadist. They made no difference between a Fulani and a jihadist.... I myself have several times been called a jihadist by Mossi whom I know. One day they told me, “Look, watch this video... look at what your parents are doing to our soldiers” while showing me a video of a terrorist attack on an army base. That day I was very angry, and I replied, “Why are you telling me that my parents are terrorists?” They answered that terrorists and the Fulani are the same.³¹²

³¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with G.H., November 25, 2025.

³¹² Human Rights Watch interview with A.T., November 25, 2025.

Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel Region, December 11-14, 2023

Burkinabè military and VDPs killed hundreds of civilians in at least 16 villages and hamlets north of Djibo over several days, between December 11 and 14, 2023, during one of the most brutal military operations in Burkina Faso's recent history. Videos that emerged after the operation showcased the level of atrocity. Many survivors described the killings as “butchery” and said they were left with deep psychological wounds.

Government officials announced the operation had been launched against suspected JNIM fighters. However, Human Rights Watch found the attacks deliberately targeted civilians following a JNIM attack against a military base in Djibo on November 26, 2023.³¹³ State television RTB reported on December 14, 2023, that, after the JNIM attack in Djibo, an “order was given to the fighting forces to enter the hive and eat the warriors’ honey.”³¹⁴ RTB said that the military had launched Operation Tchéfari 2 (Warriors’ Honey in Fulfulde) on December 11, 2023, in several villages and towns north of Djibo, including in the localities of Baraboulé, Pétégoli and Bouro. “More than 200 criminals” had been killed, and weapons and other logistics equipment destroyed or seized during the operation, RTB reported. Footage of several drone strikes, including one geolocated by Human Rights Watch on Pétégoli’s market, is visible in the RTB video segment.

Another special RTB report, broadcast on January 19, 2024, but filmed during Operation Tchéfari 2, reported that on December 11, 2023, “battalions 4, 5, and 6” took control of Baraboulé town “without a single shot being fired,” and that government drones carried out strikes on the village of Pétégoli against “terrorist positions.”³¹⁵ The television report contained drone footage geolocated by Human Rights Watch to Pétégoli showing at least three smoke plumes rising from the village, as well as an aerial video geolocated to Bouro.

³¹³ “Burkina Faso: At least 40 civilians killed in jihadist attack on military base in Djibo,” video clip, YouTube, *France 24*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7xoGU3n4Eo> (accessed September 5, 2025).

³¹⁴ “RTB, Lutte contre le terrorisme : Édition spéciale sur les nouvelles du front, ce 14 décembre 2023,” video clip, YouTube, *Burkina24 TV*, December 14, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zf7i8KWolo> (accessed July 29, 2025).

³¹⁵ “52 sur la RTB : Opération Tchéfari ou le miel des guerriers dans une zone à haut risque de djibo,” video clip, YouTube, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vC2EV8l45Ew> (accessed July 29, 2025).

Witnesses Human Rights Watch interviewed and social media reports contradicted the version of events presented by state media.³¹⁶ Human Rights Watch spoke to 26 witnesses from several villages targeted in Operation Tchéfari 2, including nine from Bouro, two from Monde-Sô, eight from Pétégoli, three from Pilade and four from Sè. All of them stated that Burkinabè military and VDPs had killed civilians. Most of the witnesses said they believed the attacks were in retaliation against communities the security forces accused of collaborating and harboring JNIM fighters.

On December 14, 2023, JNIM released a statement stating that, on December 12, 2023, “the Burkinabè army committed a heinous massacre against civilians” in several villages including Fetopimina, Monde-Sô, Ndidja, Oukoulourou, Pilade, and Pétégoli, killing 218 people, the majority of whom, it said, were women and children.³¹⁷ JNIM also published videos and photographs showing the alleged victims—at least 100 people, including women and children. Charred bodies are also visible in the videos. Human Rights Watch geolocated two of the photographs to Pétégoli and one to Oukoulourou.

In a December 18, 2023 statement, Rimalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo, communication minister and spokesperson of the government at the time of the events (he became prime minister in December 2024), called on the population “not to give credit to the video footage circulating on social media and seeking to have people believe” that Burkinabè forces had massacred civilians during military operations in the area of Djibo. He added that “these are perfidious set-ups intended to discredit” the Burkinabè armed forces and the VDPs that are professional and “operate in the strict respect of human rights,” especially the right to life.³¹⁸

Witnesses said that very few residents from the area targeted by Operation Tchéfari 2 had joined the VDPs since the military junta launched its recruitment campaign in late

³¹⁶ For social media reports, see Nomade Sahélien’s X account, @Nomade_Sahelien, December 17, 2023, https://x.com/Nomade_Sahelien/status/1736345532870557698 (accessed September 11, 2025). Social media reports indicated that on December 11 and 12, 2023, Burkinabè military and VDPs had killed between 220 and 300 civilians, mainly women and children, in a “punitive expedition” in several villages north of Djibo, including Baraboulé, Bouro, Filifili, Hamdallay, Monde-Sô, Ndidia, Oukoulourou, Pétégoli, Pilade, Sè, and Petega.

³¹⁷ Sahel Strategic Center’s X account, @SahelStrategic, December 14, 2023, <https://x.com/SahelStrategic/status/1735421120663200000> (accessed September 11, 2025).

³¹⁸ “Djibo : « Le Gouvernement invite les populations à n’accorder aucun crédit aux images vidéos qui circulent, »” *Burkina24*, December 18, 2023, <https://burkina24.com/2023/12/18/djibo-le-gouvernement-invite-les-populations-a-naccorder-aucun-credit-aux-images-vidéos-qui-circulent/> (accessed October 2, 2025).

2022. Community members cited fear of retaliation from JNIM, which publicly warned that those who enlisted would face consequences. Local reluctance to join the VDPs appears tied to these threats and the perceived risks of retaliation.³¹⁹

The Attack on Djibo

JNIM has besieged Djibo, a strategic town, since early 2022, cutting off road access and heavily blocking the supply of humanitarian aid, fuel, and food, and causing thousands of people to starve and die of hunger.³²⁰ The siege has meant the military garrison stationed there relies on airlifts for resupply, and insists on armed escorts for supply convoys.

On November 26, 2023, JNIM attacked Djibo’s military base and then claimed it had killed up to 200 soldiers. International media reported that at least 22 soldiers were killed.³²¹

According to the United Nations, at least 40 civilians died in the attack.³²² According to the Burkinabè national TV between 300 and 400 JNIM fighters were killed.³²³ It is difficult to establish with certainty the extent of the attack. However, residents from the area said it was a major incident that angered the military and served as a catalyst for retaliation.

A 45-year-old man from Bouro said:

The JNIM attack in Djibo was a big one, with many thousands of fighters involved coming from all over the place, also from Mali. Even if the government didn’t admit it, the attack inflicted huge losses on the army. Soldiers were killed and a lot of military equipment was seized. This is what triggered the reprisal. The soldiers were furious and, after the camp had

³¹⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with V.M., January 24, 2024.

³²⁰ “Burkina Faso: Upsurge in Atrocities by Islamist Armed Groups,” Human Rights Watch news release, June 15, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/15/burkina-faso-upturge-atrocities-islamist-armed-groups>. “Severe humanitarian crisis persists for people living under blockade in Djibo,” *Médecins Sans Frontières Project Update*, May 5, 2023, <https://www.msf.org/burkina-faso-severe-humanitarian-crisis-persists-people-living-under-blockade-djibo> (accessed July 29, 2025).

³²¹ “Burkina Faso: At least 40 civilians killed in jihadist attack on military base in Djibo,” video clip, YouTube, *France 24*.

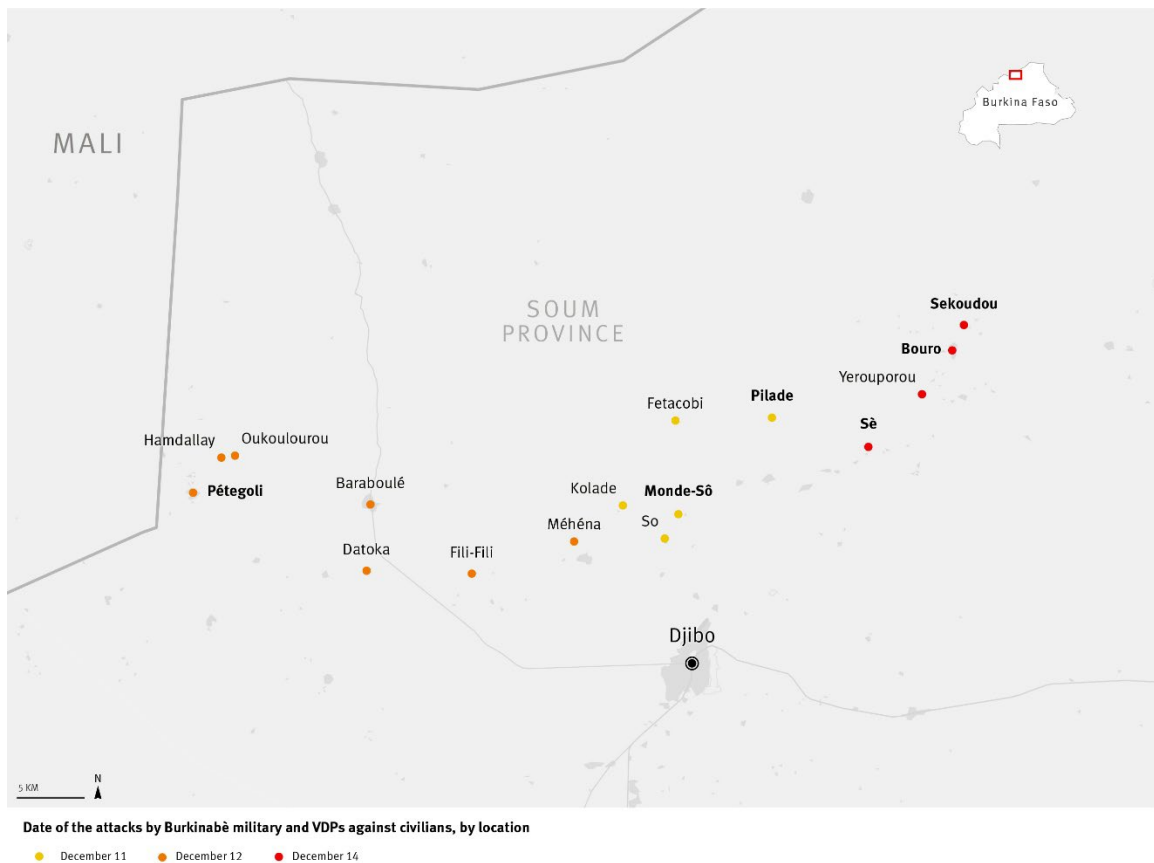
³²² “News in Brief 28 November 2023,” video report, *UN News*, November 28, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/audio/2023/11/1144037#:~:text=A%20large%20number%20of%20fighters%20from%20the%20militant,20%20shops%20and%20three%20sites%20for%20displaced%20people> (accessed September 3, 2025).

³²³ “RTB – JT de 13h du 27 novembre 2023,” YouTube live, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, Novembre 27, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5lQilHoleIE> (accessed July 29, 2025).

been resupplied and reinforcements had arrived, they came for us. They attacked all villages in the area for several days, deliberately killing everybody in their way.³²⁴

Chronology of Operation Tchéfari 2

The military fanned north in its retaliatory attacks. In addition to the attacks on Monde-Sô, Pétegoli, Pilade, Sè, and Bouro detailed below, Human Rights Watch also gathered credible accounts of attacks by Burkinabè military personnel and VDPs against civilians in the villages of So, Fetacobi, and Kolade on December 11, 2023, and on Fili-Fili, Baraboulé, Dakota, Méhéna, Oukoulourou, and Hamdallay on December 12, 2023, and Yerouporou on December 14, 2023.



Map of the chronology of Operation Tchéfari 2. © 2026 Human Rights Watch

³²⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.V., January 30, 2024.

Military Units Involved in Operation Tchéfari 2

On December 14, 2023, RTB reported that Operation Tchéfari 2 was carried out with the support of three battalions, two military units known as “guépard” (cheetah) and “fantôme” (phantom) as well as a special forces unit and “air assets.”³²⁵

On January 19, 2024, RTB reported that “battalions 4, 5 and 6” were involved.³²⁶

Monde-Sô, December 11, 2023

The first attack of Operation Tchéfari 2 that Human Rights Watch documented occurred in Monde-So village on December 11, 2023, when the military and VDPs killed at least 30 civilians. Human Rights Watch spoke to two people who fled Monde-Sô that day and reviewed credible accounts from two other residents who also fled the village. They said they heard gunfire near the village around 9 a.m. and learned that the military and VDPs were heading toward Monde-Sô.

Residents said that JNIM had been controlling the village and the nearby areas since at least 2018. “The jihadists rule here and we pay them the zakat,” a local shopkeeper said. “Some of our youths have joined them, even from our village, and not just Fulani.”³²⁷ Witnesses could not say whether JNIM fighters were in the village at the time of the military attack.

As the shooting got closer to Monde-Sô, more residents fled. A 25-year-old woman said:

I heard gunshots and explosions. We kept hearing the gunshots for two hours or more ... the shooting ... was getting closer to us, so we decided to get as far away from the shots as possible ... there was shooting to the right, to the left, we were running north, if there was shooting there, we would run south.³²⁸

³²⁵“RTB, Lutte contre le terrorisme : Édition spéciale sur les nouvelles du front, ce 14 décembre 2023,” video clip, YouTube, *Burkinaz4 TV*.

³²⁶ “52 sur la RTB : Opération tchéfari ou le miel des guerriers dans une zone à haut risque de djibo,” video clip, YouTube, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*.

³²⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.F., December 3, 2024.

³²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with J.E., Ivory Coast, November 22, 2024.

A 33-year-old trader said he fled with his relatives but was separated from them when he took cover from drones flying overhead.³²⁹ The man said he returned to Monde-Sô as the night fell and found the bodies of at least 32 people, all Fulani. He provided Human Rights Watch with the names of 14 victims, including a one-year-old girl, 6 women, ages 21 to 80, and 7 men, ages 40 to 75.

He said he found four of the bodies, charred and barely identifiable, which were together in some grass, while the others were scattered across the village. He said most of the dead had bullet wounds in their heads, stomachs, and chests. He said he also found the body of a 70-year-old woman in a house alongside an injured girl, 5, who had been shot in the chest and later died of her injuries. The man said he helped bury some of the bodies and residents buried the dead where they found them. “At the exit of the village there are many graves,” he said. “When [the assailants] attacked the village, people started running toward the bush.”³³⁰

The witness said that most homes in the village had been burned:

First, I went to my house and found it had been burned. I went to see my older brother’s shop, with whom I work, and I found that the shop was burned down. I went to my mother’s house and found that her house was burned down as well. In the meantime, survivors started coming back, and everyone was shouting, “My house has been burned.” My brothers and sisters’ homes [were burned] too.³³¹

Other residents corroborated that at least 30 civilians were killed in Monde-Sô. They also reported that, in addition to the destroyed homes, the village school and several shops around the market area were destroyed.

Low resolution satellite imagery shows that there were no signs of damage in the village before December 11. However, Human Rights Watch identified burn scars in and around Monde-Sô on the morning of December 12.

³²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with W.R., Ivory Coast, November 22, 2024.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

Pilade, December 11, 2023

On December 11, 2023, the same day as the attack on Monde-So, Burkinabè military killed at least five civilian men in Pilade in the context of Operation Tchéfari 2. Several witnesses said that about 100 Burkinabè military in pickup trucks and armored vehicles, and over 100 VDPs riding motorbikes, stormed Pilade village at about 7 a.m., shooting at civilians as they fled. Several said they hid until the assailants left, then returned to Pilade at night and found the bodies of five men.

An ethnic Fulani herder, 42, said:

I found the body of an 80-year-old man, lying on his belly in his house... [There were] two bodies near the water pump, around them there were AK-47 [assault rifle] bullet casings, [there was] another body in a house and another one also in a house, with two bullets in his chest.... We buried all of them, except the older man, in the cemetery.³³²

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by the witnesses with the names of the five victims, including four Dogon men and one Fulani man, ages 40 to 80.

Pétégoli, December 11 and 12, 2023

The third attack of Operation Tchéfari 2 that Human Rights Watch documented was in Pétégoli village between December 11 and 12, 2023, when the military and VDPs killed at least 85 civilians, possibly many more, and injured at least 26 others. The attack started with drone strikes, followed by soldiers and VDPs who entered the village in vehicles. During the ground operation, the military rounded up civilians before gunning them down.

Witnesses said that JNIM fighters were in the village before the operation and alerted the community, both on the day of the operation and during previous days, that a military convoy was coming, and that the fighters fled toward the nearby Malian border shortly before the operation started.

³³² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with V.M., January 24, 2024.

“The jihadists were the law in our village, and controlled all the province, but they have never established a base in Pétégoli” said a farmer. “When the army came, the jihadists were not around, but days before they had alerted us that the army would come and they also came when the soldiers left to help us bury the bodies.”³³³

Drone Strikes

On December 11, 2023, the Burkinabè military carried out at least three drone strikes in Pétégoli, according to witnesses. A witness said the first strike hit the market, located in the village center, and killed at least 20 civilians; the second one hit a truck loaded with fuel, killing the driver; and the third one hit a home.

A Malian trader, 35, said:

It was around 10 a.m. I had set up my products under a shed at the market when I heard a “boom!” I barely heard the sound of the drone. I didn’t see it either. All I saw was the bomb dropping from the sky.... There was a fire.... I was not far away—I was about 100 meters from where the bomb fell. I fled. I left my products, my luggage, and my motorcycle.... Everyone started to flee. I wanted to flee toward the north.... But in the meantime, a vehicle was coming. The vehicle was loaded with fuel. It was driven by an ethnic Tuareg trader from Timbuktu.... So, a second bomb targeted the vehicle toward the north of the village ... and I turned back.³³⁴

The December 14, 2023, RTB report showed video footage of a drone strike Human Rights Watch geolocated in the Pétégoli market.³³⁵ The report also showed a photograph of burned market stalls, geolocated at the site of the strike. On January 19, 2024, RTB reported that drone strikes were carried out on the village of Pétégoli against “terrorist positions” on December 11, 2023.³³⁶ Satellite imagery from December 19 shows destroyed

³³³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Z.F., March 9, 2025.

³³⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with B.L., April 2, 2025.

³³⁵ “RTB, Lutte contre le terrorisme : Édition spéciale sur les nouvelles du front, ce 14 décembre 2023,” video clip, YouTube, *Burkina24 TV*.

³³⁶ “52 sur la RTB : Opération tchêfari ou le miel des guerriers dans une zone à haut risque de djibo,” video clip, YouTube, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*.

buildings in the market at the location of the strike, as well as at least one other cluster of burned buildings 50 meters away.

A man who helped two men, ages 34 and 40, survive the strikes said both were wounded by shrapnel. “One had shrapnel in his feet and legs and the other in his arms, abdomen, and buttocks,” he said. “They told me that they were in their shops in the Pétégoli market when a drone hit the market, killing several traders.”³³⁷



Satellite imagery from December 19, 2023, shows destroyed buildings in the market at the location of the strike shown on the RTB report, as well as at least one other cluster of burned buildings 50 meters away. Image © 2026 Planet Labs PBC. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

³³⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a staff of a non-governmental organization, March 7, 2025.

Ground Operations

Following the drone strikes, on December 12, 2023, Burkinabè ground forces led an attack on Pétégoli that killed at least 64 civilians, and possibly many more, including women and children.

Witnesses said that hundreds of soldiers and VDPs entered Pétégoli in trucks and on motorbikes at about 10 a.m., shooting indiscriminately at civilians before they went door-to-door, rounding up people and executing them.

A woman, 45, said:

I saw the military convoy approach. They were Burkinabè soldiers with VDPs. There were many, on motorcycles and in vehicles. They were dressed in sand-colored Burkinabè military uniforms, a little dirty. They entered the village in a group ... [and] started shooting at people.... They were shooting everywhere, so I decided to hide until they left. They kept shooting for over one hour.... They came from Baraboulé.³³⁸

She said that when she returned to Pétégoli, about 90 minutes later, she found that 45 of her family members had been killed, and that almost all the huts of her family had been burned down. She said she found five children from other families still alive among the dead bodies and rescued them:

I immediately pulled a 2-month-old baby boy out of the flames, he was crying among the dead bodies of his parents, and I also pulled out the other children.... I got a donkey and headed toward Mali with the wounded children who were crying behind.... It was very hard. I walked several kilometers ... until I found a Malian man on a motorcycle who helped me.... Then, I called my husband.³³⁹

³³⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with F.P., March 27, 2025.

³³⁹ Ibid.

Satellite imagery from December 19, 2023, shows destruction and burned huts in at least nine hamlets located three to five kilometers east of the center of Pétégoli, on the road to Baraboulé.

The woman's husband, a 51-year-old trader, said he was not in Pétégoli during the attack, but returned three days later to bury relatives:

What I found there still haunts me, the bodies of women and children, two-month-old babies, older people... all my family, all of them were massacred.... Bodies were piled on top of each other. Some bodies were charred. Our homes had been burned.... The soldiers set them on fire. Our huts, made of straw and wood, were burned.... We put sand on the bodies [to bury them] because we could no longer move them—they were decomposing.³⁴⁰

The husband and wife provided a list with the names of 45 victims, including eight children, ages 5 to 17; 25 women, ages 27 to 47; and 12 men, ages 30 to 56.

An ethnic Mossi woman, 35, said she was the only survivor of her family of over 30 people, mainly women and children. She said that after the massacre, she tried to return home, but there were soldiers in her compound, so she fled to the nearby bush with a few others, returning to Pétégoli about two hours later. She kept hearing gunfire from her hiding place for about an hour:

I cannot describe what I saw. The entire village had been massacred in less than one hour. I saw scenes of devastation all around me. I went straight to my house to check on my family. I had my hands on my head. I was crying. It was horrible! The bodies were piled on top of each other in the compound, except for my father's body, which was at the door.... He was lying on his stomach, the palms of his hands on the ground, hands spread.... I counted about 60 bodies, half of which were incinerated. There

³⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.H., March 27, 2025.

were all the members of my family and neighbors, women and children who, it seems, had come to our home to seek protection.³⁴¹

The woman provided a list with the names of 19 victims, including four boys, ages 5 to 7; two girls, both 3; eight women, ages 30 to 67; and five men, ages 55 to 70.

A 35-year-old ethnic Dogon woman said she left her home when the military and the VDPs came, thinking that “they would not do anything to women and children.” But forces fired at her and her relatives:

My mother and my co-wife fell on the spot. I fled with my baby in my arms and my two daughters to go back into the house. Two VDPs followed us, one entered the house, and the other remained outside. [The one who entered the house] opened fire on me and my children. My two daughters died on the spot. I was seriously injured, and my 9-month-old boy also had his leg broken by the bullets. I heard the VDP outside say to the one who was shooting at us, “make sure no one is breathing before going out.” Inside the house, I had no escape. The VDP was shooting at us “ta ta ta” at close range, he was trying to shoot at my chest, and I was rolling on the ground.³⁴²

The woman said she was hit by six bullets, including two in her breast, two in her left and right arms and two more in her thighs, which caused her serious injuries. She provided the names of her two daughters, 15 and 16, her mother, 67, and her co-wife, 18.

Human Rights Watch geolocated photographs and videos recorded by JNIM published from three different locations in and around Pétégoli on December 15, 2023, showing scores of people killed. Some of the bodies were charred.³⁴³

One video and photographs show a hamlet one-and-a-half kilometers southeast of the market of Pétégoli, on the road to Baraboulé, where the bodies of 43 are lined up against a building. A man, who appears to be dressed in JNIM attire, is covering the bodies with

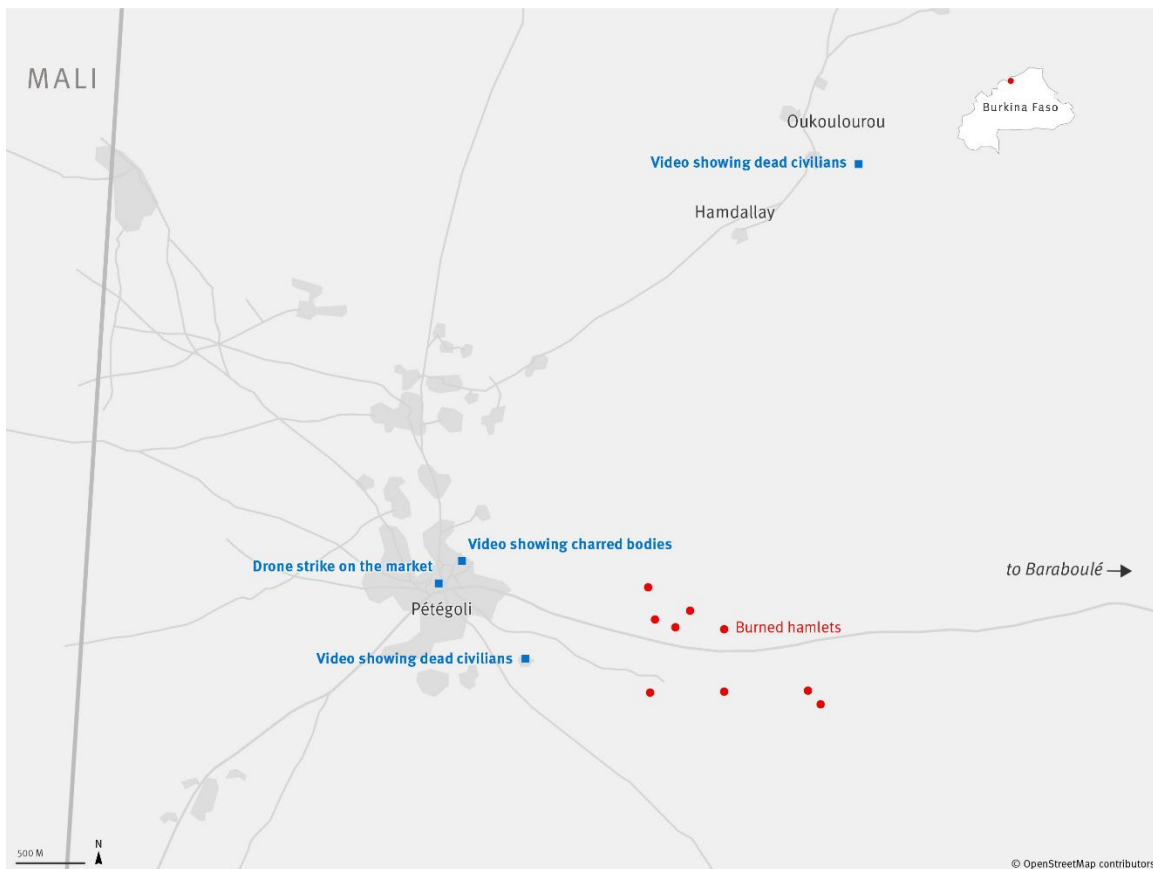
³⁴¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with B.S., March 26, 2025.

³⁴² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with G.S., March 26, 2025.

³⁴³ Photographs and videos on file with Human Rights Watch.

plastic mats. A second video and photographs show burned bodies clustered together, reduced to ash and bone fragments. While it is difficult to determine the precise number of victims in the video, Human Rights Watch could count at least 12. In a third video and photographs, the bodies of at least 39 people are lined up along a wall in the village of Oukoulourou, eight kilometers northeast of Pétégoli. Over half of the dead are children, including babies strapped to the backs or stomachs of deceased women. Fifteen of the victims are women and three are men. The victims appear to have been shot in the chest and abdomen.

Pétégoli had been under JNIM control since 2019, but witnesses said JNIM fighters were not present during the attacks and all those killed were civilians.



Locator map of Pétégoli, Burkina Faso, showing the location of videos geolocated by Human Rights Watch and burned hamlets visible on satellite imagery from December 17, 2023. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

Hours before the attack, JNIM fighters had alerted Pétégoli's residents that a military convoy was coming, before fleeing toward Mali, witnesses said. "Those who took their alert seriously fled, but we, women and children, didn't think the military were going to kill us, and we didn't flee," the 45-year-old Tamashek woman said. "Some people also thought that the military was not going to reach Pétégoli because it had not come there in years."³⁴⁴

A survivor saw JNIM fighters taking videos:

JNIM fighters helped [survivors] bury the bodies. They took pictures and filmed videos of them. The bodies were buried in mass graves, six of them... on the west side of the village with 120 bodies, and two... on the southwest side, contain 44 bodies. Among the dead were many women, children from several ethnic groups, including Fulani, Rimaïbè, Dogon, and Bella.³⁴⁵

In a December 22, 2023, statement, the humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF) reported that from December 13 to 19, 2023, it treated 26 people with severe bullet wounds coming from Pétégoli in several health facilities in Mali.³⁴⁶ The statement said that one of those treated, a 10-year-old boy, died of his wounds.

Sè, December 14, 2023

Three days after the killings in Pilade, on December 14, 2023, Burkinabè military and VDPs deployed for Operation Tchéfari 2 killed at least 66 people—but possibly many more—in Sè village. Witnesses said at least four pickup trucks with mounted machine guns and carrying Burkinabè soldiers, and at least 100 motorbikes with VDPs, accompanied by a military helicopter, entered Sè village, searched homes, and rounded people up before summarily executing over 100 of them.

³⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with F.P., March 27, 2025.

³⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with E.M., April 15, 2024.

³⁴⁶ MSF Western & Central Africa's X account, @MSF_WestAfrica, December 22, 2023, https://x.com/MSF_WestAfrica/status/1738158133443260646 (accessed September 2, 2025).

A gold miner, 44, said he spoke to the VDPs near the village early that morning:

Two VDPs asked me in Mooré, “What are you doing here?” I replied, “This is my village.” One said, “What village? You have to say that you are a terrorist! Only terrorists live here.... We are going to finish it with you, all the accomplices of the terrorists are going to die, today.” ... One wanted to kill me, but the other told him to let me go.... They said that if I cared about my life, I had to leave and not to return.³⁴⁷

A 48-year-old resident said:

The soldiers said ... “Get out! Everyone, men and women! Out! Children and old people! Out! Whoever doesn’t get out, we’ll go into the house and if we find him in the house, we’ll execute him!” I hid in my house and saw them round up people under the big shed of the village. One hour later, I heard bursts of gunfire.³⁴⁸

A 42-year-old man said he also saw the bodies of over 50 people killed in Sè’s Kara neighborhood. “[They were] one on top of the other, mostly women and children,” he said.³⁴⁹

Another resident said:

I heard motorbikes and vehicles approaching and I saw a helicopter flying overhead ... then shooting began for about half an hour.... The convoy of the FDS [security forces] didn’t pass through my neighborhood, but all the homes on the Djibo-Bouro road were attacked ... I saw the bodies of 147 people.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.M., January 24, 2024.

³⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.S., January 18, 2024.

³⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with B.I., January 7, 2024.

³⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Y.U., February 24, 2024.

The man said that of the 147 people he estimated had been killed, 51 were children from 5 months to 9 years old, 68 were women, and 28 were men from 18 to 60 years old, and that they were all ethnic Mossi, except 18 people who were ethnic Rimaïbe. He said that survivors and JNIM fighters carried out burials the following days in several mass graves. “I helped with some of the burials, we put 36 people from the same family in one mass grave, 26 people from another family in another grave, and 18 from a third family in another grave.”³⁵¹

Human Rights Watch spoke with two residents who confirmed that at least eight people were killed in an airstrike on the outskirts of the village.³⁵² “It was hard to identify the bodies because they were all burned,” the 42-year-old man said. “I covered them with a little sand and branches.”³⁵³

Human Rights Watch received two lists, totaling 66, compiled by residents with the names of some of the victims. One list included the 58 people killed in Kara neighborhood, including 33 children, ages 2 to 17; 15 women, ages 20 to 70; and 10 men, ages 18 to 40. The other list included the eight victims of the airstrike, including two 12-year-old children, two women in their forties, and four men, ages 40 to 50. Human Rights Watch was not able to confirm the names of all the people killed in Sè.

Bouro and Sekoudou, December 14, 2023

The worst attack of Operation Tchéfari 2 that Human Rights Watch documented was in Bouro, on December 14, 2023, when Burkinabè military and VDPs killed at least 211 civilians, and possibly many more.

Witnesses said that a convoy of at least 100 motorbikes, numerous pickup trucks, and armored cars with at least 200 Burkinabè soldiers and VDPs arrived in Bouro at 9 a.m. from the south, followed by at least one camouflage-painted military helicopter that flew over the village until the operation ended at about 3:30 p.m.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid. Human Rights Watch telephone interview with B.I., January 7, 2024.

³⁵³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with B.I., January 7, 2024.

Witnesses said there was no exchange of gunfire between soldiers and JNIM fighters in Bouro during the military operation, and that all those killed in Bouro were civilians. They said soldiers and VDPs accused them of collaborating with Islamist fighters.

The Killings in Bouro

Witnesses said many people were killed in the courtyards of their homes around the market area and in the two hamlets just north of Bouro. Soldiers and VDPs stormed the market area and went door to door, searching homes, and ordering villagers out before summarily executing them in groups and shooting at anyone who attempted to flee or take cover.

An ethnic Sonrai shopkeeper, 45, said he was at the market when “soldiers and VDPs came and started shooting.” He said people ran away, some “[falling] before my eyes,” while others, including “women, children, older people were screaming.” He said:

Soldiers shot and insulted people by calling them offensive names and saying they were terrorists.... I don't even know how I managed to escape.... I went east, but soldiers were all over.... I hid in an abandoned home.... I kept hearing the screams of people, and the gunfire.... They stayed in Bouro for at least one hour and shot non-stop, killing every single human being.... When they left ... I went out and saw that the world had collapsed on Bouro. ... Around the market area, I counted between 150 and 200 bodies ... I found the bodies of women, children.³⁵⁴

A survivor said he saw military forces riding many motorcycles, armored vehicles, and 4x4 vehicles into the village. Some women and traders went toward them “in the middle of the market on the road that goes to Ariel.” He said:

One VDP asked the women for their identity cards, which they provided. The VDP asked in Mooré where the shopkeepers were, and the women said they didn't know. Then a soldier ordered a search of the houses—they searched the houses to bring out people who were hiding.... Then the shooting started as if it was a war, the shooting lasted more than 40 minutes and during this time a helicopter was shooting from the north side of the town.

³⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.R., December 22, 2023.

At the same time, the security forces attacked the two hamlets of Boukari Goral and Sekoudou.³⁵⁵

A Mossi woman, 25, said she saw about 10 soldiers and VDPs rounding up five women, questioning and beating them, before one soldier opened fire on them. She said she hid in a house behind a pile of wood from a dismantled bed and from there she listened to what the soldiers and VDPs were saying:

At one point I even recognized the voice of a young VDP called Moussa from Belehede village, not far from Bouro, who insulted women by telling them that they were all “wives of terrorists” and that they deserved the most horrible death of history ... and that they were going to exterminate the Fulani and their terrorist allies.... Every time shots rang out the VDPs would shout: “Long live the FDS and the VDP! Long live Burkina Faso! Homeland or death! We will win!”³⁵⁶

Residents said two days before the attack, news of the arrival of the military and VDPs had spread to all surrounding villages and that many Fulani people abandoned their homes and left for Mali, less than 35 kilometers away across the border, out of fear of being targeted as JNIM collaborators. In Bouro, most Fulani men left the village except for a few older men who refused to leave and stayed in the village with women and children.

Members of the Sonrai, Mossi, and Rimaïbe communities chose to stay because they believed their ethnic identities would protect them against abuses by the military and the VDPs.

“Sadly, they were among the biggest group of deaths,” a trader said. “The VDPs spared no one when they arrived, adults, young people, women, and babies.”³⁵⁷

A 65-year-old Fulani man said:

³⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with F.G., March 30, 2024.

³⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.P., December 23, 2023.

³⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with T.L., January 23, 2024.

I decided to flee at about 1:30 p.m.... when the soldiers were very close to our houses.... I saw the military convoy ... and a helicopter.... I made the decision to flee alone and leave my family behind.... I locked the 13 members of my family, my wives, children, and grandchildren, in the house. I told myself that the military were not going to target women and children.³⁵⁸

The man said he fled to Douna, in Mali, and returned to Bouro with two other men three days later and found “that all the 13 members of my family had been executed... sprayed with bullets... their bodies... lying together ... just outside the house.”³⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by the witness with the names of the 13 victims: five children, ages 4 to 17 and eight women, ages 30 to 50.

Samer (not his real name) said that, after he received information about the military convoy moving toward Bouro, he decided to flee leaving his family behind, thinking that “the soldiers would not dare to attack women and children.”³⁶⁰ He said he hid in an abandoned home some two kilometers from the village, from where, around 2 p.m., he saw the military convoy arriving and heard “repeated gunshots.”³⁶¹ He said that when gunfire stopped, he left his hiding place, saw flames and smoke coming from the village, and returned home to check on his family. He said:

When I arrived at my family home, there was no one.... I was worried... so I headed toward my neighbor’s courtyard 100 meters away. When I arrived in the courtyard, I found my family and my neighbor’s family massacred. My wives [and] my children were dead. The only survivor from my family was my 11-year-old son. I found the bodies lying on the ground, bullets in their heads, chests, stomachs. My little one was wounded in the left leg, he was lucky. The bullets grazed his leg, tearing off the skin, but did not hit the bone. I took him out of a pile of corpses. Among the bodies, I also found five other children, from my neighbor’s family ... who had also survived but were injured.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with K.D., January 8, 2024.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Samer (not his real name), February 6, 2024.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.



Samer [not his real name], a resident of Bouro village, Sahel region, Burkina Faso. On December 14, 2023, Burkina Faso military forces and allied militias killed 19 of Samer’s relatives in an attack on his neighborhood in Bouro. Alone, amid bodies and devastation, Samer tended to six injured children. “I started caring for them with what I had,” he told Human Rights Watch. “I made bandages with clothes I tore off. I did this all evening. There was no one in Bouro. All had fled.” Samer then took the children and fled to neighboring Mali. © 2026 John Holmes for Human Rights Watch © 2026 John Holmes for Human Rights Watch

Samer said he counted 34 bodies in his neighbor’s courtyard, including 19 of his family members and 15 of his neighbor’s family. Human Rights Watch reviewed a list, compiled by the witness, with the names of his family members who were killed, including 15 children, ages 3-months to 12 years and four women, ages 24 to 40.

In a video from December 17, 2023, apparently filmed by JNIM fighters, seen by Human Rights Watch, part of that courtyard is visible, along with the bodies of dead or dying men, women, and children heaped on the ground.³⁶³ Human Rights Watch verified the video and geolocated it to a courtyard 200 meters south from the market of Bouro.

From the video, Human Rights Watch counted at least 16 bodies of dead or dying people on the ground, many of them face down in the dirt, including three children. An additional two babies were still alive: one baby was crying, wrapped in green fabric on the back of a

³⁶³ Video apparently by JNIM from December 17, 2023, on file with Human Rights Watch.

dead woman. Another baby stared wide-eyed toward the camera, still cradled in the left arm of a dead woman, blood pooling from underneath her head. Samer recognized the courtyard as being his neighbor's and one of the babies as his nephew. He said the baby was still alive and had been taken to a neighboring country.

Low-resolution satellite imagery collected on December 15, 2023, shows burn scars in and around the village of Bouro. An image from December 13, 2023, shows no signs of damage.

A high-resolution satellite image collected a couple of months later, on February 24, 2024, reveals extensive destruction across the village, especially south of the market, in the area where Human Rights Watch geolocated the video, showing at least 16 bodies on the ground. Other parts of the village, including the market and the nearby neighborhoods, are also severely damaged. As of February 24, 2024, Bouro appeared to be abandoned, which was confirmed by a witness who returned to the village on January 18, 2024. "The first thing I noticed ... was that there was no one there, everyone had fled. No human being was in the village, it was deserted," he said. "Bouro had become a ghost village."³⁶⁴



Locator map of Bouro, Burkina Faso, showing the location of videos geolocated by Human Rights Watch. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

³⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.V., January 30, 2024.

Human Rights Watch reviewed 106 names across four different lists of victims in Bouro compiled by witnesses, victims' family members, and local leaders.³⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch found 101 unique individuals across the lists provided. Among these 101, there were at least 19 children, 14 boys and 5 girls.

The Killings in Sekoudou

At about 3 p.m. on December 14, 2023, soldiers and VDPs left Bouro and headed to Sekoudou, a hamlet located three kilometers north of Bouro, where they killed at least 110 people.

A 50-year-old ethnic Sonrai farmer from Sekoudou said:

We started hearing sustained gunfire, it was coming closer and closer to our homes, so we fled toward the Mali border. As we escaped, we saw a helicopter flying over our heads and we got scared. ... The following day I returned and discovered the horror in Bouro and the surrounding hamlets, including mine, where everyone had been killed. ... [I]t was almost impossible to stay calm. I cried without screaming, I have friends and brothers and sisters who were killed. ... [W]e buried 110 bodies, mostly women and children, but we did not finish burying everyone because there were helicopter flying over the village and we were afraid they would bomb us and so we had to leave.³⁶⁶

A 54-year-old man who returned to Bouro two days after the attack said:

I began to see the first bodies in the hamlet of Sekoudou. ... [I]t was a hamlet of a large family and the whole family was massacred, no survivors. They had all been gathered in the courtyard and they were sprayed with bullets... women, children, older people.... There I counted between 110 and

³⁶⁵ During the review process, any names that appeared to refer to the same individual were removed, including those with the same spelling or with minor spelling variations. Similarly, when available, gender and age information was used to distinguish individuals.

³⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with M.P., December 24, 2023.

120 bodies in the family. People had been shot ... in the chest, in the stomach, in the head, and legs, everywhere.³⁶⁷

Human Rights Watch geolocated a video recorded by a witness on December 15, 2023, in the eastern part of Sekoudou, about 120 meters east of a mosque. It shows the bodies of at least 43 people, most of them lying face down in the courtyard of a household. Blood stains are visible on the ground next to the bodies who appear to have suffered gunshot wounds, including to the head. Women and children make up most of the 43 bodies, but some men are also visible.

Trauma

The language survivors used to describe the massacres in Bouro and Pétégoli included strong diction, imagery, metaphor and simile. “It was a butchery”³⁶⁸; “it was a mass slaughter”³⁶⁹; “the world had collapsed on the village”³⁷⁰; “it was like the end of the world”³⁷¹; “it was beyond imagination”³⁷²; “it is impossible to describe it with words.”³⁷³

According to survivors, victims, and relatives, the attacks and killings left them with deep psychological wounds.

They described symptoms that appear consistent with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, including fear, anxiety, inability to speak and focus, and insomnia.

The 25-year-old Mossi woman from Bouro said:

I lived the most horrible hours of my life.... I remained motionless for a long time in front of the bodies of the people who had been killed. I am totally disoriented and lost and ... I cannot accept that I have lost everything.... It is as if I am dreaming and quite frankly, the people who came the next day

³⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with K.M., January 8, 2024.

³⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with K.D., Jan 8, 2024.

³⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.R., December 22, 2023.

³⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with K.M., January 8, 2024.

³⁷¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.P., December 23, 2023.

³⁷² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with M.P., December 24, 2023.

³⁷³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with K.M., January 8, 2024.

and who found me just outside the village ... I don't know what condition they found me in.... I don't even know how night fell and how the next day came. I have seen friends with babies killed. Some women did not die instantly and died several hours later. I heard screams and I didn't know what to do or say.³⁷⁴

Samer (not his real name), who lost 19 members of his family in the attack in Bouro said, “I stayed there between the injured children and the corpses of their mothers.... Seeing all my family members dead at once ... it traumatized me.”³⁷⁵

“I lost my sleep,” the 65-year-old man who lost 13 family members in the attack said. “I cannot concentrate.”³⁷⁶

The 35-year-old Mossi woman from Pétégoli who lost at least 30 of her relatives in the attack said: “I can't name all those who died in my family because since this tragedy, if I start saying their names, my heart starts beating very fast, so fast that I lose my breath, I choke.”³⁷⁷

Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel Region, January–March 2025

Burkinabè military and VDPs killed up to 200 civilians and burned over 100 hamlets during several military operations conducted while escorting a supply convoy in the Sahel administrative region between January and March 2025. Using satellite imagery, Human Rights Watch retraced most of the convoy route.

Human Rights Watch interviewed eight witnesses to attacks carried out by Burkinabè military and VDPs escorting the supply convoy in at least two villages on a circular route between Dori and Sebba and back to Dori from January to March 2025. The town of Sebba has been besieged by JNIM since at least 2022.

³⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.P., December 23, 2023.

³⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Samer (not his real name), February 6, 2024.

³⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with K.D., January 8, 2024.

³⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with B.S., March 26, 2025.

One VDP who escorted the convoy confirmed to Human Rights Watch the circumstances of the attacks on civilians. Human Rights Watch also analyzed satellite imagery and geolocated social media photos and videos to retrace the route of the convoy and documented the burning of at least 110 hamlets. The convoy was escorted by BIR 8 and BIR 9, witnesses said.

On January 27, 2025, the supply convoy, composed of more than 100 trucks, left the town of Dori for the besieged town of Sebba about 100 kilometers southeast, arriving on January 30. Because of the risk of ambush and the presence of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), the convoy did not use the main N24 road that connects both cities but instead used backroads east of the main road.

Witnesses said VDPs escorted the convoy to Sebba alongside soldiers from BIR 8 and BIR 9. A man in his forties who traveled with the convoy said:

We left Dori on Monday, January 27, at 5 a.m. I was in a truck and there were at least 100 other trucks loaded with food and passengers. There were also people who were on their motorcycles. The convoy was escorted. There was the BIR 9, as well as soldiers who were supposed to replace those based in Sebba and Solhan.... They had motorcycles, pickup trucks with machine guns mounted on top, and armored vehicles.³⁷⁸

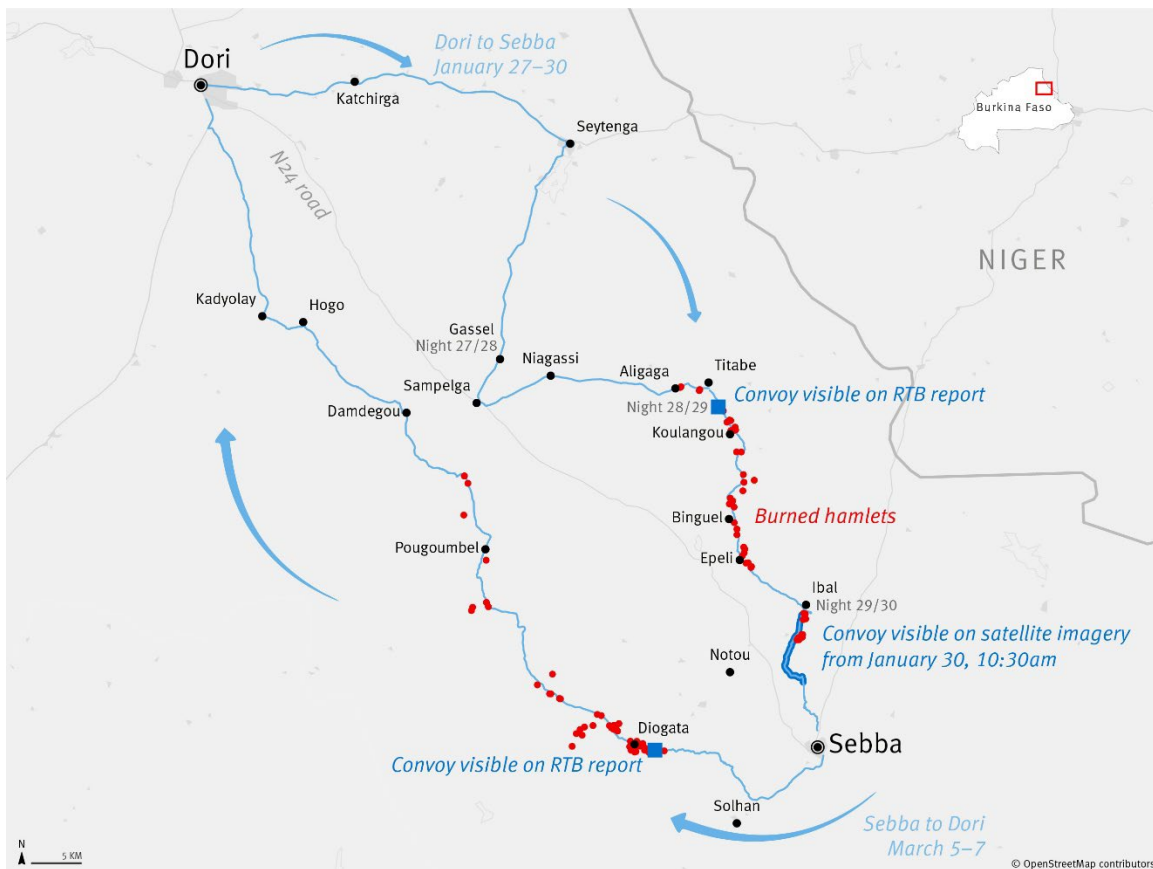
On the return journey, leaving Sebba on March 5, 2025, the convoy took an alternative route and arrived in Dori on March 7, 2025.

A VDP who escorted the convoy told Human Rights Watch that they were ambushed by Islamist fighters shortly after leaving Dori, near the village of Katchirga. At this point, the convoy was only escorted by BIR 8. “Seeing that we could not continue, we withdrew to Dori where BIR 9 reinforced us,” he said. “So, we were [with] two BIRs, 8 and 9, supported by a helicopter and a drone. This allowed us to continue the path to Sebba and supply the city.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with P.P., February 14, 2025.

³⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with L.P., April 13, 2025.

The convoy left Dori on January 27, 2025, and took the road east to Seytenga before moving south toward Sampelga, a village on the N24 road. Before reaching Sampelga, the convoy spent the first night in the village of Gassel. On January 28, 2025, the convoy passed by Sampelga, Niagassi—where the French newspaper *Libération* reported that 30 people had been killed during the passage of a previous convoy in April 2024—onwards to Aligaga, and then stopped for a second night close to Titabé.³⁸⁰ A February 2, 2025 RTB report showed a drone view of the convoy stationed in a location geolocated by Human Rights Watch just south of Titabé, close to Koulangou.³⁸¹



Locator map of the Dori-Sebba-Dori convoy, Burkina Faso, displaying the route of the convoy, geolocated views of the convoy shown in RTB reports, location of the convoy visible on satellite imagery from January 30, 2025, and burned hamlets along the route. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

³⁸⁰ Célian Macé and Agnès Faivre, “« Les soldats ont tiré sur tout ce qu’ils ont vu » : au Burkina Faso, des centaines de civils exécutés par deux convois militaires,” *Libération*, July 17, 2024, https://www.liberation.fr/international/afrique/les-soldats-ont-tire-sur-tout-ce-quils-ont-vu-au-burkina-faso-des-centaines-de-civils-executes-par-deux-convois-militaires-20240717_l4YZVCP4FHERO7IP6CS3D7FOM/ (accessed September 3, 2025).

³⁸¹ “RTB – Edition Spéciale sur les Nouvelles du Front du 02 février 2025,” YouTube live, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, February 2, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1dtWepFCg8> (accessed September 3, 2025).

Witnesses from Titabé and Koulangou said that, although their villages were in an area where Islamist armed groups were, Islamist fighters were not present when the convoy reached their villages on January 28, 2025, and there was no attack on the military or the convoy.³⁸² A 38-year-old man from Koulangou said: “The jihadists used to come every once in a while, [but] when the military entered the village, they were not around, they had left earlier.”³⁸³ Nevertheless, from the village of Titabé onwards, the military escort and VDPs began to attack civilians.

Titabé

The VDP member escorting the convoy said that when the convoy approached Titabé, the military received information “suggesting that the terrorists were gathering to attack the convoy,” and that, to address this threat, VDPs and soldiers from BIR 8, using motorbikes and light vehicles, were tasked with securing the roadside and entering the hamlets and villages located nearby to prevent ambushes during the convoy’s passage.³⁸⁴

The VDP member said that “it was BIR 8 and VDPs that entered the hamlets and villages [along the roadside] who killed civilians.”³⁸⁵

He said:

Civilians were killed all along the route. The death toll reached 220 in the various villages mentioned, with most of the killings taking place in the vicinity of Titabé, in other words, in the entire department of Titabé.³⁸⁶

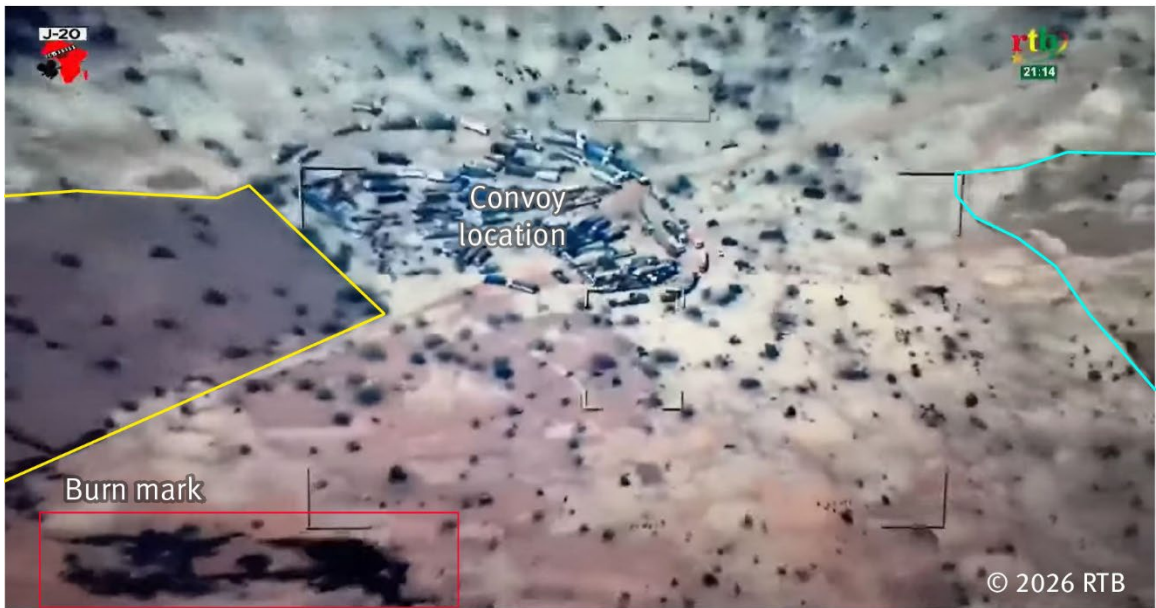
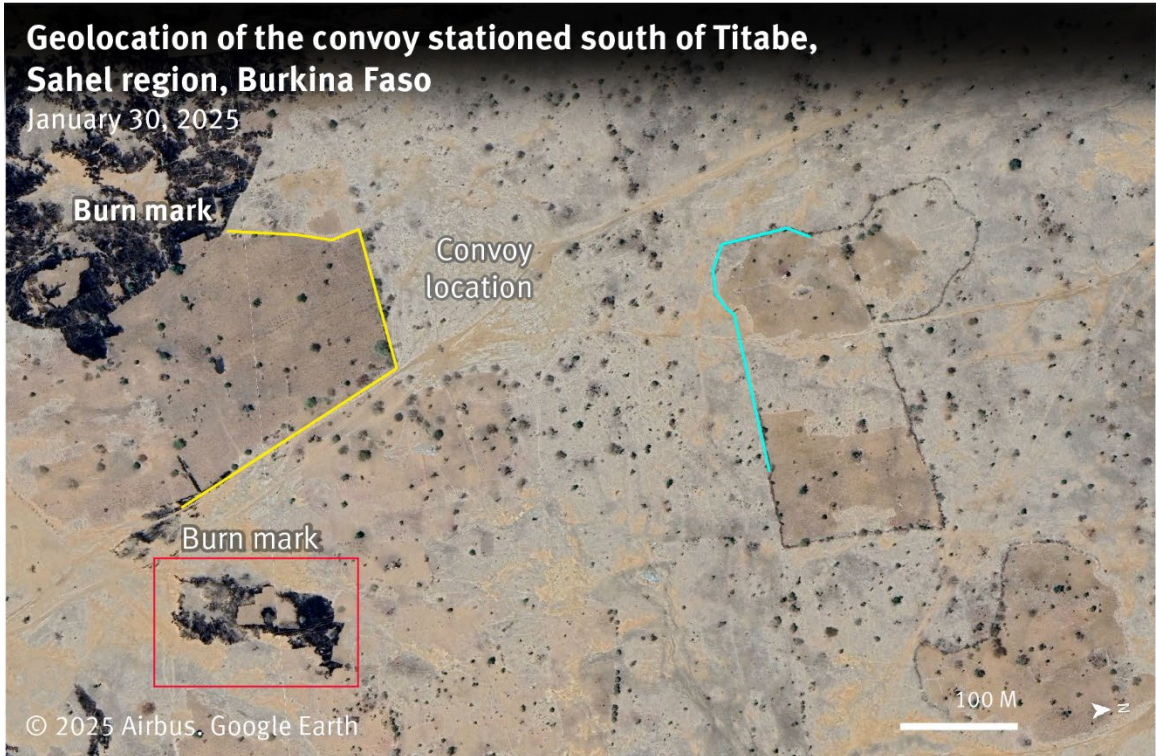
³⁸² ACLED reported at least two clashes between IS Sahel and JNIM in 2024 in Yagha province, where Titabé and Koulangou are located: a November 2024 clash in Titabé in which nine JNIM fighters were reportedly killed, and another in April 2024 in the village of Ouro Yaro, five kilometers from Titabé. ACLED also reported that in February 2024, IS Sahel fighters attacked the villages of Tyekanyebi and Obouga, respectively 13 and 20 kilometers from Titabé, killing respectively 40 and 20 civilians whom the IS Sahel accused of collaborating with JNIM.

³⁸³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with V.C., April 20, 2025.

³⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with L.P., April 13, 2025.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.



Geolocation of the convoy stopped in a field as shown in a RTB report from February 2 in a location just south of Titabé. © 2025 RTB. Image © 2026 Airbus. Google Earth. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

A 40-year-old woman who survived the attack in Titabé said:

When the military arrived in the village, people were in the fields and a few others on the outskirts of the village. The military fired on everything that moved, men, women, and children. A man who was giving water to his chicks was shot and fell on the spot. Those who were far [away] were able to flee, but no one survived in the village.³⁸⁷

A Fulani man said he found 26 bodies, mostly of women and children, “in front of the courtyards of their homes,” as well as several homes burned, in a neighborhood called Tioutibe, about a kilometer from the center of Titabé.³⁸⁸

The man who traveled with the convoy from Dori to Sebba said that when they stopped near Titabé, he saw soldiers surrounding a woman and later saw her dead body.³⁸⁹

International media reported that “several dozens” of people had been killed, allegedly by soldiers who were escorting a supply convoy between Koulangou and Titabé on January 28, 2025.³⁹⁰ Satellite imagery from the morning of January 29, 2025, analyzed by Human Rights Watch, shows large burn marks in the villages of Aligaga, Titabé, and Koulangou. They were not visible on an image from the previous morning.

Koulangou

Upon arriving in Koulangou, located just a few kilometers south of Titabé, the military and VDPs started to shoot at the population.

The 38-year-old man from Koulangou said:

The population was watching the convoy and the soldiers who came down, but suddenly shooting started and it was a manhunt. They [soldiers] started

³⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Q.A., February 16, 2025.

³⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.B., February 19, 2025.

³⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with P.P., February 14, 2025.

³⁹⁰ “Burkina Faso: l’armée accusée d’avoir perpétré un nouveau massacre dans le nord-est du pays,” *RFI*, February 1, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250201-burkina-faso-l-arm%C3%A9e-accus%C3%A9-d-avoir-perp%C3%A9tr%C3%A9-un-nouveau-massacre-dans-le-nord-est-du-pays> (accessed July 29, 2025).

shooting at people. When they arrived ... I was watching them from afar to better understand what was going to happen. And unfortunately, it turned into a tragedy and I ... fled.... The soldiers were on foot, on motorcycles, in pickup vehicles.... There were VDPs with them.... There was shooting for ... more than an hour at least.... It was every man for himself. People who could started running. The others were killed.³⁹¹

The man said that, after the convoy left, he returned to Koulangou and saw “at least 20 bodies piled up,” and believed that the “military rounded up most of the victims before massacring them.”³⁹²

Another Fulani man, who was not in Koulangou at the time of the attack, but returned to the village on January 29, 2025, one day after the massacre, said he found the bodies of his family members and other people all together not far from his home. He said:

From the position of the bodies, I would say that the military would have arrested the people first and then rounded them up before opening fire on them. There were 21 bodies piled up. Among them were the seven members of my family, including my older brother.... They were all riddled with bullets.³⁹³

He provided a list with the names of his seven relatives killed, all Fulani men, ages 30 to 68.

Another Fulani man who lost 18 family members in the attack and returned to Koulangou on January 30, 2025, said he found the bodies of 31 people, including women and children. He said that he found the body of a 17-year-old girl “burned in her hut,” six others in the outskirts of the village, and that “others were shot in the courtyard of their home and the houses burned.”³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with V.C., April 20, 2025.

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.C., March 7, 2025.

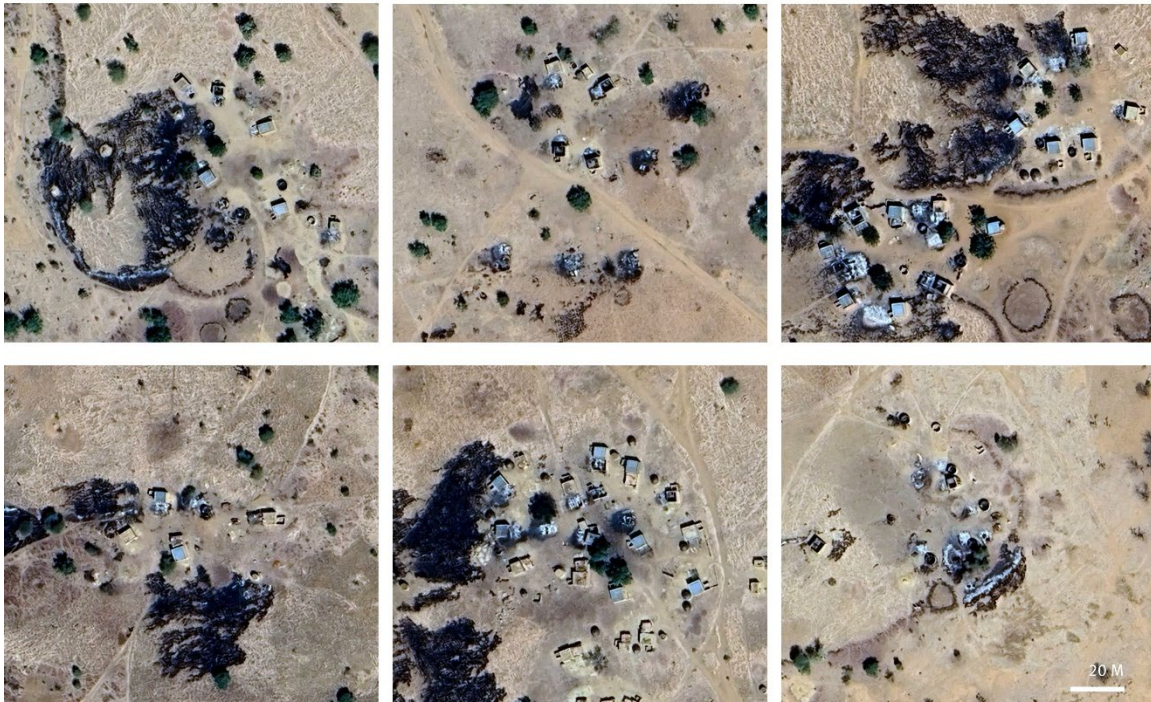
³⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with R.T., February 19, 2025.

The man provided a list he compiled with the names of 21 people killed in Koulangou, all Fulani, ages one year to 78.

Witnesses said that when they returned to the village, they found that many homes had been burned. “The soldiers burned and looted the village,” the 38-year-old man said. “They burned granaries and homes. They also took away jewelry and money. I could not believe my eyes. The village was in ruins. Our homes had been burned down, as well as other homes.”³⁹⁵

After Koulangou, the convoy continued south toward Ibal where it stopped for the third night. On the way, it passed by the villages of Binguel and Epeli, where forces destroyed and burned down homes. Satellite imagery from January 29, 2025, shows these homes intact and destroyed the following day.

Examples of burned hamlets between Koulangou and Ibal, Sahel region, Burkina Faso
January 30, 2025



© 2026 Airbus. Google Earth

Satellite imagery from January 30, 2025, shows examples of burned hamlets between Koulangou and Ibal, Burkina Faso. In total, Human Rights Watch found at least 110 burned hamlets along the Dori-Sebba-Dori convoy route. Image © 2026 Airbus. Google Earth. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

³⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with V.C., April 20, 2025.



Satellite imagery from January 30, 2025, captured at 10:30 a.m. local time, shows a portion of the convoy composed of trucks, motorbikes and military vehicles as it left Ibal toward the south and Sebba. Image © 2026 Airbus. Google Earth. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

According to a witness, the village of Ibal was empty of residents when the convoy arrived, as inhabitants had fled. Satellite imagery from January 30, 2025, captured at 10:30 a.m. shows the convoy composed of about 130 trucks, dozens of motorbikes, and several technical vehicles stretching over eight kilometers as it leaves Ibal toward the south and Sebba. Two houses are visibly on fire in the southern part of Ibal. More hamlets between Ibal and Sebba appear burned on satellite imagery from January 30 and 31, 2025.

Sebba

A report from the Burkinabè Information Agency (Agence d'Information du Burkina, AIB) from February 2, 2025, three days after the convoy arrived in Sebba, shows the visit to the town of a delegation that included Moussa Diallo, the military Chief of Staff (CEMGA), a day

earlier, alongside men wearing uniforms adorned with the BIR 9 crest.³⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch geolocated the video to a military base in Sebba.

JNIM has regularly attacked both military and VDPs in Sebba. On January 22, 2025, nine days before the military convoy arrived, JNIM claimed responsibility for an attack against the military barracks in Sebba, stating it took “complete control” of the garrison.³⁹⁷ In a separate statement, on January 26, 2025, JNIM also claimed to have killed at least ten soldiers, and seized military vehicles and weapons in Sebba.³⁹⁸

The Convoy’s Return

On March 5, 2025, one month after its arrival, the convoy left Sebba for Dori, taking an alternate route through backroads west of the N24 main road. Initially progressing southwest from Sebba, it went north, reaching the village of Diogata before the town of Solhan. Human Rights Watch geolocated aerial views of the convoy shown in a March 17, 2025 RTB report in an area just east of Diogata.³⁹⁹ The report states that an ambush on the convoy was foiled in the area.

Satellite imagery from March 5, 2025, captured at 10:58 a.m., shows two smoke plumes rising from the village. New burn marks at the village are present in a low-resolution image from the day after. High-resolution satellite imagery from March 15, 2025, shows burned houses and some neighborhoods completely burned down. A large track is visible on the soil where the convoy is believed to have passed. Human Rights Watch geolocated a video in Diogata shared on Telegram on March 6, 2025, showing the bodies of 15 people, all men in civilian clothes. Burn marks on the ground and burned homes are visible.⁴⁰⁰

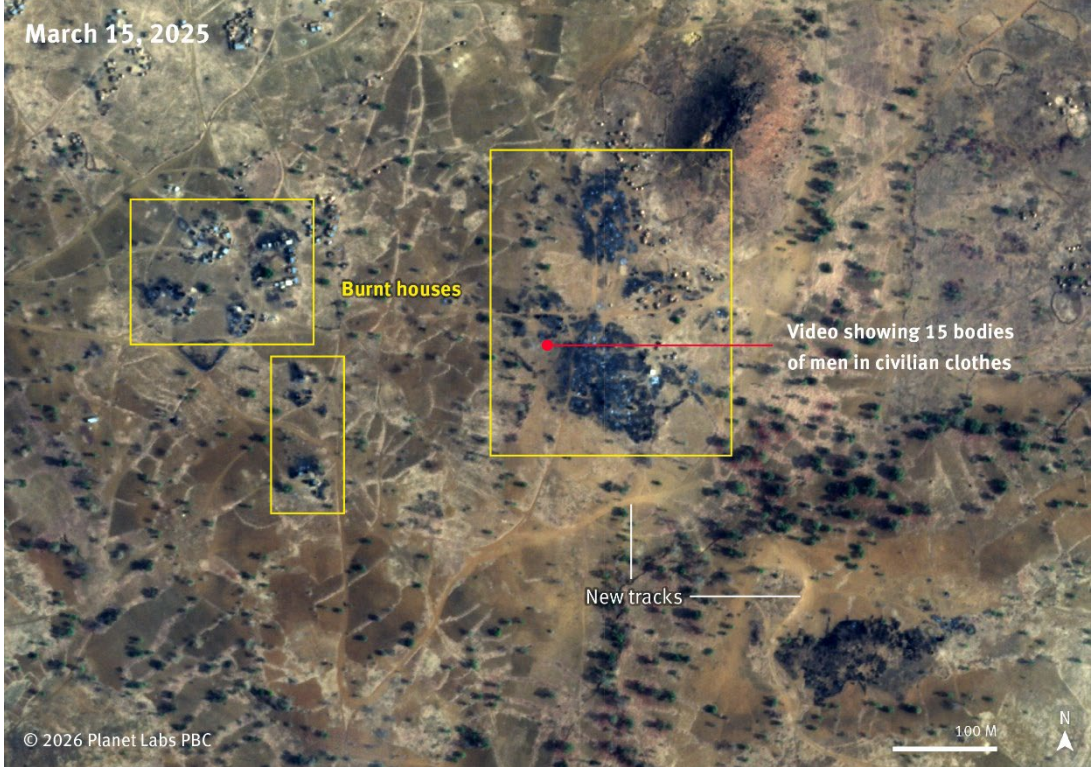
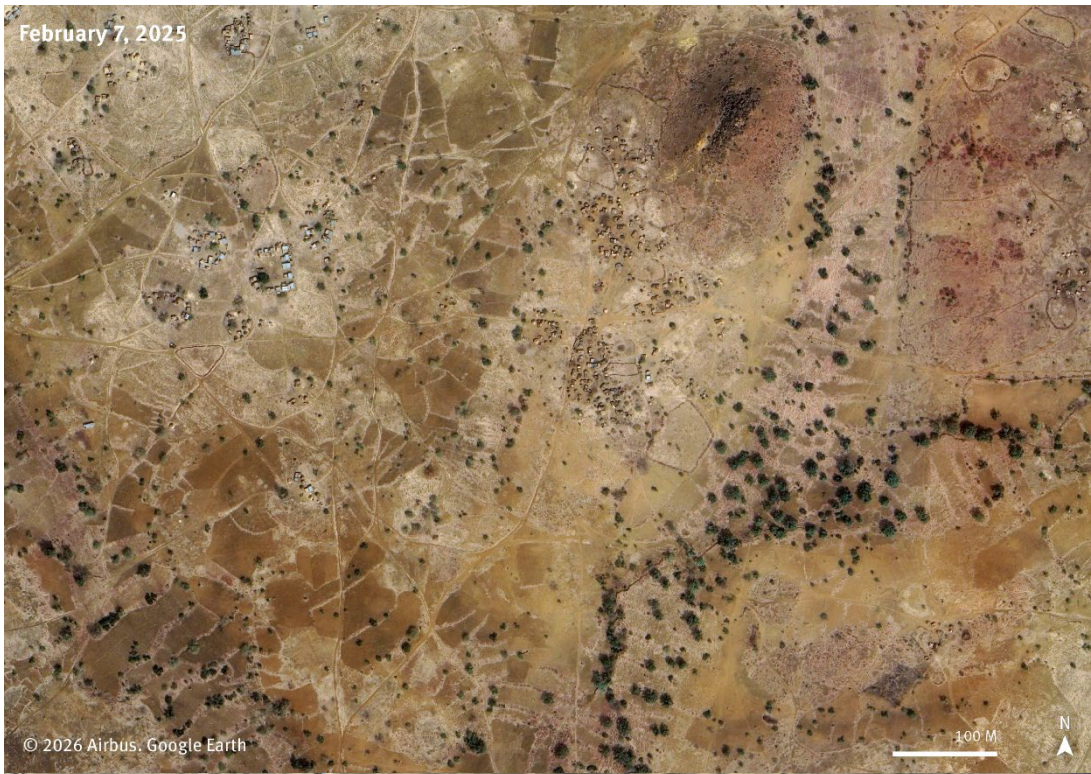
³⁹⁶ Agence d’Information du Burkina (AIB)’s Facebook page, “Reconquête territoriale : Une délégation gouvernementale burkinabè, accompagnée d’autorités militaires du Mali et du Niger s’est rendue ...,” February 2, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2631674677221956> (accessed July 29, 2025).

³⁹⁷ Statement on file with Human Rights Watch.

³⁹⁸ Statement on file with Human Rights Watch. Satellite imagery analyzed by Human Rights Watch from January 24, 2025, shows multiple burned houses in the eastern and western part of Sebba and large burn marks on the military camp located north of the town, presumably destruction caused from JNIM attacks.

³⁹⁹ “RTB – Edition spéciale sur les nouvelles du Front,” YouTube live, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, March 17, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/live/3TT4zuOdQaU> (accessed January 27, 2026).

⁴⁰⁰ Video taken in Diogata shared on Telegram on March 6, 2025, showing the bodies of 15 people, on file with Human Rights Watch.



Satellite imagery comparison between February 2 and March 15, 2025, shows newly burned houses across Diogata, Burkina Faso. New tracks are also visible, at the location where the convoy passed. Human Rights Watch also geolocated a video in the village showing the bodies of 15 men in civilian clothes. Image © 2026 Airbus. Google Earth. © 2026 Planet Labs PBC. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch.

Satellite imagery from March 5 to 7, 2025 shows multiple burned hamlets along the route of the convoy between Diogata and Dori. Human Rights Watch geolocated two videos, shared on Telegram on March 7, 2025, showing burned houses, one in the village of Pougoumbel, and the other in a hamlet five kilometers south of it.

Gaskindé, Sahel Region, February 20, 2025

On February 20, 2025, the military and VDPs attacked Gaskindé, a village 20 kilometers south of Djibo, killing at least 20 civilians in apparent retaliation against local communities accused of harboring JNIM fighters.

Between late January and mid-February 2025, JNIM attacked several military positions in the Sahel region. JNIM claimed responsibility for at least four attacks of which three took place in and around Djibo. Media reported that on February 2, 2025, JNIM fighters had attacked soldiers of BIR 22 and VDPs in Djibo, killing at least 20, and that on February 17, 2025, they attacked at least three military posts, also in Djibo, seizing military equipment.⁴⁰¹

A JNIM fighter who went to Gaskindé in the aftermath of the military's assault on civilians said:

The cause of this attack, I think, is due to the fact that on the morning of February 2 [2025], we attacked two of their positions on the outskirts of Djibo and one in Djibo. The other [attack], I think it was at [the outskirts] of Tangomaïl. So, we attacked these positions. We took them. We took their weapons. We killed them. They ran back to the city and we left. I think that's why they went to commit this massacre against the civilian population.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ "Burkina Faso: plusieurs positions militaires attaquées dans la province du Soum au nord du pays," *RFI*, February 3, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250203-burkina-faso-plusieurs-positions-militaires-attaqu%C3%A9es-dans-la-province-du-soum-au-nord-du-pays> (accessed September 3, 2025).

⁴⁰² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.K., April 1, 2025.

ACLEED reported that “Burkinabè special forces from the Rapid Intervention Battalion 10 (BIR 10) carried out an air and ground operation” in Gaskindé and that “at least 21 civilians including women, children, and babies were killed.”⁴⁰³

A 47-year-old Fulani man said he fled Gaskindé just before the attack after hearing a man talking with a JNIM fighter over a walkie-talkie:

The jihadist said: “To all those who are in the village of Gaskindé, take care of yourselves. There is a movement of VDPs and soldiers who are heading toward the village. So, to all the people of Gaskindé, find a solution, take care of yourselves.” When I heard this, I told my wife and my two children to flee I took my motorbike [to get] my elderly mother away ... and a 4-year-old child who was also with her away.⁴⁰⁴

The man said he heard gunfire and saw people running as he went to find his mother to flee.

A 40-year-old Rimaïbé man in Arayel, about 90 kilometers north on the border with Mali, traveled to Gaskindé to see his elderly parents, 65 and 70, who lived there. He arrived four days after the killings. The man said he “did not meet a single soul” on his way and that as he approached the village, he heard distant gunfire and saw drones flying. “I went to the family home, there was no one there,” he said. “There were some of my parents’ belongings, but I didn’t take them ... because I was scared ... of the gunshots and drones.”⁴⁰⁵

The man said that on his way back from Gaskindé, he met a young Fulani man who told him that he had buried the bodies of two older people, a man and a woman, in a cemetery south of the village, and took him to the grave. Based on his discussion with the young man, he believes he saw his parents’ graves.⁴⁰⁶ He provided their names, as well as a list,

⁴⁰³ According to ACLED: On 20 February 2025, Burkinabè special forces from the Rapid Intervention Battalion 10 (BIR 10) carried out an air and ground operation in the village of Gaskindé (Pobe-Mengao, Soum). At least 21 civilians including women, children, and babies were killed.

⁴⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with N.A., April 3, 2025.

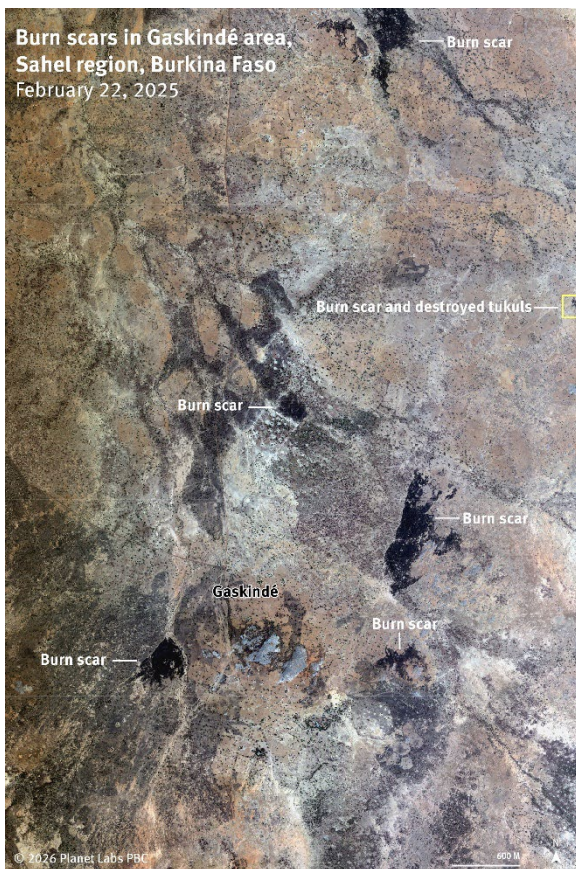
⁴⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with B.B., April 2, 2025.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

compiled by survivors with whom he spoke, with the names of eight men killed in the February 20 attack. The list includes two Rimaïbé, two Fulani, and four Tuareg men.

The 47-year-old man who fled Gaskindé before the attack said that survivors informed him that the village had been “burned down, including our houses.... The VDP and the military, after killing people, burned down the village. Few houses escaped the fire.”⁴⁰⁷

Low-resolution satellite imagery captured in the morning of February 21, 2025, shows large burn scars in and around Gaskindé. Those burn scars were not visible on an image captured one day earlier. Several scattered houses appear to have been destroyed by fire on high-resolution imagery from February 22, 2025.



Close-up of burned houses after the attack that took place on February 20, 2025. © 2026 Planet Labs PBC. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch

⁴⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with N.A., April 3, 2025.

Gaskindé had been the site of an attack by Islamist fighters on a supply convoy escorted by the military in September 2022, killing at least 27 soldiers in a major attack that triggered Traoré's coup.⁴⁰⁸

5th Military Region (Boucle du Mouhoun Administrative Region)

Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, June 2023

One day in June 2023, at about 1 p.m., a group of about 20 VDPs riding motorbikes and armed with Kalashnikov-style assault rifles killed at least 22 civilian men and a 17-year-old boy in a Fulani settlement about three kilometers from the city of Yaho. Witnesses said the VDPs were masked, wore cargo pants and short-sleeve t-shirts, and spoke Mooré, French, and Dafing. "President Ibrahim Traoré told us to kill you!" the assailants reportedly told the victims.

Human Rights Watch spoke with witnesses who said the attack was perpetrated by VDPs based in Yaho and Ouakara, about 11 kilometers from Yaho. They believed the VDPs targeted the Fulani community in retaliation for a JNIM attack in Yaho on April 5, 2023, during which JNIM fighters destroyed cell phone infrastructure, and on the presumption that the Fulani community was supportive of JNIM.⁴⁰⁹ "The jihadist attack that sabotaged the telephone network gave the VDPs a pretext to attack us," said a resident of the Fulani hamlet.⁴¹⁰

A 64-year-old herder whose adult son was killed in the attack said the VDPs surrounded the hamlet, blocking all entrances and exits and preventing people from escaping:

First, they caught three men and beat them with whips until they could no longer move. Then, they took knives and slit their throats. They said:
"President Ibrahim Traoré ordered us to kill you. God cannot save you! ...
No one will be able to run away from it! Come and see! We want it to hurt

⁴⁰⁸ Benjamin Roger, "Burkina Faso – Attaque de Gaskindé : « 22 ans, c'est trop jeune pour mourir »,» *Jeune Afrique*, October 8, 2022, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1383439/politique/burkina-faso-attaque-de-gaskinde-22-ans-cest-trop-jeune-pour-mourir/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁴⁰⁹ ACLED, Property destruction: On 5 April 2023, presumed JNIM militants destroyed cell phone installations in the town of Yaho (Yaho, Bale). ACLED also reported looting: On 7 April 2023, presumed JNIM militants seized goods in two stores of a primary school in the town of Yaho (Yaho, Bale). The stores were vandalized by the militants before they left.

⁴¹⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.F., January 23, 2025.

you.” ... I watched the whole scene from less than 10 meters away, terrified.⁴¹¹

VDPs then rounded up 13 other men, the herder said, including his son. They tied the victims’ hands with their torn clothes, took them to a nearby place behind a wall, and executed them. He said the VDPs then shot other men returning from the fields:

I didn’t see the shooting but heard gunfire.... When the VDPs left and we recovered the bodies, I found that they had all been shot and their throats slit. Eight bodies, including that of my son, had also been left with iron bars stuck in their bellies.... The iron bars were as long as an arm and shaped like skewers, with a sharp point.... I saw the VDPs kill those who were coming back to the hamlet, unaware of what was happening. They shot them one by one.⁴¹²

Two witnesses said that when the VDPs left, at about 3 p.m., residents recovered at least 23 bodies and buried them in separate graves in the following days. They provided a list with the names of the victims, who were aged 17 to 70.

One man whose three sons, ages 24, 27, and 30, were killed in the attack said that after the massacre he traveled to Yaho to see the prefect—the central government representative—and asked him whether he was aware of what happened. “He replied, in a completely uninterested manner, that he would respond, and asked me to go back to the hamlet,” the witness said.⁴¹³ Fearing another attack, he said he, like most people from the hamlet, chose not to return. “Everybody fled,” he said. “I took my family and went to Yaho, and stayed there for 17 days before a Mossi [man] [who had welcomed us in his house] asked us to leave.... As the days went by, local residents became wary of us.... So, we fled to Côte d’Ivoire.”⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with O.M., Ivory Coast, November 25, 2024.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with M.A., January 21, 2025.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, November 23, 2023

On November 23, 2023, at about 7 a.m., the Burkinabè military, accompanied by VDPs, killed at least seven Fulani men in an operation in Koumana, a village predominately populated by Mossi and Bobo people. Human Rights Watch spoke with three witnesses and a man who fled Koumana prior to the attack who said they believed the attack was in retaliation for the Fulani community having refused to join the VDPs.

“Our chief, a Mossi [man], asked us to become VDPs, but we said no, we said we shouldn’t interfere in the war between the jihadists and the state,” a 55-year-old Quranic teacher said.”⁴¹⁵

A herder from Koumana said:

The jihadists used to come to our village.... Two days before the military came, they also passed through the village, but the day of the attack, I didn’t see any fighters around and I’m not aware of any clashes in Koumana.... There might have been clashes in the bush.... All I know is that those killed in Koumana were not terrorists, but Quranic teachers, and farmers and herders like all of us.⁴¹⁶

The witnesses said they fled to the bush after people alerted them that the soldiers were preparing to attack Koumana.

“From my hiding place, I saw a military convoy heading toward the village with several motorbikes and vehicles, and a helicopter flying over our heads,” said a 45-year-old man.⁴¹⁷ “The shooting started between 7 and 8 a.m. and lasted until noon,” the Quranic teacher said. “I heard so many gunshots that I thought the military had not spared anyone in the village.”⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Z.A., January 20, 2025.

⁴¹⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with A.B., March 11, 2025.

⁴¹⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.T., January 20, 2025.

⁴¹⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Z.A., January 20, 2025.

The witnesses said that when they returned to Koumana in the afternoon, they found the bodies of seven men, “two ... near the mosque, two at the entrance of the village, and the others in the village, outside,” the Quranic teacher said.⁴¹⁹ “The bodies had a lot of bullet wounds in the legs and the heads,” the 45-year-old man said. “The heads were completely smashed, and you could see the brains, so we wrapped them [the bodies] and buried them in a mass grave at the cemetery.”⁴²⁰

Human Rights Watch reviewed two lists that witnesses compiled, with the names of the seven victims, all men, ages 23 to 55. All those killed in Koumana were civilians, witnesses said.

“After the attack [on Koumana], all the Fulani people left the village to go to Bobo-Dioulasso,” said the Quranic teacher. “In Bobo-Dioulasso, we also witnessed kidnappings of members of the Fulani community, so we fled to take refuge in Côte d’Ivoire.”⁴²¹

On November 23, 2023, Burkinabè media reported that “over several days,” security forces had conducted large-scale operations in the Bondukuy area, including in Koumana, Wakui, Wakara, Kera, and Kovio, killed about “20 terrorists,” and seized vehicles and ammunitions.⁴²²

Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, January 2024

In January 2024, dozens of VDPs riding motorbikes killed two men and four boys and looted several houses in a Fulani hamlet about three kilometers from Konga village. Human Rights Watch spoke with the victims’ wives and mothers, who witnessed the killings and believed the VDPs had targeted the Fulani community on suspicion that members collaborated with Islamist fighters. “They only targeted our hamlet, they did not

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.T., January 20, 2025.

⁴²¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Z.A., January 20, 2025.

⁴²² BurkinaWeb.net’s Facebook page, “Boucle du Mouhoun~Une vingtaine de terroristes neutralisée...,” November 23, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/burkinaweb.net/posts/pfbido35tWqNG2me28VNzqyL3yXMAH5LEjw7zPxEQzQzbYMzbRC8cR1opUG6DbVUizXRAFI> (accessed September 12, 2025). ACLED also reported that on November 23, 2023, soldiers and VDPs carried out an operation against JNIM militant bases in Koumana, Bondokuy, Zanzaka, Hite, Wakui, Ouakara, Kera, Kovio, and Tia (Bondokui, Mouhoun). One vehicle, 15 motorcycles, weapons, and ammunition were seized. The soldiers also destroyed seven IED. About 20 militants were killed.

go to Konga, where there are also Mossi and Bobo [people]. They only came to us,” a 32-year-old woman said. “They think all the Fulani people are terrorists.”⁴²³

The witnesses said Fulani people had previously been abducted and killed in the area. They said their families had chosen to stay at a time when several Fulani families had already left the surrounding villages out of fear of attacks, because Mossi neighbors had reassured them they would not be harmed. “The attack took us by surprise,” the 32-year-old woman said.”⁴²⁴

A 30-year-old woman said that on the day of the attack, VDPs speaking in Mooré ordered her husband and his brother out of the house and opened fire on them. “I wanted to grab my husband, but a VDP pointed his gun at me.... Another one told him to let me go,” she said. After killing her husband and brother-in-law, the VDPs “went into the house and shot my two boys.” The woman said she fled, returning to Konga in the afternoon, when she found the bodies of her relatives.⁴²⁵

She said:

My husband had been shot three times, in the head, chest, and abdomen. The body of my youngest son was riddled with bullets.... My oldest son was still breathing as I held him in my arms. He started screaming. He asked me for water, and when I gave it to him, he died. He had been shot in the abdomen.⁴²⁶

The 32-year-old woman said:

Our homes were looted, the metal roofs taken away. The VDPs also took our cows, our goats.... Some Mossi men from the village came and told us that they would bury the bodies and that we should leave immediately because the VDPs could come back for us.⁴²⁷

⁴²³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Q.L., January 19, 2025.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Q.U., January 19, 2025.

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Q.L., January 19, 2025.

The woman, who fled Burkina Faso, said she did not know whether her relatives had been buried or not.⁴²⁸

Human Rights Watch reviewed two lists, compiled by the witnesses, with the names of the victims: four boys, ages 9, 11, 12, and 14, and two men, ages 42 and 45.

Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, August 15, 2024

On August 15, 2024, members of the Burkinabè military accompanied by VDPs apprehended and apparently killed five Fulani men from Sanakuy village after first arresting them and accusing them of collaborating with Islamist armed groups. Two residents, including a relative of the victims, said that, the day after the arrest, they recovered the bodies of the five men riddled with bullets, about four kilometers from the village.

The residents said that that one month before the attack, VDPs from the city of Solenzo, 20 kilometers from Sanakuy, had come to the village, threatened community residents with death, and accused the population of collaborating with Islamist armed groups. Sanakuy is in an area where JNIM is known to operate and regularly attacks the security forces.⁴²⁹

The residents said that on the eve of the attack, scores of Burkinabè military personnel and VDPs from Solenzo arrived on the outskirts of the village on dozens of motorbikes, three armored cars, and several pickup trucks. A 54-year-old man said:

We thought they were on a regular patrol, but the next morning they surrounded the village and went straight to the house of a 90-year-old man—the oldest and wisest person in the village. I was there.... [T]hey asked for our identity cards, which we showed them, but they didn't even look.... [T]hey grabbed the older man and four of his family members and took them with them. They said that because our village had never been attacked by the jihadists, that meant we were collaborating with them. They also said that women being fully covered is a sign that we are complicit with the jihadists.

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ ACLED: On 29 January 2024, JNIM militants ambushed a patrol of soldiers and volunteer fighters (VDP) in the area of Sanakui (Solenzo, Banwa). At least ten soldiers and VDPs were killed. JNIM claimed responsibility, said it killed 13 soldiers, and captured 13 AKs and two hunting rifles.

But we've been practicing Wahhabism [a strict and puritanical movement of Islam] for ages. This has nothing to do with jihad.⁴³⁰

A 40-year-old man related to the five people arrested said he received an anonymous call the following day from someone who told him that his relatives had been killed. He said:

We went into the bush, to the place that had been indicated to me, and discovered the bodies with multiple bullet wounds.... They had been gathered and shot probably with a heavy weapon, because we saw very large shell casings all around the bodies.... I lost my two sons, my brothers, and my grandfather. I am devastated.⁴³¹

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by the witnesses with the names of the five victims, all men, ages 25 to 90.

Many residents fled Sanakuy to a neighboring country after the killings.

Operation Green Whirlwind 2 (Opération Tourbillon Vert 2), Boucle du Mouhoun Region, February 27 – April 2, 2025

Human Rights Watch previously documented that in early March 2025, VDPs and soldiers killed at least 130 Fulani civilians, and possibly many more, around the western town of Solenzo, in a series of attacks that were part of a larger military operation in two provinces of the Boucle du Mouhoun region.⁴³²

The killings took place during Operation Green Whirlwind 2 (Opération Tourbillon Vert 2), a weeks-long campaign that began on February 27, 2025, in the Banwa province and continued toward the northern province of Sourou until at least April 2, 2025. The operation resulted in the mass displacement of Fulani civilians from the Banwa province.

⁴³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with P.B., Mali, December 19, 2024.

⁴³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with R.M., Mali, December 19, 2024.

⁴³² "Burkina Faso: Government-Allied Militias Linked to Massacre," Human Rights Watch news release, March 14, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/14/burkina-faso-government-allied-militias-linked-massacre>. "Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres," Human Rights Watch news release, May 12, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/12/burkina-faso-army-directs-ethnic-massacres>.



A Fulani woman fleeing with her children during Operation Green Whirlwind 2, a coordinated offensive carried out between March 8 and 13, 2025, by Burkinabè military forces and allied militias, in the western Boucle du Mouhoun region, near the town of Solenzo. During the operation, government forces killed at least 130 Fulani civilians, and possibly many more, and forced thousands to flee. © 2026 John Holmes for Human Rights Watch

A 44-year-old Fulani herder from Solenzo whose eight family members were killed in the March 8, 2025, attack near the village of Béna explained how he attempted to flee:

Thousands of Fulani families from over 20 villages set out for Mali in search of protection. However, we couldn't reach Mali without crossing villages occupied by the VDPs and the [military].... The VDPs shot at us like animals, while drones were flying over our heads. Many women and children died because they could not run.⁴³³

In May 2025, JNIM carried out retaliatory attacks in the region, in which it killed at least 100 civilians. JNIM sought to justify these killings to Human Rights Watch, saying those killed were combatants. (See box below.)

⁴³³ "Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres," Human Rights Watch news release.

Burkinabè and international media reported that BIRs 7, 10, 18, and 23, under the command of Rapid Intervention Group 2 (GIR 2), as well as the Rapid Intervention Field Artillery Battalion (Bataillon d'Artillerie de Campagne et d'Intervention Rapide, or BACIR), took part in the operation, along with hundreds of VDPs.⁴³⁴

Villagers from Banwa province described military operations across several locations. VDPs would force Fulani people out of their villages by shooting in the air or at civilians and looting their cattle, forcing villagers to flee. In the area between the villages of Béna and Légoro, VDPs and soldiers blocked their flight in an apparent pincer movement, then killed scores of civilians trapped in the bush. Witnesses said most of the victims in Banwa province were children, older people, and women. Military helicopters and drones continually flew over the area, indicating Burkinabè security forces had direct command and control of the operation.

In a March 15, 2025 statement about the events in Solenzo, Burkinabè government spokesperson Pingdwendé Gilbert Ouedraogo said that on March 10, “intrepid” VDPs and security forces repelled a “terrorist” attack and killed about 100 assailants before chasing stragglers through the bush.⁴³⁵ He said the security forces and VDPs “took over the forest to dismantle the terrorist base,” that they found children, older people, and women “whom the terrorists tried to use as human shields, as well as a large herd of stolen cattle and goats,” and that they took these people to safety. State media reported that a reception center in Ouagadougou had provided shelter and support for 318 internally displaced people from Solenzo in the weeks following the attack. Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm this claim.

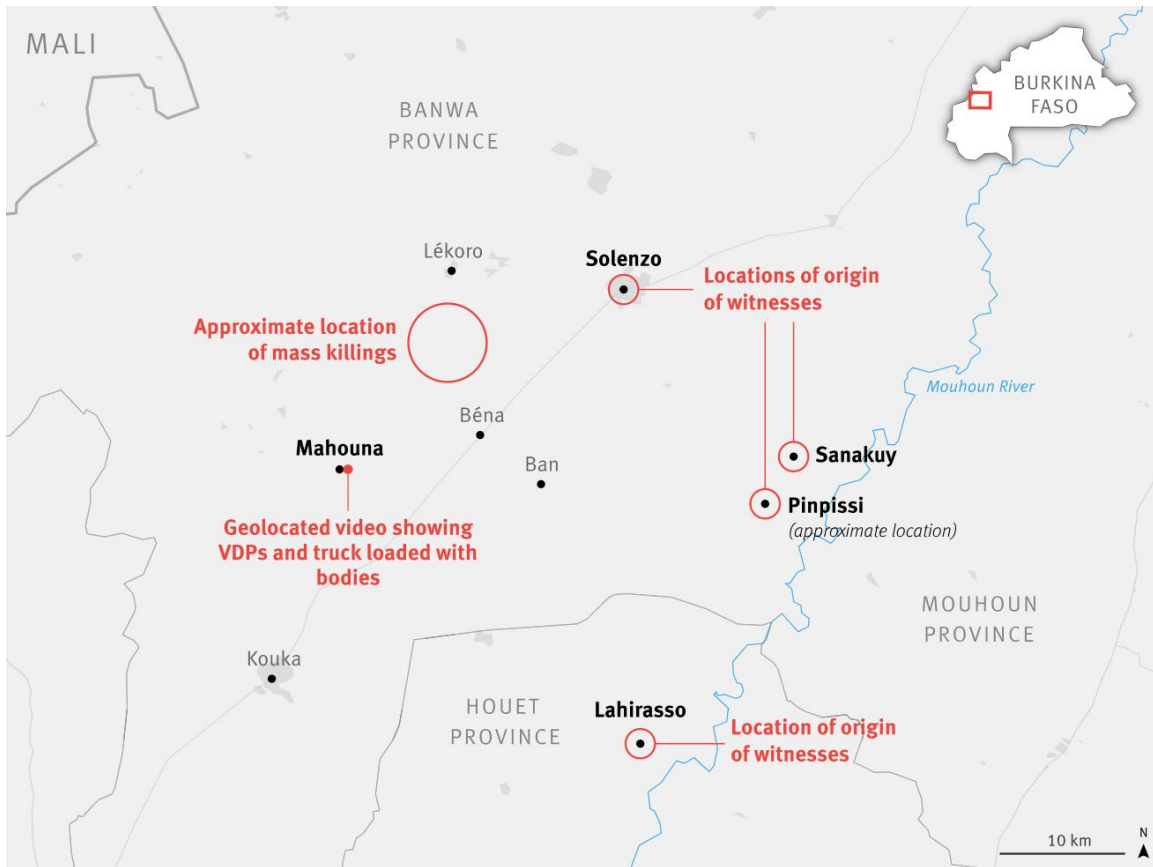
⁴³⁴ For Burkinabè media reports, see FasoTimes's Facebook page, “Opération “Tourbillon Vert 2” : Un succès majeur contre le terrorisme dans la Boucle du Mouhoun...,” April 2, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/FASOACTUALITE/posts/op%C3%A9ration-tourbillon-vert-2-un-succ%C3%A8s-majeur-contre-le-terrorisme-dans-la-boucle/1069065048600435/> (accessed September 5, 2025).

For International media reports, see Agnès Faivre, “«Ils portaient des treillis et des bérets rouges, ils nous ont vus et ont commencé à tirer» : à Solenzo, l'armée burkinabè accusée d'une nouvelle tuerie,” *Libération*, March 20, 2025, https://www.liberation.fr/international/afrique/ils-portaient-des-treillis-et-des-berets-rouges-ils-nous-ont-vus-et-ont-commence-a-tirer-a-solenzo-larmee-burkinabe-accusee-dune-nouvelle-tuerie-20250320_2N2T5GAQLFF2XAANZSS2SZHB74/ (accessed September 5, 2025).

For BACIR, see “Boucle du Mouhoun/Opération «Tourbillon Vert 2» : Un succès majeur contre le terrorisme dans la région,” *Aconews.net*, April 2, 2025, <https://aconews.net/boucle-du-mouhoun-operation-tourbillon-vert-2-un-succes-majeur-contre-le-terrorisme-dans-la-region/> (accessed September 5, 2025).

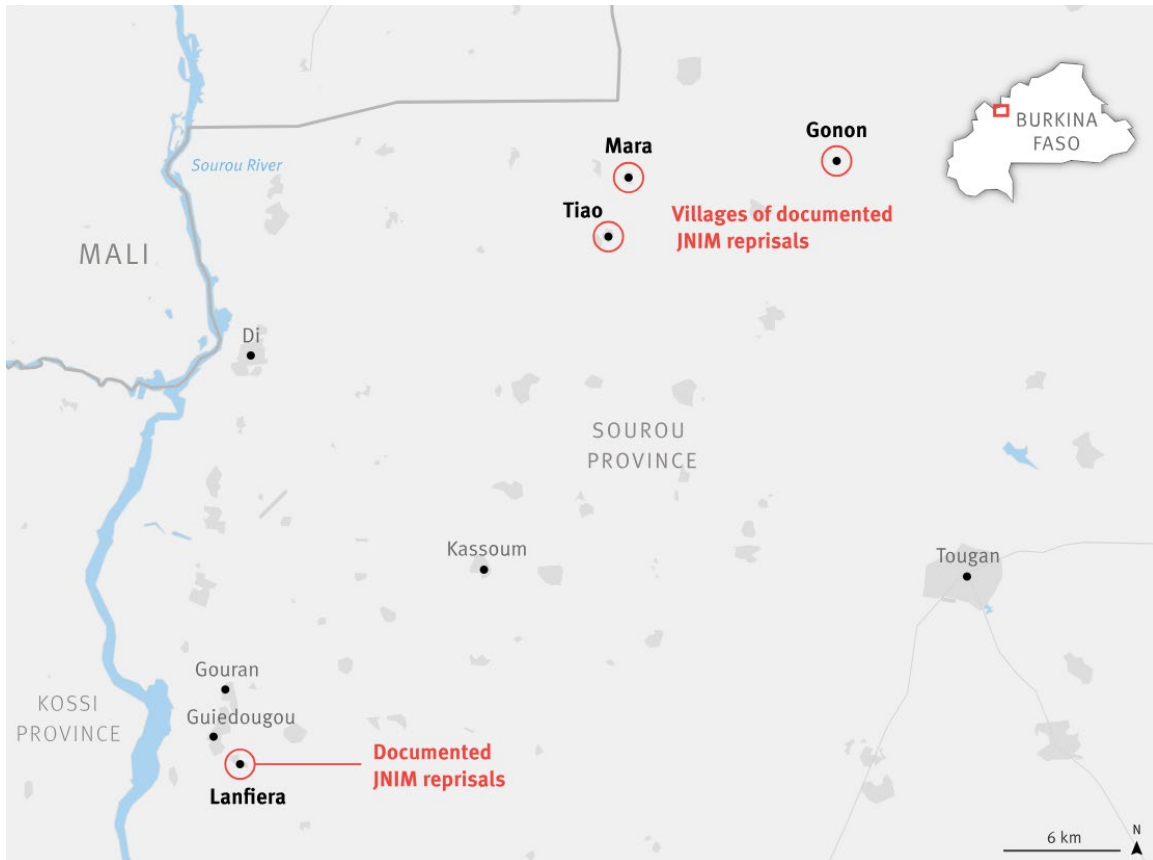
⁴³⁵ SIG Burkina Faso's X account, @sigbf, March 15, 2025, <https://x.com/sigbf/status/1900907066820075567> (accessed September 5, 2025).

In a letter to Human Rights Watch dated April 28, 2025, the Burkinabè justice minister rejected Human Rights Watch’s findings on Operation Green Whirlwind 2. In the letter, which Human Rights Watch received on May 19, 2025, the justice minister accused Human Rights Watch of “an attempt of ethnicization of terrorism victims in Burkina Faso,” and stated that “the fight against terrorism is directed against terrorists and not against a community.”⁴³⁶



Caption: Locator map of Solenzo, Burkina Faso. © 2025 Human Rights Watch

⁴³⁶ Letter from Edasso Rodrigue Bayala, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, to Tirana Hassan, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch, April 28, 2025, transferred to Human Rights Watch by Kassoum Coulibaly, Burkina Faso Ambassador to the United States, on May 19, 2025, in French, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/03/Reponse%20du%20gouvernement%20Burkinabe%20-%202019%20mai%202025.pdf.



Caption: Locator map of Sourou, Burkina Faso. © 2025 Human Rights Watch

Deadly JNIM Reprisals for Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in Gonon, Lanfièra, Mara, and Tiao

In a March 13, 2025, video, Ousmane Dicko, brother of Jafar Dicko, head of JNIM in Burkina Faso, threatened to avenge the killings of civilians around Solenzo.⁴³⁷

In a previous report, Human Rights Watch documented that between April 1 and April 5, 2025, JNIM attacked at least four villages in the Sourou province—Gonon, Lanfièra, Mara, and Tiao—and killed at least 100 civilian men whom JNIM accused of having collaborated with the Burkinabè military, including by indicating a willingness to join the VDPs.⁴³⁸ Human Rights Watch spoke to witnesses to the attacks in the four villages who confirmed

⁴³⁷ Wassim Nasr's X account, @SimNasr, March 14, 2025, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1900553561513017565> (accessed September 5, 2025).

⁴³⁸ "Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres," Human Rights Watch news release.

those killed were civilians and reviewed lists compiled by residents and relatives with the names of those killed.

The attacks also led to the displacement of the local population.

International media and social media reported the death toll of the JNIM attacks in Sourou province in early April 2025 could be as high as 200.⁴³⁹

In a May 31, 2025 reply to Human Rights Watch, JNIM’s Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso (Comité chariatique du GSIM au Burkina Faso) sought to justify the attack, saying that, “it was incumbent upon us to measure them with the same measure they used to measure the weak, to stop them in their tracks, and to make them taste the consequences of their crimes, so that they may desist.”⁴⁴⁰ JNIM claimed it killed only men because of “their involvement in assisting Traoré’s forces and their participation in their crimes in the region.”⁴⁴¹

The laws of war largely prohibit reprisals—normally unlawful attacks taken in response to unlawful actions by opposing forces—against civilians.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ For international media, see “Burkina Faso: des attaques meurtrières menées contre trois villages de la province de Sourou,” *RFI*, April 5, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20250405-burkina-faso-des-attaques-meurtri%C3%A8res-men%C3%A9es-contre-trois-villages-de-la-province-de-sourou> (accessed July 28, 2025).

For social media publications, see MALI Infos “ANW KO MALI”’s Facebook page, “FASO: ATTAQUE ET MASSACRE TERRORISTE...,” April 7, 2025, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1248587083937500&set=a.516247293838153> (accessed July 29, 2025).

⁴⁴⁰ Letter from JNIM’s Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso to Human Rights Watch, May 31, 2025. On file with Human Rights Watch.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴² International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, vol. I: Rules (Cambridge University Press, 2005), rule 145.



A woman begging JNIM fighters not to take away her husband in Tiao village, Boucle du Mouhoun region, Burkina Faso, on April 5, 2025. That day, JNIM fighters killed up to 70 men in Tiao in apparent retaliation against residents whom the JNIM accused of collaborating with the army. © 2026 John Holmes for Human Rights Watch

6th Military Region (Center-East and East Administrative Regions)

Petit Zabré, Center-East Region, February 2023

Around February 5, 2023, VDPs entered a Fulani settlement known as Petit Zabré, about six kilometers southwest of Zabré town, and abducted nine men, whom they likely later killed. Villagers found the bodies of the men five days later about five kilometers from Petit Zabré. Two witnesses to the attack said they identified the assailants as VDPs because they wore military uniforms with no epaulettes as well as civilian clothes.

Witnesses said that two weeks prior to the attack, Islamist fighters had come to the settlement and threatened people with death if they collaborated with the military and VDPs. Petit Zabré is in an area where JNIM is known to operate.

On the day of the attack, “the VDPs came with their motorbikes and started shooting, so everybody fled,” a 60-year-old man said. “When we returned the following day, we realized

that nine of us were missing, so we went to the Zabré village chief, who promised to call the VDPs to seek an explanation, but they [VDPs] said they didn't arrest anyone."⁴⁴³

"[Five days later,] our children, who had been in the fields, came back screaming and crying that they found some dead bodies in the bush," a 45-year-old man said. "So, we went there. We discovered the bodies of our friends, their hands bound behind their backs.... We could barely identify them, because of the advanced state of decomposition."⁴⁴⁴

Both witnesses said they buried their friends where they were found, in a shallow grave they covered with sand. They provided a list they had compiled with the names of the nine victims, all men, ages 20 to 70.

"The jihadists are the problem!" the 45-year-old man said. "If they hadn't come to our hamlet, we wouldn't have become a target."⁴⁴⁵

Békouré, Center-East Region, February 2023

On February 9, 2023, VDPs summarily killed three Fulani men at the market in Békouré, in apparent retaliation for a JNIM attack against VDPs in the village the previous day.

On February 8, 2023, JNIM fighters attacked VDPs in Békouré, killing at least three of them, as well as three civilians.⁴⁴⁶ Three witnesses said the following day, VDPs began looking for Fulani people, accusing them of collaborating with JNIM, and carrying out retaliatory attacks.

A 54-year-old man said:

Around 10 a.m., about 10 VDPs on motorbikes surrounded us. Then they went to three men and told them that they [the three men] were providing information to the jihadists about their [VDP] positions. They ordered the

⁴⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with C.J., Ghana, March 14, 2025.

⁴⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with N.B., Ghana, March 14, 2025.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Infowakat.net's Facebook page, "Centre-Est : 06 personnes dont 03 VDP tuées à Bekoure...", February 8, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/infowakat.net/posts/5716437525071550/> (accessed July 29, 2025). See also ACLED: On February 8, 2023, presumed JNIM militants attacked a position of volunteer fighters in the village of Békouré (Bittou, Boulgou). Three VDPs and three civilians were killed.

men to sit down and tried to handcuff them, but the men refused. The VDPs wanted to take them away, but the men refused. The men asked the VDPs to provide evidence for their assertions. Altercations followed.... And then a VDP opened fire ... and shot the three men point-blank in the middle of the market. After the gunshots, I fled. Everybody fled the market.⁴⁴⁷

Witnesses said that after the killing, all Fulani residents fled the village and returned three days later. They said the bodies of the three men were buried by local Bissa people. They provided the names of the three victims, ages 27, 30, and 35.

Then, the evening of February 12, 2023, two masked gunmen, presumably VDPs, chased a 57-year-old Fulani man who was riding his bicycle on the outskirts of Békouré.

The man said:

They called me by my nickname. When I saw them, I got worried and cycled fast to reach the village. They stopped me and asked: “Why did you run away? Do you have something to hide about?” I replied, “No, but you are hooded and armed, and there was no one around us, and you could murder me and lie about me. But here at least there are people, so even if you kill me, people will testify that I was just riding my bike.” They said to me, “If the Fulani are afraid of dying, the Fulani must stay away from the terrorists, otherwise they will die.”⁴⁴⁸

The same night, VDPs abducted two other Fulani men from their homes. The people who spoke to Human Rights Watch were not present at the time of the abductions but said they spoke to the wives of the two men, who identified the kidnappers as local VDPs from Békouré, speaking Bissa. In the following days, witnesses found the bodies of the two men with multiple bullet wounds and their hands tied behind their backs on the road linking Békouré to Bitou, a city 13 kilometers south of Békouré. Witnesses provided the names of the two victims, ages 30 and 40.

⁴⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with M.C., Ghana, March 10, 2025.

⁴⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with E.C., Ghana, March 10, 2025.

On February 14, 2023, a well-known Fulani trader, 60, was killed as he was returning to Békouré from Bitou market. People who found the body said VDPs killed the man to steal his money. “Traders who had transactions with him at the market told me that he had pocketed up to 10 million CFA francs [US\$18,000],” the 57-year-old man said. “But when he found his body, his pockets were empty and there was no sign of the money.”⁴⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm the identity of the perpetrators. Residents found the body two kilometers from Békouré, on the road to Bitou, with two bullet wounds to the chest and one to the head. “We took his body and buried him at the cemetery in Békouré,” a 45-year-old man said.⁴⁵⁰

Witnesses said that after the killing of the trader, “there was some calm,” and that members of the local Bissa population complained to the VDPs about their behavior.⁴⁵¹ However, on March 8, 2023, JNIM fighters attacked VDPs again near Békouré and killed several of them. This led to a retaliatory operation by VDPs in Békouré the same day, and the alleged killing of at least 10 Fulani men. Human Rights Watch spoke to two people who said they fled Békouré after the VDPs entered the village. “They were shooting and going door to door to all Fulani homes,” the 54-year-old man said. “Bissa people hid some women and children. I ran away.”⁴⁵²

Sources said they later learned from their Bissa neighbors that the VDPs had killed 10 Fulani men who were unable to flee during the attack. Witnesses said members of the Bissa community recovered the bodies and buried them in the village cemetery. Witnesses provided a list with the names of the 10 victims, ages 30 to 75.

Witnesses said that, after the March 8, 2023 attack, all Fulani residents fled Békouré. Some went to the city of Tenkodogo, 50 kilometers north, where they rejoined their family members. The 45-year-old man said:

When we arrived on the outskirts of the town of Tenkodogo, people called the police saying that “the terrorists have come.” The police arrived....

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with M.S., Ghana, March 10, 2025.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with M.C., Ghana, March 10, 2025.

There were about 10 of us, women and children too. The police took us to the courtyard of their offices, they asked us for our identity documents. We presented them and explained what had pushed us to leave our homes—that the VDPs had killed our relatives in Békouré.... After listening to us, the police ... took us back where they ... had taken [first detained] us. Afterwards, people from the mayor's office came to register us as internally displaced people.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with M.S., March 10, 2025.

IV. JNIM Abuses

The Al-Qaeda-linked Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) has carried out widespread abuses since it began its insurgency in Burkina Faso in 2017, including unlawful killings of civilians and summary executions, the destruction and looting of civilian property, the denial of humanitarian assistance to civilians in dozens of towns and villages under siege, and unlawful forced displacement.⁴⁵⁴

Human Rights Watch documented 24 JNIM attacks in six administrative regions (Boucle du Mouhoun, Center-North, East, Hauts-Bassins, North, and Sahel) between January 2023 and August 2025, that resulted in the killings of at least 582 civilians, including 15 children.

Unlawful Killings, Summary Executions

JNIM forces committed widespread killings of civilians, shooting them in their homes or in the streets or in places where they sought refuge, including camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), at times execution-style. The vast majority of the victims appear to have been men, but women and children have also been executed. JNIM fighters shot at civilians while attacking villages and towns and while entering neighborhoods, both on foot and from motorbikes and other vehicles. They targeted those hiding or fleeing and summarily executed civilians who could not flee during attacks.

JNIM also appears to have targeted prominent community members, including village chiefs, for their presumed collaboration with local authorities or the military and VDPs.

Destruction and Looting of Civilian Property

JNIM forces have looted and deliberately destroyed homes, shops, food supplies, cattle, and other civilian property. Witnesses to attacks said JNIM fighters deliberately set fire to houses and shops or went door-to-door to loot them.

⁴⁵⁴ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 18, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/18/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-terrorize-civilians>.

Between December 2022 and January 2023, JNIM forces made at least three incursions into the village of Zincko, Center-North region, looting, shooting in the air, and demanding that villagers tell them where they could find government security forces. “They [JNIM fighters] took what they wanted, ... many rice bags and cooking oil drums, ... motorbikes, ... phones,” said a 27-year-old woman who witnessed the first attack on the Zincko market. “[They also] burned down shops.”⁴⁵⁵

Some people who returned home after JNIM attacked their towns or villages found that their valuables, furniture, and other property were gone.

Cattle rustling has been a hallmark as well as a driver of the conflict in Burkina Faso.⁴⁵⁶ When JNIM was created in 2017, it expanded by cooperating with—and later co-opting—bandits and cattle rustlers. *Zakat*, or Islamic tax, in the form of cattle paid to JNIM, has become a key component of the group’s financial strategy.⁴⁵⁷

Unlawful Forced Displacement

JNIM has forcibly displaced civilians in violation of the laws of war, including as a means of punishment. JNIM forces have frequently issued ultimatums to residents of villages and towns to leave the area within a fixed deadline, or face death or other unlawful consequences.

The laws of war prohibit parties to a non-international armed conflict from ordering the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or in part, unless required for the security of the civilians affected or for imperative military reasons.⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁵ “Burkina Faso: Upsurge in Atrocities by Islamist Armed Groups,” Human Rights Watch news release, June 15, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/15/burkina-faso-upturge-atrocities-islamist-armed-groups>.

⁴⁵⁶ Global Initiative, “Cattle rustling and insecurity – In the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana,” July 2025, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/cattle-rustling-and-insecurity-in-the-triborder-area-between-burkina-faso-cte-divoire-and-ghana/> (accessed September 22, 2025).

⁴⁵⁷ James Courtright, “How stolen cattle links Ghana to the jihadist conflict in the Sahel,” *The New Humanitarian*, July 16, 2025, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2025/07/16/stolen-cattle-ghana-burkina-faso-jihadist-jnim-conflict-sahel> (accessed September 22, 2025). James Courtright and Kars de Bruijne, Clingendael, “Cattle Wahala – How Ghana, Burkina Faso and Togo can jointly address the political economy of cattle rustling and smuggling in the tri-border region,” July 8, 2025, <https://www.clingendael.org/publication/cattle-wahala>, July 8, 2025 (accessed September 22, 2025).

⁴⁵⁸ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, vol. I: Rules (Cambridge University Press, 2005), rule 129(b).

JNIM has attacked communities not abiding to its ultimatums by shooting at civilians and burning and looting homes and livestock.

Sieges

JNIM has besieged localities across the country, planting explosives and ambushing vehicles on the roads leading to them, cutting residents off from food, fuel, basic services, and humanitarian aid, and prevented residents from farming and grazing cattle.⁴⁵⁹

The laws of war do not prohibit sieges of an opposing side's military forces. However, starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare is prohibited and is a war crime. Humanitarian assistance intended for civilians needs to be facilitated and civilians need to retain their right to freedom of movement.

The Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), a nongovernmental project that aims to conduct independent humanitarian analysis, estimated that at least 40 towns and villages, primarily in the Center-North, East, North, and Sahel regions of Burkina Faso, were under siege as of late 2024, affecting up to two million people.⁴⁶⁰

JNIM has imposed sieges on localities by encircling them, strictly controlling all access roads, often through checkpoints. The armed group has destroyed bridges, electric lines, water, and communications infrastructure, and used improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and threats of violence against civilians and humanitarian personnel to prevent the free movement of civilians and goods.⁴⁶¹

According to Amnesty International, which has extensively researched JNIM's siege tactics, JNIM has used sieges "to exert pressure on the communities and the government to accede to their demands or to force them to leave these areas," in a strategy that "may aim to achieve

⁴⁵⁹ Amnesty International, "Death was slowly creeping on us': Living under siege in Burkina Faso," Index Number: AFR 60/7209/2023, November 2, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr60/7209/2023/en/> (accessed March 16, 2026).

⁴⁶⁰ acaps, "Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Needs in Blockaded Areas," May 28, 2025, https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20250528_ACAPS_Burkina_Faso_Humanitarian_needs_in_blockaded_areas.pdf (accessed September 19, 2025).

⁴⁶¹ "Burkina Faso: Upsurge in Atrocities by Islamist Armed Groups," Human Rights Watch news release.

military objectives in some of these places,” but that has disproportionately affected the population.⁴⁶²

Djibo town, in the Sahel administrative region, is among the localities that have suffered the worst siege, causing civilians to starve and die of hunger.⁴⁶³

A woman from Borguendé, a village about eight kilometers from Djibo, said she was forced to leave her home and flee to Djibo in 2021 following an attack by suspected JNIM fighters. She said:

I was pregnant. I took my four children and walked to Djibo. Three days later I gave birth to twins.... In Djibo it has been very tough, especially between late 2022 and early 2023, we had nothing to eat, the city was totally blocked, no one could go out.... Every day my children were crying because they were hungry.... I was forced to beg for food.⁴⁶⁴

Circumstances of the Attacks

As exemplified in the attacks documented below, JNIM appears to have targeted civilians across Burkina Faso for various reasons.

First, JNIM has targeted civilians from all the major ethnic groups in Burkina Faso, including the Fulani, for their perceived collaboration with or support of the Burkinabè authorities, security forces and VDPs. JNIM has frequently warned civilians not to divulge JNIM forces’ whereabouts to state security services. In a November 2022 video published on social media shortly after President Traoré launched a VDP recruitment campaign, JNIM’s deputy leader in Burkina Faso, Ousmane Dicko, threatened communities whose members joined the VDPs.⁴⁶⁵ JNIM forces

⁴⁶² Amnesty International, “‘Death was slowly creeping on us’: Living under siege in Burkina Faso.”

⁴⁶³ “Burkina Faso: Upsurge in Atrocities by Islamist Armed Groups,” Human Rights Watch news release.

⁴⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with A.S., May 29, 2023.

⁴⁶⁵ AMANAR_ADVISOR’s X account, @amanar_advisor, November 28, 2022, https://x.com/amanar_advisor/status/1597269684646469632. Morgane le Cam, “Burkina Faso’s surge in violence highlights limits of junta’s counterterrorism strategy,” *Le Monde*, April 19, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/04/19/burkina-faso-s-surge-in-violence-highlights-limits-of-junta-s-counterterrorism-strategy_6023513_124.html, (accessed July 29, 2025).

have also attacked civilians whom they perceived as collaborators because they helped government forces build defensive trenches around their villages or towns.⁴⁶⁶

Second, JNIM forces have attacked civilians to punish them for not complying with its orders and instructions, including for not respecting Sharia (Islamic law), failing to pay zakat, refusing to join their ranks or to leave an area, and for not obeying orders not to farm land in certain areas.⁴⁶⁷

Third, JNIM has attacked civilians to show its continuing influence in areas where the government regained or claimed to have regained authority.⁴⁶⁸

Often a combination of these three factors appears to have contributed to the targeting of civilians.

Attributing incidents to JNIM is in some cases straightforward because JNIM has frequently claimed responsibility for its attacks, ostensibly against security forces and VDPs. However, Human Rights Watch found that often the people JNIM killed in its attacks were not VDPs as it claimed, but civilians.⁴⁶⁹ And sometimes JNIM acknowledged it had attacked civilians, but sought to justify it. In cases of attacks against civilians in which JNIM did not claim responsibility, witnesses identified the assailants as JNIM fighters because of their methods of attack, choice of targets, clothing, including turbans, as well as the locations of attacks. They cited statements by the attackers, including demands for residents to leave the area. Many witnesses also said that targeted communities had previously received warnings from JNIM.

Witnesses to JNIM attacks in Burkina Faso referred to JNIM fighters as “jihadists,” “assailants,” “terrorists,” “the men of the bush,” as well as “Al-Qaeda fighters.”

⁴⁶⁶ “Burkina Faso: Massacre Shows Need to Protect Civilians,” Human Rights Watch press release, October 29, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/10/29/burkina-faso-massacre-shows-need-protect-civilians>.

⁴⁶⁷ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Massacre Civilians,” Human Right Watch news release, September 15, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/15/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-massacre-civilians>.

⁴⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch has also previously documented that JNIM targeted students, teachers, and schools because it opposes Western education, and insists that children should study only Arabic and the Quran, or not study at all. This report does not cover such attacks, but for more, see “Burkina Faso: Armed Islamists Attack Education,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 26, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/26/burkina-faso-armed-islamists-attack-education>; GCPEA, “Burkina Faso - Education Under Attack 2024,” [eua_2024_burkinafaso.pdf](https://www.gcpca.org/eua_2024_burkinafaso.pdf) (accessed November 27, 2025).

⁴⁶⁹ “Burkina Faso: Massacre Shows Need to Protect Civilians,” Human Rights Watch press release. “Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres,” Human Rights Watch news release, May 12, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/05/12/burkina-faso-army-directs-ethnic-massacres>.

Boucle du Mouhoun Region

Doumbala, January 5, 2024

On January 5, 2024, at about 6 p.m., about 60 JNIM fighters riding motorbikes attacked the town of Doumbala, killing a man and looting homes and shops. The armed group forced all the town's residents to leave Doumbala under threat of death. Several witnesses said that JNIM accused the residents of the town, which had been under JNIM control since at least 2021, of joining and supporting the VDPs.

Describing life under JNIM rule, a 35-year-old woman said: "They [JNIM fighters] were all around, they would frequently come to the town to preach and buy goods. They had imposed Sharia."⁴⁷⁰

A 70-year-old Bobo woman said JNIM fighters had become so familiar with the residents, that some residents had a convivial relationship with the fighters.⁴⁷¹ "I used to make jokes with them when they came to preach under the mango tree in front of our home," she said. "The day of the attack, I also joked with them. I told them I wasn't afraid of their threats, but one of them replied: 'No joking today, today it's just about Islam. You need to leave immediately if you want to save your life.'"⁴⁷²

The woman's son said that two fighters with headscarves and Kalashnikov-style assault rifles entered his home. "One said: 'Here's the VDP we were looking for,' and loaded his gun ... to shoot me," he said. "I jumped into a pile of garbage. My very young children ages 3, 7, and 12 jumped on me. The jihadist wanted to shoot me, but my mother also jumped in front of the rifle ... and finally I was able to run away."⁴⁷³

The 35-year-old woman said the fighters went door-to-door to force people out. She said one of them went outside her door and, speaking Fulfulde and Bambara, ordered her to leave. "I was alone with the children [and] asked him where we were supposed to go," she said. "He replied

⁴⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with S.S., Mali, December 17, 2024.

⁴⁷¹ The "joking relationship" ("parenté à plaisanterie" ou "cousinage à plaisanterie" in French) is a relationship between two people that involves a ritualized banter of teasing or mocking. It is a peculiar aspect of the Burkinabè social relations.

⁴⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with D.W., Mali, December 17, 2024.

⁴⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with L.L., Mali, December 17, 2024.

that if I valued my life and that of my children, I must obey immediately. So, I took my children and went out.”⁴⁷⁴

A shop owner, 45, who fled to the forest nearby when the attack began, returned to Doumbala the following day. He said:

All shops at the market had been looted, mine too.... They also looted many, if not all, homes.... I found the body of my uncle two kilometers away from the village. The jihadists had tied his hands behind his back using rubber bands.... [T]he body had multiple bullet wounds, especially in the chest, the bullets tore off part of his ribs.... Afterwards we dug a hole on the spot and buried him before fleeing.⁴⁷⁵

Diamahoun, July 16, 2024

On July 16, 2024, JNIM fighters stormed Diamahoun village and ordered all villagers to leave immediately, threatening to kill them. Several witnesses said that JNIM accused the local population of hosting displaced people from Kessekuy, a village nine kilometers away that JNIM forces had emptied out about a week earlier after accusing the population there of joining the VDPs.

A 30-year-old man said JNIM fighters came around 9 a.m. and split into two groups. Some went door to door ordering people to leave, and others stationed themselves at the exit of the village to ensure that people left with nothing. He said:

If they found you with any luggage or bags, they would take them away from you.... They came to my door ... [and] told me in Dioula to leave. I asked why.... They replied that we had hosted displaced people from Kessekuy, whom they had driven out, and that if I wanted to live, I had to leave the village immediately.... I took my family, three cows, and three sheep, but the jihadists took them [the animals] away ... along with our kitchen utensils, a bag of millet, a bag of rice. They took everything.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with S.S., Mali, December 17, 2024.

⁴⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with F.V., Mali, December 17, 2024.

⁴⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with C.N., Mali, December 18, 2024.

An ethnic Samo man said:

I took a wheelbarrow for my wife and children, and I took my motorbike with some luggage. When I arrived at the exit of the village ... two jihadists stopped me. They took off my boubou and blindfolded me with it. They said to me in Dioula: “Why did you flee with the motorbike?” They took away my motorbike and my family’s wheelbarrow. They told my family to continue on foot and that I would stay.... [O]ne of the jihadists wanted to kill me, but the other said that I should be spared.... Eventually, they let me go.⁴⁷⁷

The man said he fled to Mali without taking anything with him.

North Region

Zomkalga, Séguénéga District, April 22, 2024

On April 22, 2024, JNIM fighters attacked a group of about 2,000 civilians in Zomkalga village, killing at least 30 of them and injuring 25 others. A number of witnesses said that the civilians were returning to Zomkalga and Téonsgo villages, about eight kilometers apart, after JNIM had forced them to leave two years earlier. The villages are in Séguénéga district area where JNIM has carried out multiple attacks against civilians as well as government security forces.

Witnesses said that an influential *marabout*, or Muslim holy man, known as Aboubacar Traoré, persuaded displaced villagers to return to Zomkalga and Téonsgo by reassuring them that they would be protected from attacks if they performed the mystic rituals he suggested.

“We were driven by the sorrow of living as displaced people. We wanted to return at all costs, retake our fields, livestock, and dignity that we lost for nearly two years,” a 32-year-old man said. “We were waiting for a savior, and the services provided by the marabout were welcome.”⁴⁷⁸ “We gathered in Sima village, near Zomkalga, to meet the marabout” said a 31-

⁴⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with S.N., Mali, December 18, 2024.

⁴⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with G.J., March 14, 2025.

year-old man. “We waited until he performed his sacrifices before heading back to Zomkalga.”⁴⁷⁹

Witnesses said that local authorities and government security forces had opposed the return and refused to accompany the group back to their respective villages. “When we headed to Zomkalga, we were just a crowd of civilians,” a 33-year-old man said. “No soldier or VDP was with us.”⁴⁸⁰

“When we arrived in Zomkalga, we were ambushed by the terrorists who were hiding in our abandoned homes and under the trees,” the 32-year-old man said. “They started firing and people ran away.” He survived the attack by hiding in the grass.⁴⁸¹

“I saw about 100 fighters. They were in civilian clothes, and some wore headscarves,” a 28-year-old man said. “I hid and I could hear them saying in Fulfulde, ‘Did you think the marabout could shield you from the bullets? You will regret it!’”⁴⁸²

A 27-year-old man said, “At the end of the attack, I counted at least 30 bodies on the ground.”⁴⁸³

Residents believed the attack was intended to punish civilians for returning to their villages after JNIM had forcibly displaced them two years earlier after accusing them of collaborating with the security forces and VDPs. “When they ordered us to leave, they threatened us with death, they said that we should not return to what they called their land,” the 31-year-old man said.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.U., March 13, 2025.

⁴⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.G., March 12, 2025.

⁴⁸¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with G.J., March 14, 2025.

⁴⁸² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with Y.T., March 12, 2025.

⁴⁸³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with J.P., March 11, 2025.

⁴⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.U., March 13, 2025.



JNIM fighters shooting at civilians in Zomkalga village, North region, Burkina Faso, on April 22, 2024. That day, JNIM fighters attacked a group of about 2,000 civilians in Zomkalga village, killing at least 30 of them and injuring 25 others. The civilians were returning to Zomkalga after JNIM had forced them to leave two years earlier. © 2026 John Holmes for Human Rights Watch

Residents buried the bodies of those killed in Zomkalga on April 22 and 23, 2024. “Some bodies were taken to Séguénéga town, others to Téonsgo,” the 33-year-old man said. “In Zomkalga, we put some bodies in a mass grave and others in individual graves.”⁴⁸⁵

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by survivors with the names of 30 victims, all adult men.

Local media reported that on April 23, 2024, security forces arrested Aboubacar Traoré at his home in Sissamba village. Traoré’s family members have not heard from him since.⁴⁸⁶

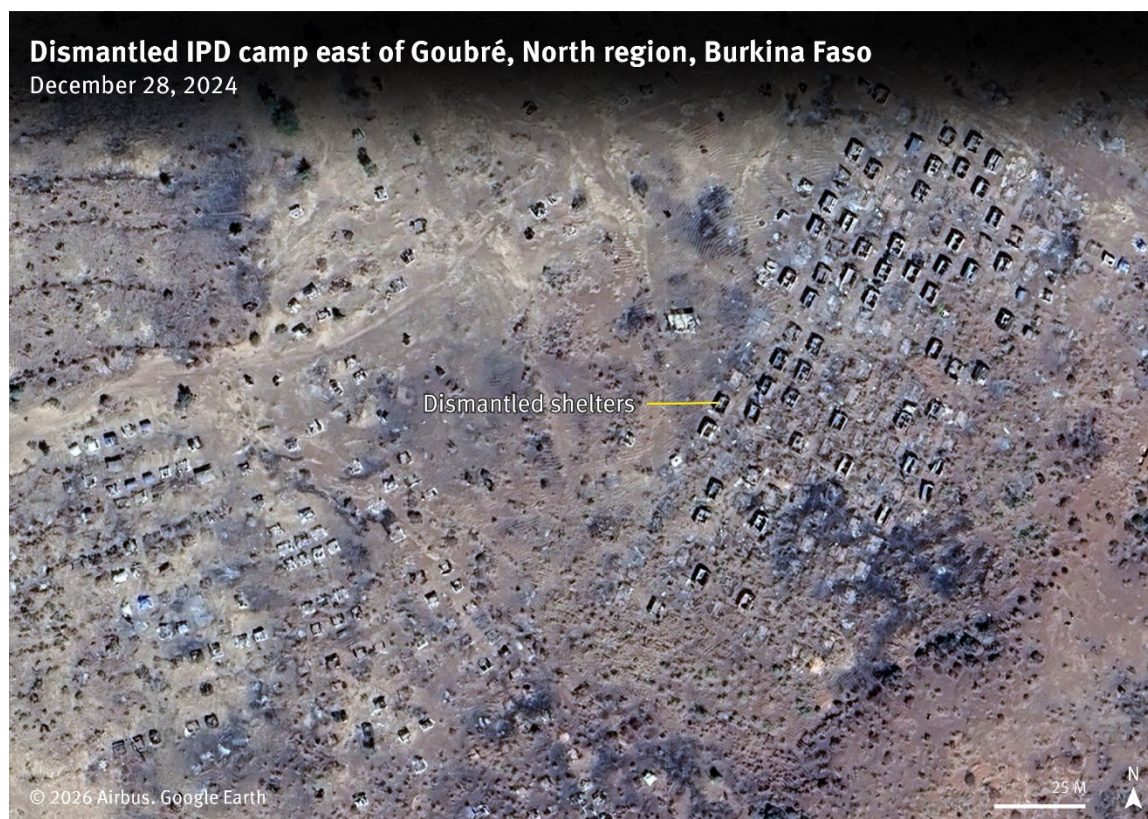
⁴⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.G., March 12, 2025.

⁴⁸⁶ Marcelin Konvolbo, “Cheick Aboubacar Traoré de Sissamba : Près de 8 mois après son arrestation, ses proches implorent le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré de le libérer,” *Le Curieux d’Afrique*, January 7, 2025, <https://curieuxdafrique.net/cheick-aboubacar-traore-de-sissamba-pres-de-8-mois-apres-son-arrestation-ses-proches-implorent-le-capitaine-ibrahim-traore-de-le-liberer/> (accessed July 31, 2025).

Goubré, May 22, 2024

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on May 22, 2024, several hundred JNIM fighters attacked a VDP base and a displaced persons' camp in Goubré, killing at least 80 people, including 72 civilians, 6 of them children, 8 VDPs, and injuring at least 40 others.⁴⁸⁷ This was one of the deadliest attacks on civilians by JNIM in 2024.

On May 24, 2024, JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack against the VDP base in Goubré, saying it killed “many” VDPs.⁴⁸⁸ The camp, which housed over 3,500 displaced people at the time, has since been shut down.⁴⁸⁹



Satellite imagery from December 28, 2024, shows the dismantled IDP camp located east of Goubré, North Region, Burkina Faso. Image © 2026 Airbus. Google Earth. Graphic © 2026 Human Rights Watch

⁴⁸⁷ OCHA, “Statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim in Burkina Faso on the recent violence in Séguénéga, Nord region,” Ouagadougou, May 27, 2024, <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/statement-humanitarian-coordinator-ad-interim-burkina-faso-recent-violence-seguenega-nord-region> (accessed September 6, 2025).

⁴⁸⁸ *Sahel News*, <https://sahelnews.io/flgA1/neLezEpU78.jpg> (accessed July 29, 2025).

⁴⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch analyzed satellite imagery from December 28, 2024, showing the IDP camp completely dismantled.

Witnesses said they believed JNIM carried out the attack in retaliation against villagers who refused to join JNIM ranks.

Séguénéga, March 15, 2025

On March 15, 2025, at least 200 JNIM fighters assaulted a military base in the town of Séguénéga, killing 11 soldiers and VDPs and wounding 5. Indiscriminate shooting by JNIM fighters resulted in deaths of at least 14 civilian men and injuries to 15 others. Government security forces appeared to flee the attackers rather than fight back.

In statements released on March 18 and 19, JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack saying its fighters took control of the military base in Séguénéga, killed five soldiers, and seized weapons and other military equipment.⁴⁹⁰ No mention was made of civilian casualties.

On March 17, 2025, the national television RTB reported that on March 15, 2025, at 4:20 p.m., at least 10 airstrikes hit “a column of criminals fleeing” after an attack in Séguénéga.⁴⁹¹ Human Rights Watch was not able to confirm the location or time of the strikes shown on the RTB report though at least one appeared to be in a built-up area.

Witnesses to the JNIM attack said that government military forces did not respond to the attack, and either fled or hid.

“There was no confrontation between the military and the jihadists,” a Mossi trader said. “Military were not even at the post. Some were drinking in the nearby bars. Soldiers fled and got rid of their uniforms, asking civilians to lend them their clothes.”⁴⁹² “I saw my neighbor give three of her husband’s clothes to soldiers who were running,” a Mossi woman said.⁴⁹³ “I saw the assailants chasing a soldier who was climbing a wall to take shelter,”⁴⁹⁴ said a Samo woman. “Our soldiers fled, they took cover,” a Mossi farmer said. “They took refuge in

⁴⁹⁰ TRACTerrorism’s X account, @TracTerrorism, March 20, 2025, <https://x.com/TracTerrorism/status/1902689958810316896> (accessed February 12, 2026). Eugene Djoko’s X account, @EugeneDjoko, March 19, 2025, <https://x.com/EugeneDjoko/status/1902341473191748032> (accessed February 12, 2026).

⁴⁹¹ “RTB – Edition spéciale sur les nouvelles du Front,” YouTube live, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, March 17, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/live/3TT4zuOdQaU> (accessed January 27, 2026).

⁴⁹² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.R., April 12, 2025.

⁴⁹³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with G.T., April 12, 2025.

⁴⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with W.T., April 12, 2025.

people’s yards to ask for civilian clothes and suddenly we no longer knew who was a civilian and who was a soldier.”⁴⁹⁵

Local sources said that the attack came as apparent retaliation following calls by junta supporters on social media to deploy a BIR in Séguénéga.⁴⁹⁶ They said that since at least late 2021, JNIM had taken control of several localities around Séguénéga, including the strategic town of Ouindigui, 25 kilometers north, where several VDP units were based. A local source from the North region said that Ouindigui fell and the prominent VDP leader based there, Ganame Soumaila, known as Ladjji Yoro, was killed, all the VDPs based there were redeployed to You, about 25 kilometers west of Ouindigui. This left Séguénéga more vulnerable to attacks.⁴⁹⁷

“The Wayiyans [pro-junta supporters] had asked to deploy a BIR in Séguénéga, especially to deal with the security deficit due to the departure of the VDPs from Ouindigui,” said a teacher from Séguénéga.⁴⁹⁸

The Mossi farmer who witnessed the attack said, “I heard [JNIM fighters] shouting ‘Allah Akbar’ [God is Great] and then they said: ‘People of Séguénéga, get out, your BIR that you have been asking for is here.’”⁴⁹⁹

Witnesses said that JNIM fighters came on motorbikes at about 3 p.m. Said one:

They came from three sides, from Sima, Ouahigouya, and Zomkalga. Some headed straight to the military camp while others surrounded the town to prevent people from entering or leaving.... Some wore military uniforms, others civilian clothes. They had turbans on their heads, and some had facemasks.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with A.L., April 12, 2025.

⁴⁹⁶ Elkebir Alertes’s Facebook page, “Suggestions...,” March 13, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbidooxb1TnNpTUeoF5t2CYAZWwinRgnAD7WL3BYH7SBmsM7312pth4z0TC4ohoqBKZ7l&id=100080674125896 (accessed September 4, 2025).

⁴⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interviews with B.F., April 11 and 12, 2025.

⁴⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with L.K., April 12, 2025.

⁴⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with A.L., April 12, 2025.

⁵⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.O., April 12, 2025.

Witnesses said that the attack, which lasted about two hours, spread across the town, but was mainly concentrated around the military base downtown, in a densely populated area, in the compound that also hosts the local administration, and near the local health center and the market.

“I wasn’t comfortable with soldiers deployed in the city center because I told myself if there was an attack, it’s the base that they are going to target and so it would endanger people,” said the Samo woman. “Which is exactly what happened.”⁵⁰¹

A resident said:

I counted 14 bodies [of civilians] at the morgue of the health center [Centre Médical avec Antenne Chirurgicale]. These people were killed by stray bullets. The assailants did not target civilians, if they wanted to target civilians they could have done so, and it would have been a massacre ... and civilians were not killed in crossfire either because there was no exchange of gunfire between the military and the assailants.⁵⁰²

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list with the names of the 14 victims, all adult men.

A man said that a group of JNIM fighters stopped him as he was approaching Séguénéga from Sima: “I got scared, I raised my hands. One pointed his gun at me. They searched my pockets and bag and found no weapon.... They let me go.”⁵⁰³

The ethnic Samo woman said that when gunfire started, she went back to her house and lay down on the floor. “Two bullets pierced the wall. It was terrifying,” she said. “I remained on the floor for about 30 minutes, then the shooting subsided and I got up.”⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with W.T., April 12, 2025.

⁵⁰² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with C.P., April 12, 2025.

⁵⁰³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with T.R., April 11, 2025.

⁵⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with W.T., April 12, 2025.

Other witnesses said that bullets hit the walls of their homes or fell in their courtyards. Human Rights Watch received three photographs from a witness whose home is about 500 meters from the military base, showing the impact of the bullets on his door and on a drawer.

Witnesses said that during the attack, JNIM fighters burned at least 15 shops and several motorbikes parked in front of the local health center.

“During the attack, I was at the health center [Centre Médical] because my son was sick,” said the ethnic Mossi farmer. “When the assailants left, I saw that several motorbikes parked in front of the health center had been burned, as well as at least 15 shops near the military base.”⁵⁰⁵

Witnesses also reported that JNIM fighters attacked Séguénéga at least four times after the March 15, 2025 attack, prompting many to flee.

A man from Séguénéga who fled to Ouahigouya on March 17, 2025, said JNIM fighters returned to Séguénéga the previous day and “fired for about one hour without any response by the security forces and then left,” causing people to flee to nearby localities. State authorities also left the town and the schools were closed.⁵⁰⁶

Baani, March 15, 2025

On March 15, 2025, over 100 JNIM fighters entered Baani village, and shot at people, killing two boys, 7 and 9, and injuring at least five men. They also beat a woman, kidnapped three men, burned at least two sheds, looted 100 cows and 50 goats, and forced all residents to abandon their homes.

Three witnesses said they believed the JNIM attack was in retaliation against the local community for having provided information to the military. The day before, the military had conducted an operation in Ingaré village, about three kilometers from Baani, where JNIM had set up a base after having forced all the population out.

A 30-year-old Mossi man said:

⁵⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with A.L., April 12, 2025.

⁵⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with R.W., April 12, 2025.

I was going to the store to buy some sugar around 6 p.m., and suddenly I heard gunshots, so I lay down on the ground. There was shooting everywhere. The attackers were shouting: “Allah Akbar, we don't want to see you here anymore! Tell the army to come and defend you!” They were speaking Fulfulde and Mooré. They also said: “You are now collaborating with the army. Your youth have joined the VDPs.”⁵⁰⁷

Witnesses said heavily armed JNIM fighters came on over 60 motorbikes and wore military uniforms and turbans. They said the attack occurred mostly in Razaïgayiri neighborhood where the fighters shot at people, killing two children.

“When the shooting stopped, and before everybody fled, I saw the bodies of the little boys,” a Mossi farmer said. “They were hit by bullets while they were playing outside. One was shot in the head and chest, the other in the abdomen.”⁵⁰⁸

A Mossi woman in her 30s said:

I was coming back from the bush with firewood and my arrival coincided with that of the terrorists who were shooting everywhere and shouting “Allah Akbar.” I hid behind a pile of bundles of wood.... After their crime, the jihadists set fire to the neighborhood sheds before heading to where I was hiding. They found me and I could no longer get up as I was in panic. One [fighter] advised the others not to burn the wood. “Don't burn the wood, there is a woman who cannot stand up, if you burn it, she will burn,” he said. Then another came to kick me, and I screamed. After he said: “She is still alive.” They left without burning the wood, but his kick injured my right ankle.⁵⁰⁹

Witnesses said that five civilian men were injured by gunshots during the attack and were taken to Koro, in Mali, for treatment. They also said JNIM kidnapped three well-known villagers, accusing them of being military informants. They provided the names of the three kidnapped men, all Mossi, ages between 45 and 50.

⁵⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.Y., May 8, 2025.

⁵⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.I., May 9, 2025.

⁵⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with D.M., May 8, 2025.

Witnesses said that, when the attack ended, JNIM fighters ordered all residents to leave immediately. “More jihadists came when the shooting was over and stayed until everybody left. They were checking whether everybody was leaving and leaving with nothing,” the Mossi farmer said. “They ensured we could not take anything with us, no food, no material, no motorbikes.”⁵¹⁰

Witnesses said that the bodies of the two boys were buried on March 16, 2025. “The day after the attack, we asked the people of Doré village to go to Baani and recover the bodies,” said the 30-year-old Mossi man. “They did and we buried the two boys in Doré, both in one grave.”⁵¹¹

Youba, August 3 and 11, 2025

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on August 3, 2025, JNIM killed at least 14 civilians, including 4 children, two of whom had hidden in a shop that JNIM set on fire, in Youba village.⁵¹² Witnesses believed the attack was to punish the local community for not complying with JNIM’s instructions not to grow tall crops, such as millet and corn, which JNIM warned could hinder its operations. JNIM also burned at least 10 shops, looted a gas station, and killed at least nine on-duty VDPs and one-off duty VDP.

In its August 15, 2025 reply to questions from Human Rights Watch, JNIM’s Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso stated that it did not target civilians in Youba and “if some claim that abuses have been committed ... it can only be unfounded allegations, or at most, incidental events caused by stray bullets, of which we have no knowledge.”⁵¹³

Witnesses said that hundreds of JNIM fighters on motorbikes and at least one pickup truck with a mounted machine gun stormed the village at about 4 p.m. screaming “Allah Akbar.” They said the fighters took control of the VDP base before entering several neighborhoods where they shot dead all the men they found.

⁵¹⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.I., May 9, 2025.

⁵¹¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with H.Y., May 8, 2025.

⁵¹² “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Massacre Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 15, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/15/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-massacre-civilians>.

⁵¹³ Letter from JNIM’s Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso to Human Rights Watch, August 15, 2025, translated to English from Arabic, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/09/R%C3%A9ponse%20du%20GSIM%20%C3%A0%20HRW%20le%2015%20août%202025.pdf.

Witnesses said that although JNIM targeted the men, a woman and two children were also fatally shot as they attempted to flee.

Witnesses provided a list with the names of the 14 civilian victims, including 9 men, ages 27 to 55, a 35-year-old woman, and four children, ages 1 to 14.

Witnesses said JNIM burned at least 10 shops at the market, including the one where two boys, 12 and 14, who had been killed were hidden.

Witnesses said that overwhelmed VDPs did not respond to the attack and fled and that the military did not intervene during the attack, but that soldiers from BIR 14 went to Youba after the attack to secure the area and allow VDPs to return to their base.

Residents of Youba said that, following the August 3, 2025 attack, regular army soldiers were deployed from their base in Ouahigouya, 12 kilometers away, to Youba to build a defensive trench around the village using excavators, with the support of VDPs.

Residents and media reported that on August 11, 2025, JNIM carried out another attack in Youba, killing dozens of soldiers, including their commanding officer, Dialla Oumarou, and VDPs, including many just at their first assignment.⁵¹⁴ JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack on the trench, a valid military objective, the same day.⁵¹⁵ Residents said JNIM targeted soldiers and VDPs who were digging the trench, and that the attack also left two civilians injured. Human Rights Watch geolocated two videos posted on social media on August 13, 2025, showing dozens of JNIM fighters on motorbikes driving freely inside Youba village.

The aftermath of the JNIM attack in Youba on August 11, 2025

⁵¹⁴ Wamaps' X account, @Wamaps_news, August 13, 2025, https://x.com/Wamaps_news/status/1955641782009499678 (accessed September 4, 2025).

⁵¹⁵ Nomade Sahélien's X account, @Nomade_Sahelien, August 11, 2025, https://x.com/Nomade_Sahelien/status/1954968818444636607 (accessed September 6, 2025).

Between August 12 and 13, 2025, soldiers and VDPs arrested at least five civilians in Youba on suspicion of collaborating with JNIM and of having provided information to JNIM fighters.

Residents told Human Rights Watch that among the five arrested were two men, including the head of the so-called development council, a body managing development activities in the village, and a mechanic, and three women. “The mechanic was arrested because he took pictures during the construction of the trench,” a resident of Youba told Human Rights Watch. “And the military thought that he showed such pictures to the jihadists.”⁵¹⁶

A local civil society activist said that the five people “had nothing to do with the jihadists,” and “have been arbitrarily arrested on the basis of little to no evidence.”⁵¹⁷

Residents said the military took the five people arrested to the VDP base in Rapougouma, a village 4 kilometers southeast of Youba. As of September 5, 2025, the five people remained in detention.

Center-North Region

Barsalogho, August 24, 2024

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on August 24, 2024, JNIM fighters attacked hundreds of civilians who had been coerced by the government to dig a defensive trench around the town of Barsalogho, a VDP stronghold.⁵¹⁸ JNIM fighters also fired on many other civilians in the vicinity of the trench. The attackers shot dead at least 133 people and injured more than 200 in fewer than two hours, Human Rights Watch confirmed through video analysis and witness accounts.

⁵¹⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with E.E., August 30, 2025.

⁵¹⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with E.V., September 4, 2025.

⁵¹⁸ “Burkina Faso: Massacre Shows Need to Protect Civilians,” Human Rights Watch press release. For Barsalogho as a VDP stronghold, see International Crisis Group, “Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion?,” Africa Report n°313, December 15, 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/burkina-faso/313-armed-civilians-at-risk-of-social-cohesion> (accessed September 4, 2025).

Witnesses said that at about 10 a.m. on August 24, 2024, scores of JNIM fighters, riding motorbikes and armed with Kalashnikov-style assault rifles and machine guns, attacked hundreds of civilians working on expanding the defensive trench northeast from the center of Barsalogo. Witnesses said that the fighters, who wore military uniforms or civilian clothes with headscarves, fired at people indiscriminately, moving up and down the trench and executing those who were still alive.

On August 25, 2024, JNIM claimed responsibility for the attack, saying that its forces killed 300 members of the Burkinabè military and VDPs. In his October 10, 2024 response to a Human Rights Watch letter, the Burkina Faso justice minister acknowledged that soldiers and VDPs were killed along with civilians in the attack but did not provide a death toll.⁵¹⁹

In a September 18, 2024, reply to Human Rights Watch, JNIM's Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso sought to justify the attack on civilians, saying that even if those targeted were forced to dig the trench, "this would not be an excuse to spare them. Anyone who ... follows this regime ... deserves to be held accountable."⁵²⁰ Deliberate attacks on civilians who are not directly taking part in hostilities is a war crime.

Loulouka, August 18, 2025

On August 18, 2025, JNIM fighters summarily executed five men in Loulouka, a hamlet five kilometers north of the city of Kongoussi. The two wives of one of the victims who witnessed the executions said JNIM accused the men of cultivating fields belonging to ethnic Fulani people who had been killed or forcibly displaced from the area by VDPs in 2022.

The women said JNIM fighters, riding on five motorbikes and armed with Kalashnikov-style assault rifles, surrounded a millet field near Loulouka, where they were cultivating along with five other men.

One wife, 29, said:

⁵¹⁹ Letter from Human Rights Watch to Edasso Rodrigue Bayala, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, September 12, 2024,

https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/10/Lettre%20de%20Human%20Rights%20Watch%20aux%20autorites%20du%20Burkina%20Faso_MOJ.pdf. Letter from Harouna Kadio, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, 10 October 2024, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/10/Lettre%20des%20autorites%20Burkinabe%20FR.pdf.

⁵²⁰ Letter from JNIM's Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso to Human Rights Watch, September 18, 2024, translated to English from Arabic, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/10/JNIM%20response%20to%20HRW.pdf.

One of the jihadists said: “VDPs sold you the land where we used to live. My house was over there when I was a civilian. VDPs destroyed all our homes. I survived the VDPs attack, and I joined the jihad. We are not going to allow anyone to cultivate here.” ... Then, they rounded up the men in a corner and ordered them to sit down. I wanted to sit next to my husband, but one of the jihadists pulled me away and ordered me to sit a few meters away.⁵²¹

The second wife, 21, said:

Two jihadists questioned the men. “What are you doing here? Don’t you know that this land belongs to the Fulani who were massacred by the VDPs?” My husband replied he did not know, as we are displaced here. We fled Pobe Mengao in 2020 following a jihadist attack which killed our relatives.... A jihadist ordered me and my co-wife to leave. We complied and minutes later, we heard “pa pa pa” – several gunshots. We looked back and saw the jihadists shooting the men in their heads, one by one. We wanted to return, but one of the jihadists pointed his gun at us and said: “It’s over. Anyone who’s going to cultivate this land again will suffer the same fate as your husband. We will kill them.”⁵²²

The two women said VDPs stationed near Loulouka abandoned their position as soon as JNIM fighters approached. “They left us without protection,” the 29-year-old woman said.⁵²³

The women said that after the executions, they walked to the city of Kongoussi where they alerted local VDPs, who later that day went to Loulouka to recover the five men’s bodies. “They took the bodies to the health center in Kongoussi. I went there and saw the bodies. The VDPs buried them at the cemetery of the city,” the 21-year-old woman said.⁵²⁴

The women provided a list with the names of the five victims, all men, ages 32, 33, 37, 40, and 57. Two of the victims were ethnic Dafing and three were ethnic Mossi.

⁵²¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with N.M., October 8, 2025.

⁵²² Human Rights Watch telephone interview with F.F., October 8, 2025.

⁵²³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with N.M., October 8, 2025.

⁵²⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with F.F., October 8, 2025.

East Region

Bantambougou, January 7, 2023

In the early hours of January 7, 2023, JNIM fighters entered Bantambougou, a village populated predominately by ethnic Mossi farmers devoted to cotton cultivation, and apparently killed 13 civilians. The next day, villagers found the bodies of the men, ages 25 to 65, with their throats slit.

Two witnesses said JNIM had threatened the villagers about a month before the attack in an audio message that circulated on WhatsApp, accusing villagers of providing information to the military. In October 2022, the Burkinabè military carried out drone strikes near Bantambougou, killing several JNIM fighters.⁵²⁵

A farmer, 34, said JNIM fighters arrived between 1 and 2 a.m., while everyone was asleep. He said that after being alerted by a barking dog, he went out of the house, saw two armed men approaching, and ran away. He said:

I climbed the wall separating my house from my dad’s house and I told my dad to run. I spent the night in the bush and the following day I came back and found 13 bodies. All of them had their throats slit—some in front of their houses, others in the streets.⁵²⁶

A 54-year-old man said he was awakened by “people screaming,” fled the village, and returned the following day at about 2 p.m. “We collected the bodies, transported them to the village cemetery where we dug 13 holes to bury them,” he said. “It was very stressful because the heads were only hanging by a thread, so when we lifted the bodies, sometimes the heads fell off.”⁵²⁷

The two men reported that some individuals who fled during the attack went to Kompiega, about 11 kilometers away, to alert the military and request intervention. However, they said that no military came. The men said that the incident left them with psychological wounds.

⁵²⁵ Sahel Média’s X account, @SahelMdia, October 8, 2022, <https://x.com/SahelMdia/status/1578828753106776064?s=20> (accessed January 7, 2026).

⁵²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with A.S.D., Benin, November 25, 2025.

⁵²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with L.T., Benin, November 25, 2025.

The 54-year-old said:

I've been traumatized. Sometimes, I don't even know if I exist. I pinch my skin to realize that it's really me who is there, ... that I'm truly alive. Sometimes I forget things, my memory is short. Other times, I stay up all night without sleeping thinking about my very kind comrades whom I buried and who were slaughtered.⁵²⁸

Mahadaga, January 23, 2023

On January 23, 2023, JNIM fighters killed at least 12 men, including 11 civilians and a VDP, in Mahadaga village. They burned telecommunication infrastructure and the town hall, as well as furniture in the primary school where, according to witnesses, a group of residents had been holding a meeting to discuss establishing a VDP base in the village.

Two witnesses said that JNIM had been present in and around Mahadaga since 2019, sporadically targeting people it suspected of having ties with the military, and ordering residents not to collaborate with state authorities or join the VDPs. "But in 2023, the military came and told the villagers to form a group of VDPs to defend the homeland," a 32-year-old man said. "We accepted, some of us became VDPs, but the military did not provide any of the necessary resources to defend the village and left us to fend for ourselves."⁵²⁹

Witnesses said that JNIM fighters on at least 100 motorbikes stormed the village at about 4 p.m. shouting "Allah Akbar." The fighters burned the telecommunication infrastructures, the town hall, and parts of the school before entering the neighborhoods located near the school, including Sector 3, where "they shot any men they found fleeing or hiding," the 32-year-old man said.⁵³⁰

"The VDP had had his throat slit," a 45-year-old man who fled the village when he heard gunfire and returned the following day said. "We saw him lying flat on his stomach and when

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with N.R., Benin, November 20, 2025.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

we lifted the body, the head was barely hanging. Near the town hall, we found other bodies ... with signs of bullet wounds in their backs.... We buried them at the cemetery individually.⁵³¹

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by witnesses with the names of the 12 victims, all ethnic Gourmantche men, ages 23 to 67.

Residents said the primary school had been shut down since 2020 due to insecurity, and since 2023 it was used by VDPs to hold meetings.⁵³²

They also said the Burkinabè military refused or did not respond to villagers' requests for protection during the attack. "Our village chief called the head of the military [in Diapaga, 50 kilometers away] to help us, but the head of the military refused [to send soldiers].... Some people also called the soldiers in Diapaga, but they did not come."⁵³³

The attack, witnesses said, led to the displacement of most of Mahadaga's residents.

Namponkoré, December 15, 2023

On December 15, 2023, JNIM fighters beat at least three women in Namponkoré city. One of the victims, a 22-year-old woman, said that since 2019, JNIM had imposed an annual "tax" of 50,000 CFA francs (US\$90) on all men who refused to join its ranks. Each year, she said, her husband, her father, and her two brothers were each required to pay this amount, as were all families in the area. Those who could not afford the payment were told they would have to give up a child or relative of fighting age instead.

"Seven jihadists came to ask my father for the money. They spoke in Gourmantche, they were Gourmantche," she said. "They gave him a week's delay and said that if the money was not going to be put on the table, they were going to kill all men in the family."⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with N.F., Benin, November 20, 2025.

⁵³² Witnesses reported that the first attack by suspected armed Islamist fighters occurred in December 2019 and led to the killing of a pastor. See also Issa B.'s X account, @IssaBaouaga, December 23, 2019, <https://x.com/IssaBaouaga/status/120912792389200691> (accessed December 2, 2025). Witnesses also said that in March 2020, armed men burned down a rehabilitation center of disabled people. See also "Burkina Faso: Le centre «Handicapés en Avant» de Mahadaga incendié par des hommes armés," *NetAfrique.net*, March 16, 2020, <https://netafrique.net/burkina-faso-le-centre-handicapes-en-avant-de-mahadaga-incendie-par-des-hommes-armes/> (accessed December 2, 2025).

⁵³³ Human Rights Watch interview with N.R., November 20, 2025.

⁵³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with S.S.C., Benin, November 20, 2025.

During that week, the woman said, the men of the family fled, while women and children stayed behind, “until one night when JNIM fighters ... forced their way into the house, demanding that we tell them where the men were hiding.” When the women said they did not know, the fighters accused them of lying. She said:

They dragged me by the hands as well as my two sisters-in-law. They hit us with strong rubber whips, they hit me hard.... I was pregnant.... I fainted. The next day, I woke up in the hospital.... The doctor told me that I had lost the fetus. It took three weeks of intense care for me to recover.⁵³⁵

After the incident, the woman said, she fled her home and sought refuge in a neighboring country.

Barhiaga, May 19, 2024

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on May 19, 2024, suspected JNIM fighters summarily executed the 79-year-old chief of Barhiaga, accusing him of collaborating with Burkinabè security forces.⁵³⁶ Fighters shot him in the head twice at his home, in front of his relatives.

“At about 1 p.m., I saw an Aloba-type motorbike with two armed men who looked like jihadists driving toward the chief’s home,” said a local resident. “Minutes after, I heard two gunshots. When the gunmen left, we found the chief dead with two bullet wounds in the head.”⁵³⁷

Diapaga, May 12, 2025

On May 12, 2025, hundreds JNIM fighters stormed Diapaga city and overran the military base, the gendarmerie post, and the police station, and freed dozens of prisoners from the local prison. They entered several neighborhoods where they killed at least 10 civilians, and possibly many more, and destroyed telecommunications infrastructure. A 70-year-old man died of an apparent heart attack while fleeing.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Wamaps’ X account, @Wamaps_news, May 15, 2025, https://x.com/Wamaps_news/status/1923026186218709286?s=20 (accessed November 28, 2025).

In a statement on May 13, 2025, JNIM acknowledged the attack on the base, which was a lawful military target.⁵³⁹ Several videos posted on social media, four of which Human Rights Watch geolocated to Diapaga, show JNIM fighters in the city, which witnesses also confirmed. They also said they saw a military helicopter flying over Diapaga during the attack and JNIM fighters firing at it.

The attack on Diapaga occurred 24 hours after a major JNIM attack on the town of Djibo, Sahel region, where JNIM also took control of the military barracks and killed civilians.⁵⁴⁰ On May 16, 2025, JNIM attacked Diapaga again, claiming “total control” of the city.⁵⁴¹

This was the second JNIM attack in Diapaga since March 2025. On March 28 and 29, 2025, JNIM attacked the military base and reportedly killed civilians, as well as dozens of soldiers and VDPs.⁵⁴² JNIM’s head Jafar Dicko claimed the attack was “the beginning of the vengeance after Solenzo.”⁵⁴³

Witnesses said that after the March 2025 attack, many residents wanted to flee Diapaga, but leaving the city for the bush caused the military and VDPs to label them as “jihadists,” which discouraged people from seeking safety. Meanwhile, JNIM viewed anyone who remained in the city as collaborators of the military. “We were trapped between these opposing suspicions,” the 48-year-old man said. “And when the jihadists finally entered the city, they executed all the men they encountered.”⁵⁴⁴

Killings on May 13, 2025

Four witnesses to the May 13, 2025 JNIM attack on Diapaga said JNIM fighters entered the city at about 8 a.m. on pickup trucks and motorbikes. After taking control of the military barracks,

⁵³⁹ Wassim Nasr’s X account, @SimNasr, May 13, 2025, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1922405557106794743?s=20> (accessed November 28, 2025).

⁵⁴⁰ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Massacre Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release.

⁵⁴¹ Wassim Nasr’s X account, @SimNasr, May 16, 2025, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1923449037233045884?s=20> (accessed November 28, 2025).

⁵⁴² Wamaps’ X account, @Wamaps_news, March 31, 2025, https://x.com/Wamaps_news/status/1906723658510303538?s=20 (accessed November 28, 2025). France 24 Français’ X account, @France24_fr, April 10, 2025, https://x.com/France24_fr/status/1910340906420515090?s=20 (accessed November 28, 2025).

⁵⁴³ Wassim Nasr X’s account, @SimNasr, April 8, 2025, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1909617489081679907?s=20> (accessed November 28, 2025). See also “Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres,” Human Rights Watch news release.

⁵⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with J.G., Benin, November 21, 2025.

they entered several neighborhoods, including Sector 4, Kankandi, and Kapeboanga, and went door-to-door searching for and executing all men they found hiding or fleeing.

A 43-year-old woman said two JNIM fighters broke into her home and ordered her and her children to go out:

Outside, I saw seven other jihadists, all Fulani, but they spoke in Gourmantche. They were armed with Kalashnikovs with long ammunition belts around their necks. They said they were looking for the men. Frightened, we said that there were no men in the house. In the meantime, two jihadists came out of the shop of [name redacted for security reasons] with a 28-year-old fuel seller who had hidden in the shop with him. One of the jihadists shot [the young man] in the head.... Then the jihadists took the fuel he used to sell [and] poured a 20-liter can on his body and set the body on fire ... all in front of me and my children.⁵⁴⁵

The woman said the killings in her neighborhood took place between 8 and 10 a.m., and when gunfire finally ceased at about 2 p.m. she saw women mourning over the bodies of their husbands. Two of her brothers had been killed. As women grieved, she said, “three terrorists walked by and told them in Gourmantche, ‘Calm down, stop crying. Crying won’t change anything.’ And then, they strolled calmly through the city.”⁵⁴⁶

A trader, 47, said that when JNIM fighters stormed the city, he attempted to return home and hide. There he saw two fighters shooting his neighbor:

When the victim collapsed, I arrived in front of them. They wanted to jump on me, but in the meantime a military helicopter appeared in the sky.... Another terrorist at the end of the street was firing a burst at the helicopter.... The appearance of the helicopter distracted the two terrorists ... and I managed to run away.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with G.P., Benin, November 21, 2025.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with D.C., Benin, November 21, 2025.

The 48-year-old man said that during the attack, he hid in a house downtown, and only walked out the following day when he returned to his neighborhood, Kapemboanga, where he found at least seven bodies, including of his brother. “We found bodies in the streets, in their houses,” he said. “I helped collect them and buried them at the Diapaga cemetery.”⁵⁴⁸

The 47-year-old man said that he returned to Diapaga on May 15, 2025, and helped collect the bodies of those killed by JNIM on May 12, 2025, but found there were far too many to count. “We spent the whole day at the cemetery, and the bodies just kept coming,” he said. “I think the bodies of the civilians killed exceeded 100.”⁵⁴⁹

Human Rights Watch received a list compiled by the witnesses with the names of 10 victims, all men, ages 20 to 50.

Hauts-Bassins Region

Sindo, June 11, 2024

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on June 11, 2024, JNIM fighters attacked Sindo town, killing at least 20 civilian men, looting shops and homes, stealing livestock, and causing the mass displacement of the local population.⁵⁵⁰

Witnesses said they believed the attack was in retaliation against the local community whom the fighters accused of joining the VDPs.

Witnesses said that fighters entered the town at about 4 p.m. through the bush.

A 24-year-old herder said that six fighters approached, tried to steal his livestock, and shot him in the foot when he resisted, before taking his animals and “leaving [him] bleeding.”⁵⁵¹

Human Rights Watch obtained two lists compiled by survivors and relatives of the victims with the names of the 20 men killed, ages 24 to 75.

⁵⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with J.G., November 21, 2025.

⁵⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with D.C., November 21, 2025.

⁵⁵⁰ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

Survivors said the actual death toll was likely much higher, noting that bodies were found throughout the village and nearby areas, with victims killed by gunfire or having their throats slit.

Survivors and relatives of the victims asserted that none of those killed had joined the VDPs.

Niamana, June 30, 2024

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on June 30, 2024, JNIM fighters killed at least two civilian men, 34 and 40, in Niamana village.⁵⁵²

Witnesses said the attack was in apparent retaliation against the local community for joining the VDPs.

“The jihadists ... were armed with Kalashnikovs and had turbans on their heads,” one witness said. “We ran away, but my brother was shot at close range. Then, they killed another man in a nearby field.”⁵⁵³

Witnesses said JNIM fighters first came to Niamana in 2021 and ordered residents not to report their presence to the military. Relations remained calm until mid-2023, when the group warned villagers not to join the VDPs, threatening to evict or kill anyone who stayed after 24 hours.

Witnesses said that after the ultimatum, many villagers fled Niamana, but that some returned in May 2024, following pressure from Burkinabè authorities who promised to ensure the security of returnees.

Dé, mid-September 2024

In mid-September 2024, scores of JNIM fighters attacked the village of Dé, killed at least 12 civilians and looted homes and cattle. Several witnesses said that the attack was in retaliation against the local community, whom JNIM accused of joining the VDPs. However, the witnesses said that very few villagers had actually joined the VDPs.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

“There was no general mobilization to recruit VDPs [in Dé],” a 40-year-old man said. “There were some young volunteers who went to register as VDPs, and some traditional Donso hunters [some of whom joined the VDPs] but to say that the village contributed to the VDPs ... no, I say no.”

Dé is in an area where JNIM was already carrying out attacks against the security forces and VDPs. Witnesses also said that about one week before the attack, the fighters had come to Dé and ordered people to leave.

A 34-year-old man said JNIM fighters, who spoke Fulfulde and Dioula, rounded up all villagers at the mosque and asked them to leave, accusing them of traveling to Samoroguan city to register with the VDPs. “They said, ‘Whoever does not like the Islam we are fighting for, must leave the village, this is our land,’” the man said. “But some of us stayed, thinking they won’t implement their threat.”⁵⁵⁴

Witnesses said that the day of the attack, the fighters came between 5 and 6 p.m. on more than 30 motorbikes, wearing military uniforms and civilian clothes with turbans, carrying a black flag, and yelling “Allah Akbar!”

“They shot continually at everything and everyone,” said a 45-year-old man. “As I fled toward the southern exit of the village, I saw at least three bodies on the ground.”⁵⁵⁵

Witnesses said that the military, based in Samoroguan, 25 kilometers from Dé, did not respond during or after the attack, and that their presence in the area is limited.

A 60-year-old man who hid to survive the attack said:

After the attack, I fled to Mali. We could not stay ... in our area because it is not safe.... VDPs are not putting up any resistance to the terrorists, and the army is not moving.... There was no response from the military. No one, neither the authorities nor the army, bothered to help us after the attack.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with C.F., Mali, December 18, 2024.

⁵⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with E.F., Mali, December 18, 2024.

⁵⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with K.T., Mali, December 18, 2024.

Three days later, some villagers returned to assess the damage and bury the bodies. The 34-year-old man said:

We recovered 12 bodies.... They had all been shot dead, except the village hunter who had been ... probably beaten on the head until death....When we went to bury him ... we noticed that his head was wounded all over, but there were no bullet marks on his body, nor bullet casings near his body either, unlike the other bodies.⁵⁵⁷

The 45-year-old man said:

Among the bodies we recovered, I found those of my uncles, 50 and 45 ... in the street ... lying on their stomachs, three meters apart.... We found an older man, 60, with his son, both shot in the head.... They were lying in the courtyard, the older man on his back, his son on the side.... We found two more bodies at the northern exit of the village ... shot dead in the head and chest.... We buried the bodies where we found them because they were already decomposed and couldn't be moved.⁵⁵⁸

“They looted my two sheep ... and homes,” the 60-year-old man said. “I buried three bodies and then I stopped because I started feeling dizzy.”⁵⁵⁹

Human Rights Watch reviewed two lists compiled by the witnesses with the names of the 12 victims, all men, ages 18 to 60.

Sindo, September 18, 2024

On the morning of September 18, 2024, two JNIM fighters stopped a 40-year-old man riding a motorbike near the town of Sindo and shot him three times. The victim survived and said that the fighters accused him of selling fuel to the VDPs.

He said:

⁵⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with C.F., December 18, 2024.

⁵⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with E.F., December 18, 2024.

⁵⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with K.T., December 18, 2024.

I am a trader, I buy and sell fuel from Sikasso, in Mali, to several towns in Burkina Faso. I used to sell fuel to everyone.... They spoke to me in Dioula but were Fulani. One said: “Don’t you know that we, the jihadists, are at war with the village of Sindo because of their refusal to follow us and disavow the VDPs.” I said: “Yes, I know.” He said again: ‘We don’t need your answer, it’s over for you’ ... and shot me in my stomach, “ta ta,” twice in my stomach. One bullet came out through the buttocks and the other remained lodged there. It took surgery to get it out. He said to me again: “You’re not going to deliver fuel anymore!” and shot me again, in the chest. Then they left.⁵⁶⁰



A photograph shared by the victim with Human Rights Watch showing his injuries after he underwent surgery. © 2024 Private

The victim said that he was rescued by a passerby who called the VDPs in Sindo, who came and took him to the hospital in Bobo-Dioulasso, about 115 kilometers away.

Gondaga, September 25 and 26, 2024

On September 25, 2024, JNIM fighters entered Gondaga village, rounded up villagers in front of the mosque, and issued an ultimatum for them to leave the area within 48 hours. Witnesses said that the fighters accused the local community of hosting displaced people from the town of Sindo, eight kilometers north of Gondaga where several dozen VDPs are based.

⁵⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with D.D., Mali, December 19, 2024.

“But they didn’t respect the 48-hour warning and the following day came to attack us,” a 40-year-old man said.⁵⁶¹

Witnesses said that on September 26, 2024, about 40 JNIM fighters riding over 20 motorbikes stormed Gondaga at 1 p.m., killed two men, 34 and 50, burned three homes, looted several other homes, and destroyed civilian property. “They went door-to-door, shooting and yelling ‘Allah Akbar,’” the 40-year-old man said.⁵⁶²

A 30-year-old man said:

I was grinding my cereal, hoping that I could take it [the grain] with me before leaving, but the assailants came.... I hid behind a shed, trying to keep calm.... The jihadists shot at my mill and ... poured the rice and sorghum on the ground.... I saw a jihadist take one of our villagers, and then another came and shot him in the head and two more times in the chest.... Then I heard more gunfire.⁵⁶³

The two witnesses said that, when the fighters left, they fled to nearby Ponda village, before returning to Gondaga the next day to recover and bury the bodies of the two men who had been killed and assess the damage in the village.

The 30-year-old man said:

One person was killed in front of me, and I found his body exactly where I saw the jihadists shoot him.... The other one we found it at the exit of the village ... with four bullets, two in the back and two in the head.⁵⁶⁴

The 40-year-old man said:

Three homes had been set on fire, as well as three motorbikes, including mine. We noticed that three piles of cotton were also burned, and the homes were

⁵⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with U.T., Mali, December 18, 2024.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with B.C., Mali, December 18, 2024.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

looted of everything.... We carried the bodies on a wheelbarrow to Ponda and buried them there.... Then, everybody fled ... and now the village is just ruins.⁵⁶⁵

Sambabougou, October 2, 2024

On October 2, 2024, hundreds of JNIM fighters attacked Sambabougou village, killing 15 civilians, including two children, and looting homes and granaries. JNIM forces largely controlled the area at the time. Residents said that about a year prior to the attack, JNIM had given a warning to the local population, who are predominately ethnic Bobo and Samo, to leave the village.

A 63-year-old man said that in 2023, JNIM fighters met his brother and told him to inform all villagers to leave. He said his brother told him that “the village chief said that the way the terrorists had proceeded was not convincing enough because, usually, they would round up everybody and give a deadline.... So, he advised us to stay. We were shocked when they came to attack us a year later.”⁵⁶⁶

Witnesses said the fighters, armed with Kalashnikov-style assault rifles, came between 3 and 4 p.m., on foot, leaving their motorbikes at the outskirts of the village. They said they surrounded the village, yelled “Allah Akbar,” and shot indiscriminately at everyone.

A 54-year-old man said:

I was home with my brother and his son, who were executed. I was saved by a wall. I climbed it and took shelter behind while the attackers shot at me, the bullets were flying over my head. I climbed and fragments of the wall hit me on the back, I thought that I had been shot. My back still hurts.⁵⁶⁷

The 63-year-old man, who lost a brother and four other family members in the attack, said two fighters grabbed his brother and shot him in the head and chest before opening fire on his two nephews who tried to flee. “My wife went out to intervene and one of the assailants told her in Dioula: ‘We have nothing to do with women, it's the men that we will exterminate, if Allah

⁵⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with U.T., December 18, 2024.

⁵⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with R.F., Mali, December 18, 2024.

⁵⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with T.F., Mali, December 18, 2024.

wills,” he said. “Then I saw another villager being chased by one of the attackers who shot him.”⁵⁶⁸ The man said that the fighters went on and killed his 11-year-old grandchild, shooting him in the head, before grabbing him:

I stayed calm although I just wanted to shout, I told them that I am sympathetic of JNIM, that I like their Islam and support the jihad. The assailant looked at me and told me to go, ... I walked away before starting running like a horse to go as far as possible.⁵⁶⁹

A 27-year-old man said:

I was home sick ... when two assailants broke in.... They asked me: “Why didn’t you leave? Which force were you relying upon to refuse our instructions?” I answered that I was sick. One wanted to execute me, the other said: “No, there’s no point in killing him, he's already dead.” They asked me to leave, and I fled.⁵⁷⁰

Witnesses said that after the attack, the village chief informed the military based in Samoroguan, about 20 kilometers from Sambabougou, but the soldiers did not react.

The 54-year-old man said:

The soldiers did not respond to our call, we were abandoned. For two years, we were left to ourselves, with no help from the Burkinabè state, which abandoned the area to the terrorists. The terrorists make the law here ... even when the terrorists came asking us to leave in 2023, we had alerted the army, but nothing, no support, not even a single patrol.⁵⁷¹

The attack forced almost all the villagers to flee, many to Mali, but some returned to Sambabougou three days later to assess the damages and bury those killed.

⁵⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with R.F., December 18, 2024.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with E.W., Mali, December 18, 2024.

⁵⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with T.F., December 18, 2024.

The 63-year-old man said:

We found that our homes had been looted, all our goods and cattle looted. We found the bodies of 15 people in the streets, in front of their homes, they were decomposing but we observed the marks left by the bullets everywhere ... we wrapped the bodies with clothes, and we buried them in individual graves in the cemetery of the village.⁵⁷²

Human Rights Watch reviewed two lists compiled by the witnesses with the names of the 15 victims, including 13 men, ages 18 to 57, and 2 children, ages 11 and 12.

Sindo, July 31, 2025

On July 31, 2025, JNIM fighters killed four men and a boy on the outskirts of Sindo, a village where several dozen VDPs are based.

Witnesses said that they and their families, along with other residents, fled Sindo in 2022 following repeated attacks by JNIM. They reported coming back in 2023 after local authorities encouraged their return and established VDPs, assuring them that security would be guaranteed. However, according to the witnesses, neither the military nor the VDPs were able to provide effective protection. “The presence of VDPs made things worse and jihadists started targeting anyone from Sindo, accusing the whole population of collaborating with the military or being a VDP,” a 56-year-old man said. “And eventually, they [JNIM] imposed an embargo on Sindo.”⁵⁷³

Witnesses described being subjected to a JNIM-imposed siege that restricted movement in and out of Sindo, requiring armed escorts for travel to Samorogouan, to obtain essential supplies. They added that JNIM had prohibited villagers from cultivating fields outside the town.

Despite these restrictions and the resulting food shortages, in mid-2025 some residents attempted to cultivate millet and sorghum on the outskirts of Sindo, after having been reassured by VDPs. “In June [2025], there were patrols by the VDPs and the military toward the

⁵⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with R.F., December 18, 2024.

⁵⁷³ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.W., October 17, 2025.

Malian border,” a 59-year-old man said. “After that, the VDPs reassured us that the forest had been cleared, swept of terrorists and told us that we could ... cultivate.”⁵⁷⁴

The witnesses reported that on the morning of July 31, 2025, at least 10 JNIM fighters on motorbikes attacked a group of about 10 villagers engaged in farming around two kilometers from Sindo.

The 56-year-old man said:

I looked up. I saw motorcycles with armed men heading toward us and I knew that they were not the VDPs because they were all wearing turbans. We ... ran ... to reach the village.... The jihadists chased us on foot, but we continued to run with all our strength. The jihadists then, seeing that they could not get us, opened fire on us. I escaped and made it to the village around 1 p.m., but five of my friends were shot.⁵⁷⁵

The witnesses said that they returned to the place of the attack with the VDPs in the afternoon to collect the bodies. The 59-year-old man who lost his 16-year-old son said:

My child was shot about 50 meters from the place where we were farming. I found him lying flat on his stomach, three bullets in his back.... All the people had been hit by at least three bullets each, mainly in the back and shoulders but also in the neck. We took the bodies and buried each in a separate grave at the Sindo cemetery. My three bulls were also stolen by the jihadists.⁵⁷⁶

Human Rights Watch reviewed a list compiled by the witnesses with the names of the five victims, four men, ages 25 to 60, and a 16-year-old boy.

⁵⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with P.L., October 17, 2025.

⁵⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with S.W., October 17, 2025.

⁵⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with P.L., October 17, 2025.

Sahel Region

Mansila, June 11, 2024

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on June 11, 2024, JNIM fighters killed 20 civilians in Mansila town and burned homes.⁵⁷⁷

On June 16, JNIM claimed responsibility for the June 11, 2024 attack on a military base in Mansila, and said it killed 107 soldiers, captured 7 others, and seized weapons and ammunition.⁵⁷⁸

Witnesses said that JNIM fighters attacked the military barracks and engaged in combat with the soldiers before storming the town. They said they went door-to-door, ordering people out of their homes and summarily executing the men they accused of collaborating with the military.

Djibo, May 11, 2025

Human Rights Watch previously documented that on May 11, 2025, JNIM forces killed at least 26 civilians it accused of supporting or joining the VDPs in Djibo town and burned and looted shops and health facilities.⁵⁷⁹ JNIM had besieged the town since 2022, cutting people off from food, basic necessities, and humanitarian assistance.⁵⁸⁰

Media and witnesses reported that hundreds of JNIM fighters riding motorbikes stormed the town and took control of the military base before entering several neighborhoods where they went door-to-door and killed civilians.⁵⁸¹

Witnesses said JNIM fighters targeted civilians from Fulani subgroups. These subgroups include the Rimaïbé, a subgroup to which a large local family belongs, the Tamboura family, and metal workers (blacksmiths) whom JNIM accuses of supporting the VDPs.⁵⁸² Members of

⁵⁷⁷ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Terrorize Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release.

⁵⁷⁸ Wassim Nasr’s X account, @SimNasr, June 16, 2024, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1802331466132603103> (accessed July 29, 2025).

⁵⁷⁹ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Massacre Civilians,” Human Right Watch news release.

⁵⁸⁰ “Burkina Faso: Upsurge in Atrocities by Islamist Armed Groups,” Human Rights Watch news release.

⁵⁸¹ For the control of the military base, see Quang Pham, “Burkina Faso: des jihadistes ont bien posé devant le portrait d'Ibrahim Traoré,” *Les Observateurs, France 24*, May 15, 2025, <https://observers.france24.com/fr/burkina-faso-jihadistes-posent-devant-portrait-ibrahim-traore> (accessed September 4, 2025).

⁵⁸² Human Rights Watch telephone interviews with D.A., July 1, 2025; A.W., July 30, 2025; V.B., July 30, 2025; and A.R., July 30, 2025.

the Tamboura family said that in February 2025, JNIM circulated a video on social media threatening to attack its members. Witnesses said JNIM reproached the Tamboura after some of its members fled from JNIM-controlled areas between 2022 and 2023 to go to Djibo, where security forces are present and where some of them joined the VDPs.

In an August 15, 2025 reply to Human Rights Watch, JNIM’s Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso said, “We have never targeted the Tamboura people. Our action is not based on any ethnic or racial considerations, but exclusively on the necessity to respond to those who have declared war on us.”⁵⁸³

Witnesses to the May 11, 2025 attack and Djibo residents said that some members of the Tamboura family and some blacksmiths did collaborate with the military and VDPs. Residents of Djibo told Human Rights Watch that Fulani people, without distinction, joined JNIM. These individuals would still be protected from attack and mistreatment in custody.

Witnesses provided a list with the names of the 26 victims, including 23 men, ages 27 to 93, and 3 women, ages 28, 30 and 32. Of the victims, 16 belong to the Tamboura family.

Witnesses said the attack lasted from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m., and that residents hid in their homes for three days, until military reinforcements came and secured the town. They also said JNIM burned dozens of shops at the central market located in Sector 1, as well as a pharmacy, and looted a health facility. Satellite imagery analyzed by Human Rights Watch confirmed the burning.

Media reported that several soldiers and VDPs were killed in the attack. The government did not issue any public statement about the attack, but on May 16, 2025, Burkina Faso’s state broadcaster, RTB, confirmed that on May 11, 2025, “hundreds or even thousands” of Islamist fighters attacked the military base in Djibo and that the military responded with several airstrikes in Djibo and surrounding villages.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸³ Letter from JNIM’s Sharia Committee in Burkina Faso to Human Rights Watch, August 15, 2025, translated to English from Arabic, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2025/09/R%C3%A9ponse%20du%20GSIM%20%C3%A0%20HRW%20le%2015%20août%202025.pdf.

⁵⁸⁴ For the media report, see “Une attaque jihadiste au nord du Burkina Faso fait “plusieurs dizaines” de morts,” *France 24*, May 12, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20250512-afrique-burkina-faso-attaque-jihadiste-nord-pays-plusieurs-dizaines-morts> (accessed September 5, 2025). For the RTB report, see “RTB – Edition spéciale : Les échos du front du 16 mai 2025,” YouTube live, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, May 16, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLZGW7PCx9o> (accessed September 5, 2025).

JNIM had previously targeted Djibo. In October 2022, JNIM fighters attacked the military base, killing at least 10 soldiers.⁵⁸⁵ In November 2023, the armed group attacked the military barracks as well as a camp for internally displaced people, killing at least 40 civilians.⁵⁸⁶ In February 2025, JNIM led a series of attacks in and around Djibo, attacking military and VDP positions.⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁵ Wamini Sidwaya, “Djibo : 10 militaires tombés dans l’attaque du 14^e Régiment interarmes,” *Sidwaya Info*, October 24, 2022, <https://www.sidwaya.info/djibo-10-militaires-tombes-dans-lattaque-du-14e-regiment-interarmes/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁵⁸⁶ “Dozens killed in attack by armed groups in Burkina Faso, UN says,” *France 24*, November 28, 2023, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20231128-armed-groups-carry-out-major-attack-in-northern-burkina-faso-say-security-sources> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁵⁸⁷ “Burkina Faso: plusieurs positions militaires attaquées dans la province du Soum au nord du pays,” *RFI*, February 3, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20250203-burkina-faso-plusieurs-positions-militaires-attaque%C3%A9es-dans-la-province-du-soum-au-nord-du-pays> (accessed September 3, 2025). Djibo residents told Human Rights Watch that the city has a symbolic meaning for JNIM. Jafar Dicko, JNIM leader in Burkina Faso, and his two brothers, Ousmane Dicko and Ibrahim Dicko, known as Malam (first brother to become a jihadist in the mid-2000s), used to live in the city. “The city was their home, they ran a mosque in Sector 5,” said a resident of Djibo who used to know Jafar. “When Malam joined the jihadists, authorities shut down the mosque forcing the Dicko family to leave the city.” Human Rights Watch telephone interview with V.B., July 30, 2025.

V. International Legal Standards

The violence prevailing in Burkina Faso amounts to a non-international armed conflict regulated under international humanitarian law—otherwise known as the laws of war. This law regulates what can and cannot be done during armed conflict and aims among other things to protect civilians and other non-combatants and reduce suffering. The laws of war are binding on all parties to the conflict. International human rights law also remains applicable and provides complementary protection to victims during times of conflict.

Applicable international humanitarian law includes Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, the Second Additional Protocol of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol II), and customary laws of war, which apply to non-state armed groups as well as national armed forces.⁵⁸⁸ The laws of war prohibit summary executions, attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and pillage, among other violations.

The Burkinabè authorities dispute that the situation in the country amounts to an armed conflict. In a letter sent in August 2024 to Human Rights Watch, the Ministry of Justice said:

The expressions "armed Islamist groups" and "international humanitarian law" allude to a context of armed conflict, whereas Burkina Faso is facing attacks perpetrated by terrorists. The level of organization of the terrorists attacking Burkina Faso does not allow them to be qualified as armed groups but rather as terrorists. Consequently, the actions carried out on the ground by our National Armed Forces (FAN) and Internal Security Forces (FSI) are counter-terrorism operations. The use of these terminologies is therefore not appropriate to the Burkinabè context, which is rather facing a security crisis marked by terrorist acts that constitute violations of national criminal law.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁸ ICRC, *The Geneva Conventions and their Commentaries*, <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions> (accessed September 4, 2025).

⁵⁸⁹ Letter from Harouna Kadio, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, to Human Rights Watch, August 2024, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2024/09/Africa_BurkinaFaso_ROR_Response.pdf.

In an April 2025 letter sent to Human Rights Watch, the Ministry of Justice reiterated the same concepts.⁵⁹⁰

The International Committee of the Red Cross's Commentary on Common Article 3 states that:

A situation of violence that crosses the threshold of an 'armed conflict not of an international character' is a situation in which organized Parties confront one another with violence of a certain degree of intensity. *It is a determination based exclusively on the facts* [emphasis added].⁵⁹¹

The Islamist armed groups in Burkina Faso, including JNIM, demonstrate sufficient organization, including command structures, territorial control, and sustained organization, to qualify as armed groups under international humanitarian law, and the country has seen widespread fighting since 2016 in relation to this conflict. JNIM's level of organization, including a command structure, designated zones of operation, and the ability to procure, transport, and distribute arms, together with the degree of intensity of the violence, which is protracted and persistent, mean that the fighting in Burkina Faso amounts to a non-international armed conflict.

Unlawful Attacks

The laws of war limit attacks to "military objectives." Military objectives are personnel and objects that are making an effective contribution to military action and their destruction, capture, or neutralization offers a definite military advantage. This would include enemy fighters, weapons and ammunition, and objects being used for military purposes, such as houses and stores in which soldiers are deployed. While humanitarian law recognizes that some civilian casualties are inevitable during armed conflict, it imposes a duty on warring parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians at all times, and to target only

⁵⁹⁰ Letter from Edasso Rodrigue Bayala, Minister of Justice and Human Rights, Burkina Faso Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, to Tirana Hassa, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch, April 28, 2025, transferred to Human Rights Watch by Kassoum Coulibaly, Burkina Faso Ambassador to the United States, on May 19, 2025, in French, https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2026/03/Reponse%20du%20gouvernement%20Burkinabe%20-%2019%20mai%202025.pdf.

⁵⁹¹ ICRC, *Commentary on the First Geneva Convention: Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field*, (Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition, 2016), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gci-1949> (accessed March 20, 2026), art. 3, para. 387.

combatants and other military objectives. Civilians lose their immunity from attack during the time they are “directly participating in the hostilities.”

The laws of war also protect civilian objects, which are defined as anything not considered a military objective. Prohibited are direct attacks against civilian objects, such as hospitals, schools, houses and apartments, businesses, places of worship, and cultural monuments—unless they are being used for military purposes and thus become military objectives.

Deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian objects are prohibited. The laws of war also prohibit indiscriminate attacks, which are attacks of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction. Also prohibited are attacks that violate the principle of proportionality. Disproportionate attacks are those that may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life or damage to civilian objects that would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated from the attack.

Summary Killings, Torture, and Other Mistreatment

International humanitarian law provides a number of fundamental protections for noncombatants, such as civilians, captured or surrendered combatants, and those who are unable to fight because of wounds or illness. It prohibits violence against such persons—particularly murder, cruel treatment, and torture—as well as outrages against their personal dignity and degrading or humiliating treatment.

Forced Displacement

In a non-international armed conflict, forced displacement of civilian populations is prohibited by Protocol II and by customary international law. The ICRC Commentary on Customary International Humanitarian Law provides that parties to a non-international armed conflict may not order the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or in part, for reasons related to the conflict unless required for the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹² International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, vol. I: Rules (Cambridge University Press, 2005), rule 129(b).

Pillage and Destruction of Civilian Property

International humanitarian law prohibits pillage, also sometimes referred to as looting, plunder, sacking, or spoliation. Pillage is the unlawful appropriation of any civilian property during an armed conflict and is a war crime.⁵⁹³

Collective Punishment

Collective punishments are prohibited under international humanitarian law in all circumstances.⁵⁹⁴ The prohibition on collective punishments applies to criminal sanctions against persons for actions for which they are not individually responsible, but also to “sanctions and harassment of any sort, administrative, by police action or otherwise.”⁵⁹⁵

Collective punishment violates prohibitions against the mistreatment of civilians and captured combatants, such as are found in Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions and article 4 of Protocol II, which sets out the fundamental guarantees of humane treatment.

War Crimes

Serious violations of the laws of war, committed by individuals with criminal intent—that is, deliberately or recklessly—are war crimes.

Individuals may be held criminally liable for committing, attempting to commit, as well as assisting in, facilitating, or aiding and abetting, a war crime. Responsibility also may fall on people planning or instigating a war crime. Commanders and civilian leaders may be prosecuted for war crimes as a matter of command responsibility when they knew or should have known about the commission of war crimes and took insufficient measures to prevent them or punish those responsible.⁵⁹⁶

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, rule 156.

⁵⁹⁴ ICRC, *Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949* (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2010), https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/external/doc/en/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0321.pdf (accessed February 17, 2026). Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), of 8 June 1977, art. 4(2)(b). See also, ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, rule 103.

⁵⁹⁵ Claude Pilloud et al., *Commentary on the Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), para. 3055.

⁵⁹⁶ ICRC, *Customary International Humanitarian Law*, rules 152, 153, and 156.

Under international law, the Burkinabè government has an obligation to investigate and prosecute as appropriate those found responsible for war crimes, which are serious violations of the laws of war committed with criminal intent, and other serious international crimes. Burkina Faso is also a party to the Rome Statute, the International Criminal Court (ICC) treaty, which may have jurisdiction if Burkina Faso is unwilling or unable to prosecute grave international crimes.

Ethnic Cleansing

Though the term "ethnic cleansing" has no formal definition under international law, a UN Commission of Experts defined it as a "purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas" where the "purpose appears to be the occupation of territory to the exclusion of the purged group or groups."⁵⁹⁷

The definition rests on three crucial components. "Purposeful policy" designates coordinated actions by individuals and groups (whether formal or informal), acting in the pursuit of a common goal; qualifying acts as "purposeful policy" may rely on demonstrating the implication of government bodies, but does not require it. The second component, "one ethnic or religious group [removing] ... the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from a geographic area," indicates that the policy aims at widespread displacement of a given group by another. Finally, ethnic cleansing relies on "violent and terror-inspiring means."⁵⁹⁸

The UN Commission of Experts further defined the means of ethnic cleansing to include crimes such as "murder, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, extra-judicial executions, rape and sexual assaults, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, deliberate military attacks or threats of attacks on civilians and civilian areas, and wanton destructions of property."⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ UN Security Council, Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), S/1994/674, May 27, 1994, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/resolution/unsc/1994/en/113325> (accessed September 5, 2025), Section III., B., para. 130.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., Section III., B., para. 129.

Ethnic cleansing is in and of itself not a defined crime under international law, but it may be prosecuted as the crime against humanity of persecution, given the specific element of discrimination.

The ethnic targeting of Fulani communities by military forces and the VDPs by way of killings, enforced disappearances, and looting, which led to the mass displacement of entire communities, amounts to ethnic cleansing.

Crimes Against Humanity

Crimes against humanity are part of customary international law and were first codified in the charter of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal of 1945. The purpose was to prohibit crimes “which either by their magnitude and savagery, by their large number, or by the fact that a similar pattern was applied ... endangered the international community or shocked the conscience of mankind.”⁶⁰⁰ Since then, the concept has been incorporated into a number of international treaties and the statutes of international criminal tribunals, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The definition of crimes against humanity varies slightly by treaty, but the definition found in the Rome Statute largely reflects customary international law and includes a range of crimes committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.⁶⁰¹ Such a widespread or systematic “attack” is defined as a course of conduct involving multiple commission of such criminal acts pursuant to state or organizational policy to commit the crimes.⁶⁰²

Crimes against humanity are abuses carried out as part of an attack directed against a civilian population. So long as the targeted population is of a predominantly civilian nature, the presence of some combatants does not alter its classification as a “civilian

⁶⁰⁰ *History of the United Nations War Crimes Commission and the Development of the Laws of War* (1943), p. 179, quoted in Rodney Dixon, “Crimes against humanity,” in *Commentary on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court*, ed. Otto Triffterer (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1999), p. 123.

⁶⁰¹ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Rome Statute), A/CONF.183/9, July 17, 1998, entered into force July 1, 2002, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf> (accessed September 6, 2025), art. 7.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, art 7(2)(a).

population" as a matter of law.⁶⁰³ Rather, it is necessary only that the civilian population be the primary object of the attack by state or non-state forces. Thus, the presence of some Islamist fighters among the civilian population that Burkinabè forces and VDPs targeted does not negate possible crimes against humanity.

The attack against a civilian population underlying the commission of crimes against humanity must be widespread or systematic; it need not be both. "Widespread" refers to the scale of the acts or number of victims.⁶⁰⁴

A systematic attack indicates a pattern or methodical plan. International courts have considered to what extent a systemic attack requires a policy or plan. For instance, such a plan need not be adopted formally as a policy of the state. The nature of the abuses, their broad-based character, and their frequency (rather than the actions of individual security forces and personnel) constitute the relevant factors to assess whether the acts are reflective of a policy.⁶⁰⁵

The following alleged crimes against humanity should be independently and impartially investigated and appropriately prosecuted.

Murder and Enforced Disappearance

Murder is recognized as one of the prohibited acts that may constitute a crime against humanity in the Rome Statute and ad hoc criminal courts.⁶⁰⁶ It is also prohibited as a violation of the right to life under international human rights law and as a violation of Common Article 3 to the Geneva Conventions. It has been defined by international courts as "the death of the victim which results from an act or omission by the accused,

⁶⁰³ *The Prosecutor versus Jean-Paul Akayesu*, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), Case No. ICTR-96-4-T, Judgement (Chamber I), September 2, 1998, <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/caselaw/ictr/1998/en/19275> (accessed September 6, 2025), para. 582.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 579. *Prosecutor v. Dario Kordic & Mario Cerkez*, International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), Case IT-95-14/2-T, Judgement (in the Trial Chamber), February 26, 2001, <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/caselaw/icty/2001/en/19636> (accessed February 17, 2026), para. 179. *The Prosecutor vs. Clément Kayishema and Obed Ruzindana*, ICTR, Case No. ICTR-95-1-T, Judgement (Trial Chamber II), May 21, 1999, <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/caselaw/ictr/1999/en/62079> (accessed February 17, 2026), para. 123.

⁶⁰⁵ *Prosecutor v. Dragoljub Kunarac, Radomir Kovac and Zoran Vukovic*, ICTY, Case No. IT-96-23 & IT-96-23/1 A, Judgement (in the Appeals Chamber), June 12, 2002, <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/kunarac/acjug/en/kun-ajo20612e.pdf> (accessed February 17, 2026), para. 98.

⁶⁰⁶ Rome Statute, art 7(1)(g).

committed with the intent of either to kill or to cause serious bodily harm with the reasonable knowledge that it would likely lead to death.”⁶⁰⁷

The Rome Statute defines an enforced disappearance as the arrest or detention of someone by a state or political organization "followed by a refusal to acknowledge the arrest, detention, or abduction, or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time."⁶⁰⁸ Enforced disappearances not only violate various human rights law provisions, but they put the individual disappeared at heightened risk of torture and other ill-treatment, and take a terrible psychological toll on their families, who may wait long periods before finding out what happened to them.

Torture

The Rome Statute describes torture as "the intentional infliction of severe pain or suffering" that can be either physical or mental.⁶⁰⁹ The Rome Statute definition of torture as a crime against humanity does not require that it be inflicted with a specific prohibited purpose, such as to obtain a confession, meaning that certain acts of severe physical or mental pain or suffering would fall within the crimes against humanity definition of torture regardless of the purpose for which it was committed.

Persecution

The crime against humanity of persecution is also originally found in the Charter of the International Military Tribunal in 1945, which defined crimes against humanity as including "persecutions on political, racial or religious grounds."⁶¹⁰ The Rome Statute defines persecution as "the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to

⁶⁰⁷ See for example *Prosecutor v. Vidoje Blagojevic, Dragan Jokic*, ICTY, Case No. IT-02-60-T, Judgement (in Trial Chamber I, Section A), January 17, 2005, <https://www.refworld.org/jurisprudence/caselaw/icty/2005/en/91971> (accessed September 6, 2025), para. 556.

⁶⁰⁸ *Elements of Crimes* (The Hague: International Criminal Court, 2013), <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/3coe2d/pdf> (accessed March 5, 2026), art. 7(1)(i). Rome Statute, art. 7(2)(i).

⁶⁰⁹ Rome Statute, art. 7(2)(e).

⁶¹⁰ Agreement for the Prosecution and Punishment of the Major War Criminals of the European Axis, and Charter of the International Military Tribunal, 8 August 1945. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/assets/treaties/350-IHL-49-EN.pdf> (accessed March 5, 2026), art. 6.

international law by reason of the identity of the group or collectivity,” including on national, religious, or ethnic grounds.⁶¹¹

The crime of persecution entails intentionally discriminating on one of the recognized grounds set out above, in the denial of fundamental human rights.

Persecution is based on “political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious, gender ... or other grounds that are universally recognized as impermissible under international law.”⁶¹² Persecution operates as an umbrella term that encompasses other constitutive acts so long as they are committed with discriminatory intent.

Forced Displacement

The Rome Statute defines the crime against humanity of unlawful “deportation or forcible transfer” of a civilian population as “forced displacement of the persons concerned by expulsion or other coercive acts from the area in which they are lawfully present, without grounds permitted under international law,” when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against a civilian population. In this context, deportation refers to expulsion across an international border, while transfer refers to forced movement within a state; forced displacement can refer to either or both.⁶¹³

Legal Findings

War Crimes

Since September 2022, Burkinabè forces, VDPs, and Islamist armed groups have committed numerous serious violations of the laws of war that have targeted civilians. With respect to the armed forces and the VDPs, war crimes committed include directing attacks against the civilian population and civilian objects, carrying out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, summary killings, enforced disappearance, torture, sexual violence, and forced displacement of the civilian population. Burkinabè military and VDPs have been implicated in the looting and destruction of homes and shops, as well as other civilian property, including cattle across Burkina Faso.

⁶¹¹ Rome Statute, art. 7(2)(g).

⁶¹² Rome Statute, arts. 7(1)(h), (2)(g).

⁶¹³ Rome Statute, arts. 7(1)(d), (2)(d).

JNIM members have been responsible for directing attacks against the civilian population and civilian objects, carrying out indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, summary killings, abductions, and sexual violence. JNIM has pillaged, destroyed, or burned civilian property, including homes, shops, food, cattle, objects of aid agencies like cars, offices, and medical facilities, including hospitals, health centers, and pharmacies. JNIM has also destroyed or burned public infrastructure, including roads, bridges, electric lines, and telecommunication infrastructure.

Both the military and VDPs and JNIM have resorted to collective punishment, frequently in the form of broad and unlawful punitive measures against entire communities, typically in retaliation for actions taken by opposing forces.⁶¹⁴

The Burkina Faso government should impartially investigate and appropriately prosecute these cases as war crimes.

Crimes Against Humanity

The Rome Statute defines crimes against humanity as specified acts “committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.”⁶¹⁵ This definition can be broken down into four requirements: (1) that the attack is “widespread or systematic”; (2) that the attack is directed against a “civilian population”; (3) that the acts are committed “with knowledge of the attack”; and (4) that the acts are “pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit such attack.”⁶¹⁶

Human Rights Watch found that Burkina Faso government forces and VDPs as well as JNIM have committed serious violations as part of the same widespread and systematic attacks against the civilian population that amount to crimes against humanity.

The government’s massacres of civilians meet the requirement of a “widespread or systematic” attack. Since September 2022, Burkinabè forces and VDPs have been implicated in large-scale killings of civilians during numerous counterinsurgency

⁶¹⁴ See III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs, 5th Military Region (Boucle du Mouhoun Administrative Region), Operation Green Whirlwind 2 (Opération Tourbillon Vert 2), Boucle du Mouhoun Region, February 27 - April 2, 2025.

⁶¹⁵ Rome Statute, art. 7(1).

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, arts. 7(1), (2)(a).

operations across the country. The widespread killings of civilians took place during planned attacks and cannot be treated as isolated acts. Burkinabè forces entered villages and towns across the country, often accompanied by VDPs, deliberately killing civilians, including in several large-scale attacks that caused the death of hundreds of people, including many children.

JNIM was also implicated in widespread killings of civilians across Burkina Faso. JNIM deliberately massacred civilians, including children, in numerous attacks that also resulted in other abuses.

Many of the attacks were directed against a specific civilian population. Military and VDP attacks were committed against villages and towns in which the residents were ethnic Fulani, or members of other groups deemed to be supportive of Islamic armed groups. JNIM attacks were typically against villages and towns in which the civilians were considered to be assisting the military or joining the VDPs.

Government forces and VDPs targeted Fulani with killing, arbitrary arrests and detention, forced displacement, and other abuses as a whole group on the presumption that they supported or collaborated with Islamist armed groups.

Evidence that the atrocities against Fulani were committed “with knowledge of the attack” and that the government “actively promote[d] or encourage[d] such an attack against a civilian population” can be found in the geographic scope of the targeting of civilians and the clear increase in the intensity of anti-Fulani violence since the current junta took power; in anti-Fulani statements by the president and other senior officials; and in many attacks that demonstrate a close coordination between the military and VDPs across military units and layers of military hierarchy.⁶¹⁷

The commission of crimes against humanity can serve as the basis for individual criminal liability not only in the domestic courts of the country where the crimes took place, but also in international courts and tribunals, as well as in other country's courts under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Individual criminal liability extends beyond those who

⁶¹⁷ *Elements of Crimes* (The Hague: International Criminal Court, 2013), <https://www.legal-tools.org/doc/3coe2d/pdf> (accessed March 5, 2026), art. 7, Introduction, (3).

carry out the acts to those who order, assist, facilitate, aid, and abet the offense. Under the principle of command or superior responsibility, military and civilian officials up to the top of the chain of command can be held criminally responsible for crimes committed by their subordinates when they knew or should have known that such crimes were being committed but failed to take reasonable measures to prevent the crimes or punish those responsible.

Rights of Displaced People

International law entitles people who are victims of forced displacement the remedy of return to their home areas and property. The UN Security Council and other UN bodies have also repeatedly asserted the right of internally displaced persons to return to their former homes.

The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which are drawn from accepted principles of international law, emphasize that national governments bear primary responsibility to ensure protection and assistance during displacement and find durable solutions, setting out provisions relating to return, resettlement, and reintegration of internally displaced persons. Principle 28 states:

Competent authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Such authorities shall endeavor to facilitate the reintegration of returned or resettled internally displaced persons.⁶¹⁸

Burkina Faso is party to the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), which builds on the UN Guiding Principles. Under the Kampala Convention, the government is obligated to protect all persons against arbitrary displacement; to ensure assistance to internally displaced persons, including food, shelter, medical care, and education; to ensure freedom of

⁶¹⁸ Commission on Human Rights, “Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39, Addendum, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,” E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, February 11, 1998, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2> (accessed March 5, 2026), principle 28.

movement and residence; to provide effective remedies for displacement and damages; and to seek lasting or durable solutions to displacement by promoting and creating satisfactory conditions for voluntary return, local integration, or relocation on a sustainable basis and in circumstances of safety and dignity.⁶¹⁹

Ongoing since 2016, the armed conflict in Burkina Faso had displaced more than 2.3 million people as of December 2025. This includes over 2 million internally displaced persons and over 270,000 refugees in neighboring Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Togo.⁶²⁰

Right to Redress

Under international law, victims of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are entitled to redress, including reparation. The UN Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy provide that victims of gross violations have the right to receive “adequate, effective and prompt reparation for harm suffered.”⁶²¹ This right draws on the broader principle of a right to concrete and effective remedy in the face of violations.⁶²² The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights General Comment No. 4 also provides guidance on the right to redress for victims of torture and other forms of ill-treatment.⁶²³

Victims of serious violations are “persons who individually or collectively suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial

⁶¹⁹ African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), adopted October 23, 2009, entered into force December 6, 2012, https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/36846-treaty-kampala_convention.pdf (accessed March 6, 2026), arts. 3, 4, 9(2), 11 and 12.

⁶²⁰ UNHCR, Refugee Data Finder, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download> (accessed December 2, 2025).

⁶²¹ Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law, adopted by the General Assembly by its resolution 60/147 of December 16, 2005, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/basic-principles-and-guidelines-right-remedy-and-reparation> (accessed March 6, 2026), art. 2(c).

⁶²² International Commission of Jurists, “The Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Gross Human Rights Violations, A Practitioner’s Guide, Revised Edition,” October 2018, <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Universal-Right-to-a-Remedy-Publications-Reports-Practitioners-Guides-2018-ENG.pdf> (accessed March 6, 2026), pp. 52-83. Theo van Boven, “Victims’ Right to a Remedy and Reparation: The New United Nations Principles and Guidelines,” in *Reparations for Victims of Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity*, ed. Carla Ferstman et al. (Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2009), <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r26214.pdf> (accessed March 6, 2026), p. 22.

⁶²³ General Comment No. 4: The Right to Redress for Victims of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Punishment or Treatment (Article 5), adopted by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights on March 4, 2017, entered into force March 4, 2017, <https://achpr.au.int/en/node/893/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

impairment of their fundamental rights,” and include “the immediate family or dependents of the direct victim and persons who have suffered harm in intervening to assist victims in distress or to prevent victimization.”⁶²⁴

Reparation includes, among other aspects, restitution and compensation. Compensation is due when restitution cannot be obtained.⁶²⁵

People who have been unlawfully displaced, such as the victims of ethnic cleansing, are entitled to return to their homes or places of habitual residence, or, if their homes have been destroyed, to be compensated for the loss.⁶²⁶ Victims are also entitled to reparation for other rights violations committed as part of crimes against humanity and war crimes, for instance if they were detained arbitrarily, tortured, raped, if their family member was killed, or if their property, crops, or cattle were looted.

The Burkinabè government, as the competent authority, bears the primary responsibility to recover victims’ possessions and, if not possible, to provide them, or assist them in obtaining, compensation.⁶²⁷ The process of reparation and the right to return should not result in further human rights violations.

⁶²⁴ Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy, art. 8.

⁶²⁵ International Commission of Jurists, “The Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Gross Human Rights Violations,” pp. 156.

⁶²⁶ Basic Principles on the Right to a Remedy, arts. 19, 20. United Nations General Assembly, “Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,” A/51/18, September 30, 1996, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/51/18> (accessed March 6, 2026), General Recommendation XXII (49), adopted at the 1175th meeting, on 16 August 1996, p. 126-127.

⁶²⁷ UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, “Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (the Pinheiro Principles),” E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17, June 28, 2005, <https://www.unhcr.org/media/principles-housing-and-property-restitution-refugees-and-displaced-persons-pinheiro> (accessed March 6, 2026).

VI. Military Commanders Implicated in Abuses

The Burkinabè military is organized with a clear chain of command with the appointment and promotion of commanders and their authority over subordinates and territory delineated in decrees issued and signed by senior military leaders, including the leader of the junta, President Ibrahim Traoré, the minister of defense, and the chief of staff of the armed forces (CEMGA).

The government abuses documented in this report involved military units that fell under one of three chains of command: 1) military regions; 2) force groups under the National Theater Operations Command (COTN); or 3) since January 2024, Rapid Support Battalions (BIRs) and other rapid support units under the Special Rapid Intervention Brigade (BSIR). As VDPs are subordinate to the military, depending on the operation, they are also under the command and control of any of these three chains of command.

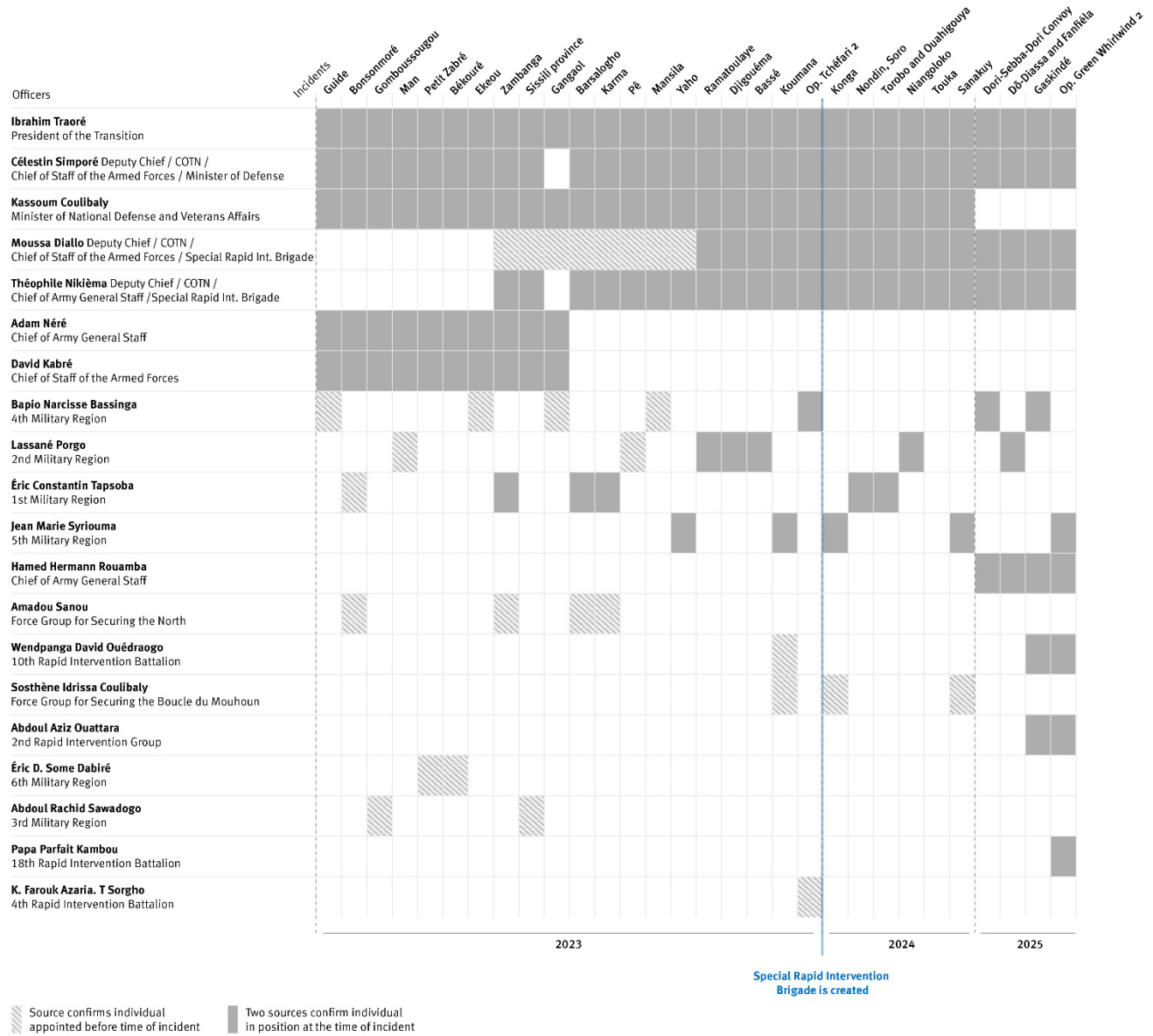
All of these chains of command ultimately report to the CEMGA, who is under the minister of defense, who in turn reports to President Traoré.

The major military operations documented in this report appear to have been closely monitored by Traoré, both defense ministers, and the three different CEMGAs, with frequent public speeches and appearances made alongside troops and commanders on the ground. Official state media regularly reported on the military operations, in particular those involving the BIRs across Burkina Faso.

Under international humanitarian law, senior civilian officials and military commanders can be held liable for ordering war crimes and, under the doctrine of command responsibility, for war crimes committed by their subordinates if they knew or should have known of the crimes and failed to prevent or take appropriate action against those responsible.

Officers in a Position of Command During Incidents in Burkina Faso Documented by Human Rights Watch

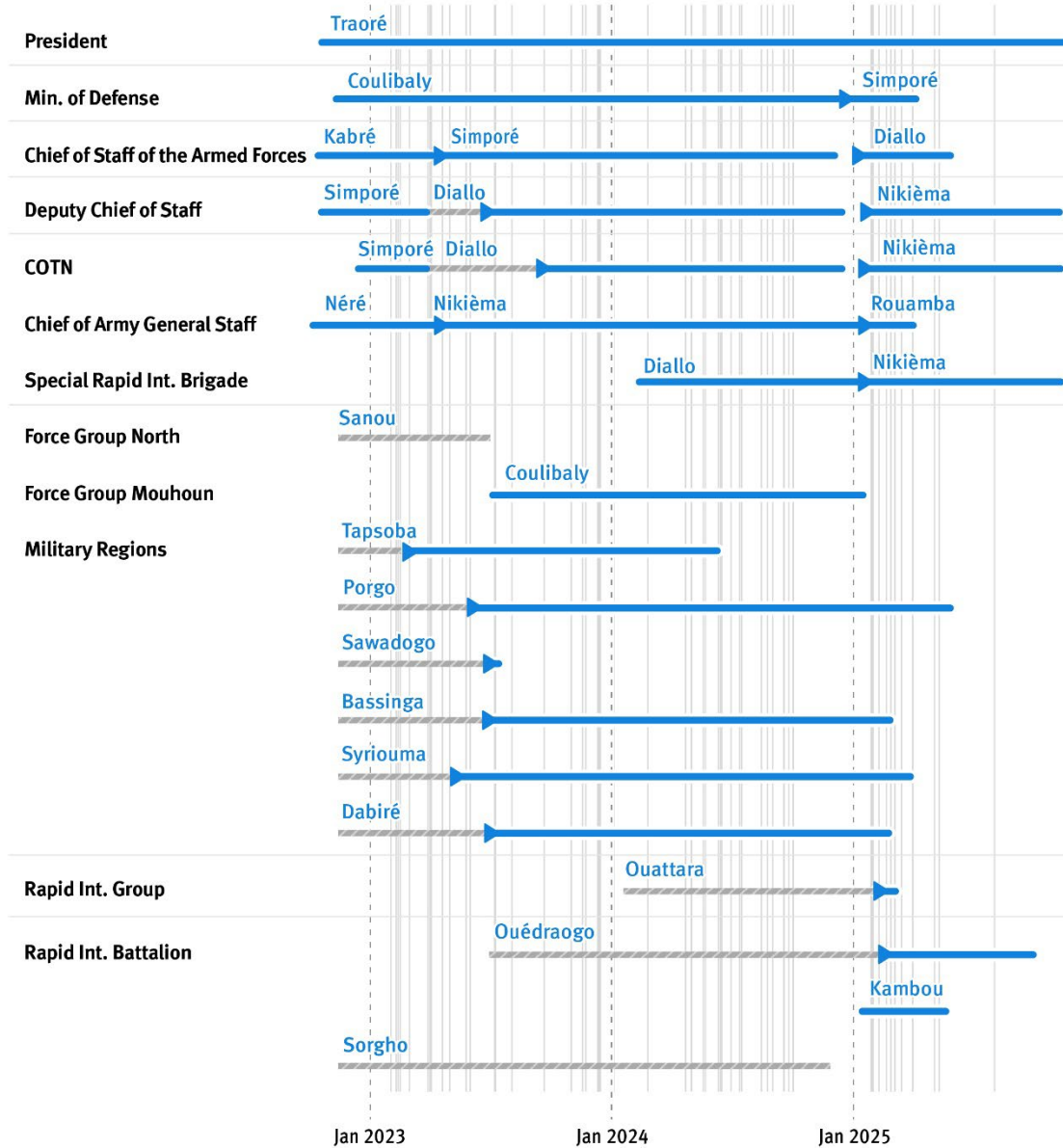
January 2023 – April 2025



Source: Human Rights Watch incident data with research support by Security Force Monitor.

Officers Occupying Key Chain of Command Roles Across Time

January 2023 – April 2025



▶ Change in Command
 ▬ Confirmed
 ▬▬▬ Appointed
 ||| Attacks on civilians

Source: Human Rights Watch incident data with research support by Security Force Monitor.

Capt. Ibrahim Traoré

President of the Transition

After removing then-President Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba from office and assuming power as the “interim president,” Captain Traoré formally became the “president of the transition” by signing the transition charter on October 14, 2022.⁶²⁸ As president of the transition, he has the constitutional powers of the president of Burkina Faso and is the supreme commander of the armed forces.⁶²⁹ These powers were reaffirmed in the amended transition charter of May 25, 2024.⁶³⁰

Traoré may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for all of the incidents documented in this report committed by Burkinabè security forces, including Operation Green Whirlwind 2 (Opération Tourbillon Vert 2) in the Boucle du Mohoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025; Operation Tchéfari 2 in the Sahel region between December 11 and December 14, 2023; and the operation of the convoy Dori-Sebba-Dori in the Sahel region between January and March 2025.

Col. Maj./Brig. Gen. Kassoum Coulibaly

Minister of National Defense and Veterans Affairs (November 2022 – December 2024)

Colonel Major Kassoum Coulibaly officially became minister of national defense and veterans affairs on November 3, 2022.⁶³¹ Traoré promoted Coulibaly to the rank of brigadier general on October 27, 2023.⁶³² Coulibaly continued to serve as minister until he was replaced on December 9, 2024.⁶³³

⁶²⁸ “Clôture des assises nationales : la Charte de la Transition signée, le Capitaine Ibrahim TRAORE Président du Faso,” *Service d’Information du Gouvernement du Burkina Faso*.

⁶²⁹ Charte de la Transition, arts. 4-5.

⁶³⁰ Charte de la Transition (Modifiée), arts. 4-5.

⁶³¹ Abdoul Ouegraogo, “Gouvernement de la transition : Le ministre en charge de la défense officiellement installé,” *Faso-actu*, November 3, 2022, <https://faso-actu.info/gouvernement-de-la-transition-le-ministre-en-charge-de-la-defense-officiellement-installe/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶³² “Burkina: Le ministre de la Défense promu général,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, October 28, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250421211836/https://www.aib.media/regions/2023/10/28/burkina-le-ministre-de-la-defense-promu-general/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶³³ “Le Burkina « portera les coups qu’il faut » aux terroristes, général Célestin Simporé,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, December 9, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241211234801/https://www.aib.media/le-burkina-portera-les-coups-quil-faut-aux-terroristes-general-celestin-simpore/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

As minister of national defense and veterans affairs, Coulibaly may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least 26 incidents documented in this report, including Nondin and Soro in the North region on February 25, 2024 and Operation Tchéfari 2 in the Sahel region from December 11 to December 14, 2023.⁶³⁴

Col. Maj./Brig. Gen. Célestin Simporé

Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, CEMGAA (February 2022 – March 2023)

Considered one of the Capt. Traoré’s military sponsors, and appreciated by Traoré for his “ideological loyalty,” Colonel Major Célestin Simporé assumed the role of CEMGAA on February 2, 2022.⁶³⁵ While in that position he also chaired the national assembly that designated Traoré as president of the transition in October 2022.⁶³⁶ Simporé continued to serve as CEMGAA until at least March 31, 2023, when he was appointed chief of staff of the armed forces.⁶³⁷ As CEMGAA, Simporé may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least eight incidents documented in this report, including Man in the Hauts-Bassins region in February 2023.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁴ He served as Minister of National Defense and Veterans Affairs during the following incidents: Barsalogo, Center-North region, April 20, 2023; Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, November 2023; Békouré, Center-East region, February 2023; Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North region, February 2023; Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins region, September 2023; Ekeou, February 15, 2023; Gangaol, April 3, 2023; Gomboussougou, Center-South region, February 2023; Guide, January-March 2023; Karma, North region, April 20, 2023; Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun region, January 2024; Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023; Man, Hauts-Bassins region, February 2023; Mansila, June 1, 2023; Niangoloko, Cascades region, Burkina Faso, June 14, 2024; Nondin, Soro, North region, February 25, 2024; Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel Region, December 11-14, 2023; Pê, Hauts-Bassins region, mid-late May 2023; Petit Zabré, Center-East region, February 2023; Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins region, July 8, 2023; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024; Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023; Torobo and Ouahigouya, North region, May 2024; Touka, Center-North region, July 13, 2024; Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun region, June 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023.

⁶³⁵ “Réaménagement à la tête de l’armée, levée du couvre-feu, frontières terrestres rouvertes, délégations spéciales,” *Burkina24*, February 2, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220202224034/https://burkina24.com/2022/02/02/burkina-faso-reamenagement-a-la-tete-de-larmee-nationale/> (accessed March 6, 2026). Aly Asmane Ascofaré, “Burkina Faso : 10 choses à savoir sur Célestin Simporé, le « super ministre » de la Guerre d’Ibrahim Traoré,” *Jeune Afrique*, February 5, 2026, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1757508/politique/burkina-faso-10-choses-a-savoir-sur-celestin-simpore-le-super-ministre-de-la-guerre-dibrahim-traore/> (accessed February 15, 2026).

⁶³⁶ “Burkina Faso : Des nominations au sein de l’armée au lendemain de l’incident de Ouagadougou près de la présidence...,” *Tic Infos*, April 2, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250212212311/https://ticinfos.com/2023/04/02/burkina-faso-des-nomination-au-sein-de-larmee-au-lendemain-de-lincident-de-ouagadougou-pres-de-la-presidence/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶³⁷ “Burkina : Le général de brigade Célestin Simporé nommé ministre de la Défense,” *LeFaso.net*, December 8, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241208223410/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article134669> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶³⁸ He served as CEMGAA during the following incidents: Békouré, Center-East region, February 2023; Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North region, February 2023; Ekeou, Sahel region, February 15, 2023; Gomboussougou, Center-South region, February 2023; Guide, Sahel region, January-March 2023; Man, Hauts-Bassins region, February 2023; Petit Zabré, Center-East region, February 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023.

National Theater Operations Command, COTN (December 2022 – March 2023)

While serving as CEMGAA, Simporé was also appointed as COTN commander on December 7, 2022, and was last seen in that position as of March 31, 2023.⁶³⁹

Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, CEMGA (April 2023 – December 2024)

Simporé officially became CEMGA on April 6, 2023.⁶⁴⁰ He was promoted in rank to brigadier general on November 3, 2023,⁶⁴¹ and continued to serve as CEMGA until at least December 8, 2024.⁶⁴²

As CEMGA, Simporé may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for 16 incidents in this report, including Nondin and Soro in the North region on February 25, 2024, and Operation Tchéfari 2 in the Sahel region from December 11 to 14, 2023.⁶⁴³

⁶³⁹ “Burkina Faso : Le colonel-major Célestin Simporé est nommé Chef d'état-major général des armées,” *Faso7*, March 31, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240725073909/https://faso7.com/2023/03/31/burkina-faso-le-colonel-major-celestin-simpore-est-nomme-chef-detat-major-general-des-armees/> (accessed March 6, 2026). Between the date of his appointment and the earliest date sources confirm he was in his position, the following incidents occurred: Békouré, Center-East region, February 2023; Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North region, February 2023; Ekeou, February 15, 2023; Gomboussougou, Center-South region, February 2023; Guide, January-March 2023; Man, Hauts-Bassins region, February 2023; Petit Zabré, Center-East region, February 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023.

⁶⁴⁰ “Burkina : Les offensives contre les terroristes vont s'accroître, Armée,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, April 6, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240913042802/https://www.aib.media/burkina-les-offensives-contre-les-terroristes-vont-saccroitre-armee/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁴¹ “Forces armées nationales : Le CEMGA, Colonel-major Célestin Simporé, reçoit ses attributs de Général de Brigade,” *LeFaso.net*, November 3, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20231104155915/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article125470> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁴² “Burkina: Le colonel Moussa Diallo élevé au grade de général de brigade,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, December 17, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250421214724/https://www.aib.media/regions/2024/12/17/burkina-le-colonel-moussa-diallo-eleve-au-grade-de-general-de-brigade/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁴³ He served as CEMGA for the following incidents: Barsalogo, Center-North region, April 20, 2023; Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, November 2023; Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins region, September 2023; Karma, North region, April 20, 2023; Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun region, January 2024; Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023; Mansila, Sahel region, June 1, 2023; Niangoloko, Cascades region, June 14, 2024; Nondin and Soro, North region, February 25, 2024; Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel region, December 11-14, 2023; Pê, Hauts-Bassins region, mid-late May 2023; Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins region, July 8, 2023; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024; Torobo and Ouahigouya, North region, May 2024; Touka, Center-North region, July 13, 2024; Yahoo, Boucle du Mouhoun region, June 2023. As noted, Simporé became CEMGA on April 6, 2023 which partially overlaps with the incidents Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023 and Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether the abuses occurred during the period Simporé held the position and thus these incidents have not been included in the overall count of incidents for this position.

Minister of National Defense and Veterans Affairs (December 2024 to at least April 2025)

On December 9, 2024, Simporé officially became minister of national defense and veterans affairs,⁶⁴⁴ and he continued to serve as minister until at least April 10, 2025.⁶⁴⁵

In this role, Simporé may have been liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least four incidents documented in this report, including Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025, and the operation of the Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy in the Sahel region between January and March 2025.⁶⁴⁶

Col./Brig. Gen. Moussa Diallo

Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, CEMGAA

Colonel Moussa Diallo was appointed to CEMGAA on March 31, 2023⁶⁴⁷ and had taken the position by at least June 16, 2023.⁶⁴⁸ He served as CEMGAA until at least December 19, 2024.⁶⁴⁹

As CEMGAA, he may have been liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least 11 incidents, including Nondin and Soro in the North region on February 25, 2024, and Operation Tchéfari 2 in the Sahel region from December 11 to 14, 2023.⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁴ “Le Burkina « portera les coups qu’il faut » aux terroristes, général Célestin Simporé,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁶⁴⁵ Evariste Yoda, “Ministère de la Défense nationale et des Anciens combattants : le programme d’activités 2025 en examen,” *Sidwaya*, April 10, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250411001008/https://www.sidwaya.info/ministere-de-la-defense-nationale-et-des-anciens-combattants-le-programme-dactivites-2025-en-examen/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁴⁶ He served as Minister of National Defense and Veterans Affairs for the following incidents: Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins region, January 31, 2025; Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel region, January-March 2025; Gaskindé, Sahel region, February 20, 2025; Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun region, February 27 – April 2, 2025.

⁶⁴⁷ “Burkina : Le colonel Moussa Diallo nommé chef d’État major général adjoint des Armées (décret),” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, March 31, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240908061252/https://www.aib.media/burkina-le-colonel-moussa-diallo-nomme-chef-detat-major-general-adjoint-des-armees-decret/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁴⁸ Gaoussou Ouegraogo, “Bobo-Dioulasso : Un mort et des blessés lors d’une expédition militaire,” *Minute.bf*, June 16, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230616180736/https://www.minute.bf/bobo-dioulasso-un-mort-et-des-blesses-lors-dune-expedition-militaire/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁴⁹ “Burkina/Chef d’État-Major : Le Général de brigade Moussa Diallo s’engage à servir avec loyauté et patriotisme,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, December 30, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250122104830/https://www.aib.media/burkina-chef-detat-major-le-general-de-brigade-moussa-diallo-sengage-a-servir-avec-loyaute-et-patriotisme/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁵⁰ He served as CEMGAA during the following incidents: Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, November 2023; Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins region, September 2023; Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun region, January 2024; Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023; Niangoloko, Cascades region, June 14, 2024; Nondin and Soro, North region, February 25, 2024; Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel region, December 11-14, 2023; Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins region, July 8, 2023; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024; Torobo and Ouahigouya, North region, May 2024; Touka, Center-North region, July 13, 2024. Additionally, the following incidents occurred between his appointment as CEMGAA and the earliest date sources confirm he

National Theatre Operations Command, COTN

In addition to serving as CEMGAA, Diallo was appointed as COTN commander in April 2023,⁶⁵¹ and was in that position by at least September 7, 2023.⁶⁵² He served as COTN commander until at least December 19, 2024.⁶⁵³

As COTN commander he may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least ten incidents, including Operation Tchéfari 2 in the Sahel region from December 11 to 14, 2023.⁶⁵⁴

had taken up the position: Barsalogo, Center-North region, April 20, 2023; Gangaol, Sahel region, April 3, 2023; Karma, North region, April 20, 2023; Mansila, Sahel region, June 1, 2023; Pê, Hauts-Bassins region, mid-late May 2023; Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023; Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun region, June 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023.

⁶⁵¹ “Burkina : « Nous devons demeurer professionnels et agir dans le strict respect des droits humains et de la dignité », exhorte le CEMGA, général de brigade Moussa Diallo,” *LeFaso.net*, December 30, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250101113854/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article135158> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁵² “Ouagadougou : Dr Arouna Louré arrêté à hôpital Schiphra par des militaires armés,” *Ouaga.com*, September 13, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250502183647/http://news.aouaga.com/h/150302.html> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁵³ “Le Général de Brigade Moussa Diallo prend officiellement les rênes de l’Etat Major Général des Armées,” *Toute Info*, December 30, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250504184535/https://www.touteinfo.com/spip.php?article5222> (accessed March 6, 2026). “Burkina/Armée : Le colonel Théophile Nikiéma nommé commandant de la Brigade spéciale d’intervention rapide,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, December 20, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241221004231/https://www.aib.media/burkina-armee-le-colonel-theophile-nikiema-nomme-commandant-de-la-brigade-speciale-d-intervention-rapide/> (accessed March 6, 2026). “Burkina/Chef d’État-Major : Le Général de brigade Moussa Diallo s’engage à servir avec loyauté et patriotisme,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁶⁵⁴ He served as COTN commander during the following incidents: Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, November 2023; Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins region, September 2023; Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun region, January 2024; Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023; Niangoloko, Cascades region, Burkina Faso, June 14, 2024; Nondin and Soro, North region, February 25, 2024; Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel region, December 11-14, 2023; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024; Torobo and Ouahigouya, North region, May 2024; Touka, Center-North region, July 13, 2024. Additionally, the following incidents occurred between his appointment as COTN commander and earliest date sources confirm he had taken up the position: Barsalogo, Center-North region, April 20, 2023; Gangaol, Sahel region, April 3, 2023; Karma, North region, April 20, 2023; Mansila, Sahel region, June 1, 2023; Pê, Hauts-Bassins region, mid-late May 2023; Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins region, July 8, 2023; Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023; Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun region, June 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023.

Special Rapid Intervention Brigade, BSIR

While serving as both CEMGAA and commander of the COTN, Diallo was also appointed as the first BSIR commander on January 19, 2024.⁶⁵⁵ He was in the position by at least February 12, 2024,⁶⁵⁶ and served until January 10, 2025.⁶⁵⁷

Traoré promoted Diallo to the rank of brigadier general by decree on December 17, 2024,⁶⁵⁸ personally presenting Diallo with his new rank in a ceremony on December 20, 2024.⁶⁵⁹ This promotion is notable because Diallo was technically promoted twice. He went straight from a colonel to a brigadier general, skipping the rank of colonel major, which is the next rank in the Burkinabè military.⁶⁶⁰ This is the only known example of a senior officer being promoted so quickly in the Burkinabè military during the period covered in this report.

As BSIR commander, he may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for five incidents in the report, including Nondin and Soro in the North region on February 25, 2024.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁵ “Burkina : Le colonel Moussa Diallo prend la tête de la Brigade spéciale et d’intervention rapide,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.aib.media/regions/2024/01/19/burkina-le-colonel-moussa-diallo-prend-la-tete-de-la-brigade-speciale-et-dintervention-rapide/> (accessed March 6, 2026).

⁶⁵⁶ Atiana Serge Oulon, “Force armée nationale : L’ascension du colonel Moussa Diallo,” *L’Événement*, February 12, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250207081150/https://www.evenement-bf.net/forces-armees-nationale-lascension-du-colonel-moussa-diallo/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁶⁵⁷ “Le Colonel Théophile Nikiema, nouveau commandant de la Brigade Spéciale et d’Intervention Rapide (BSIR),” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 10, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/2025011035021/https://www.aib.media/le-colonel-theophile-nikiema-nouveau-commandant-de-la-brigade-speciale-et-dintervention-rapide-bsir/> (accessed October 6, 2025).

⁶⁵⁸ “Burkina: Le colonel Moussa Diallo élevé au grade de général de brigade,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁶⁵⁹ “Burkina/Chef d’État-Major : Le Général de brigade Moussa Diallo s’engage à servir avec loyauté et patriotisme,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁶⁶⁰ Loi n°038-2016/AN portant statut général des personnels des Forces armées nationales, https://web.archive.org/web/20210812142452/https://www.defense.gov.bf/fileadmin/user_upload/stockage/images/loi_038_statut_general_fan.pdf (accessed March 13, 2026). Loi n°039-2024/ALT portant statut général des personnels des Forces armées nationales, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250418190452/https://www.assembleenationale.bf/storage/Loi/Kge95VhUvAGgXqIDCSDzDxjYf9TxM5UdWfjer80e.pdf> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁶⁶¹ He served as BSIR commander during the following incidents: Niangoloko, Cascades region, Burkina Faso, June 14, 2024; Nondin, Soro, North region, February 25, 2024; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024; Torobo and Ouahigouya, North region, May 2024; Touka, Center-North region, July 13, 2024.

Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, CEMGA

After his promotion to brigadier general, Diallo officially became CEMGA on December 30, 2024,⁶⁶² and served in this position until at least May 30, 2025.⁶⁶³

Diallo as CEMGA may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for five incidents documented in this report, including the operation of the Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy in the Sahel region between January and March 2025 and Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025.⁶⁶⁴

Col. Théophile Nikièma

Chief of Army General Staff, CEMAT

Colonel Théophile Nikièma became CEMAT on April 7, 2023.⁶⁶⁵ He served in that position until January 9, 2025, when he was replaced.⁶⁶⁶

As CEMAT, Nikièma may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for 16 incidents, including Nondin and Soro in the North region on February 25, 2024, and Operation Tchéfari 2 in the Sahel region from December 11 to 14, 2023.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶² “Burkina/Chef d’État-Major : Le Général de brigade Moussa Diallo s’engage à servir avec loyauté et patriotisme,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁶⁶³ “Burkina/Education : Le Prytanée militaire du Kadiogo récompense ses meilleurs élèves,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, May 31, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250403081242/https://www.aib.media/tournee-de-prise-de-commandement-le-cemga-en-visite-a-armee-de-terre-du-burkina-faso/> (accessed June 3 2025).

⁶⁶⁴ He served as CEMGA during the following incidents: Dô-Diassa and Faniéla, Hauts-Bassins region, January 31, 2025; Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel region, January-March 2025; Gaskindé, Sahel region, February 20, 2025; Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, February 27 – April 2, 2025; Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel region, December 11-14, 2023.

⁶⁶⁵ Cryspin Laoundiki, “Burkina : Le colonel Théophile Nikièma installé chef d’état-major de l’armée de terre,” *LeFaso.net*, April 7, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230407181603/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article120678> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁶⁶ Cryspin Laoundiki, “Burkina : Le colonel Hamed Hermann Rouamba installé chef d’état-major de l’armée de terre,” *LeFaso.net*, January 10, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/2025011042338/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article135354> (accessed September 13, 2025).

⁶⁶⁷ He served as CEMGA for the following incidents: Barsalogo, Center-North region, April 20, 2023; Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, November 2023; Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins region, September 2023; Karma, North region, April 20, 2023; Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun region, January 2024; Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023; Mansila, Sahel region, June 1, 2023; Niangoloko, Cascades region, June 14, 2024; Nondin and Soro, North region, February 25, 2024; Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel region, December 11-14, 2023; Pê, Hauts-Bassins region, mid-late May 2023; Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins region, July 8, 2023; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024; Torobo and Ouahigouya, North region, May 2024; Touka, Center-North region, July 13, 2024; Yahoo, Boucle du Mouhoun region, June 2023. As noted, Simporé became CEMGA on April 6, 2023 which partially overlaps with the incidents Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023 and Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether

Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, CEMGAA

Nikièma was appointed as CEMGAA on December 30, 2024 and had taken up that position by at least January 10, 2025.⁶⁶⁸ He continued to serve in this position until at least November 12, 2025.⁶⁶⁹

As CEMGAA, he may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for four incidents, including the operation of the Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy in the Sahel region between January and March 2025 and Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025.⁶⁷⁰

National Theater Operations Command, COTN

In addition to his role as CEMGAA, Nikièma was also in the position of COTN commander by at least January 7, 2025,⁶⁷¹ and he continued to serve in this position until at least November 12, 2025.⁶⁷²

As COTN commander, he may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for four incidents, including the operation of the Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy in the Sahel region between January and March 2025 and Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025.⁶⁷³

the abuses occurred during the period Simporé held the position and thus these incidents have not been included in the overall count of incidents for this position.

⁶⁶⁸ “Brigade spéciale d’intervention rapide : le Colonel Théophile Nikiéma prend le commandement,” video clip, YouTube, *Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, January 10, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXONLmP1Dw> (accessed March 25, 2026).

⁶⁶⁹ Alice Suglimani Thiombiano, “Burkina Faso : Le Commandant COTN le Colonel Théophile Nikiéma encourage les troupes de la 6^e Région Militaire,” *Faso7*, November 16, 2025, <https://faso7.com/2025/11/16/burkina-faso-le-commandant-cotn-le-colonel-theophile-nikiema-encourage-les-troupes-de-la-6%E1%B5%89-region-militaire/> (accessed March 11, 2026).

⁶⁷⁰ He served as CEMGAA commander during the following incidents: Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins region, January 31, 2025; Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel region, January-March 2025; Gaskindé, Sahel region, February 20, 2025; Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun region, February 27 – April 2, 2025.

⁶⁷¹ L’Observateur Paalga’s Facebook page, “Le CL NIKIEMA Théophile est nommé CEMGA adjoint...,” January 7, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20250503160631/https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=899646449031609&id=100069587875094&_rd=1 (accessed September 11, 2025).

⁶⁷² Thiombiano, “Burkina Faso : Le Commandant COTN le Colonel Théophile Nikiéma encourage les troupes de la 6^e Région Militaire,” *Faso7*.

⁶⁷³ He served as COTN commander during the following incidents: Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins region, January 31, 2025; Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel region, January-March 2025; Gaskindé, Sahel region, February 20, 2025; Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun region, February 27 – April 2, 2025.

Special Rapid Intervention Brigade, BSIR

Nikiéma became BSIR commander on January 10, 2025,⁶⁷⁴ and he continued to serve in that position until at least November 12, 2025.⁶⁷⁵

As BSIR commander, he may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for four incidents, including the operation of the Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy in the Sahel region between January and March 2025, and Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025.⁶⁷⁶

Col. Maj. David Kabré

Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, CEMGA

Colonel Major David Kabré became CEMGA on February 9, 2022,⁶⁷⁷ and served in that position until then Col. Maj. Célestin Simporé replaced him on April 6, 2023.⁶⁷⁸

As CEMGA, Kabré may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for nine incidents documented in this report, including Man in the Hauts-Bassins region in February 2023.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁴ “Le Colonel Théophile Nikiéma, nouveau commandant de la Brigade Spéciale et d’Intervention Rapide (BSIR),” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁶⁷⁵ Thiombiano, “Burkina Faso : Le Commandant COTN le Colonel Théophile Nikiéma encourage les troupes de la 6^e Région Militaire,” *Faso7*.

⁶⁷⁶ He served as BSIR commander during the following incidents: Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins region, January 31, 2025; Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel region, January-March 2025; Gaskindé, Sahel region, February 20, 2025; Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun region, February 27 – April 2, 2025.

⁶⁷⁷ “Burkina/Lutte contre le terrorisme : Le colonel major David Kabré prône la conjugaison des efforts,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, February 9, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250421224425/https://www.aib.media/burkina-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-le-colonel-major-david-kabre-prone-la-conjugaison-des-efforts/> (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁶⁷⁸ “Burkina : Les offensives contre les terroristes vont s’accroître, Armée,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁶⁷⁹ He served as CEMGA during the following incidents: Békouré, Center-East region, February 2023; Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North region, February 2023; Ekeou, Sahel region, February 15, 2023; Gangaol, Sahel region, April 3, 2023; Gomboussougou, Center-South region, February 2023; Guide, Sahel region, January-March 2023; Man, Hauts-Bassins region, February 2023; Petit Zabré, Center-East region, February 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023. As noted, Kabré was CEMGA until April 6, 2023 which partially overlaps with the incident Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023. Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether all of the abuses occurred during the period Kabré held the position and thus the incident has not been included in the overall count of incidents for this position. Kabré served as CEMGA during the apparent summary executions on March 29, 2023 in Zambanga, Center-North region and the other events of Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023 may have occurred while he was CEMGA. This incident is included in the overall count of incidents for Kabré as CEMGA.

Col. Adam Néré

Chief of Army General Staff, CEMAT

Colonel Adam Néré became CEMAT on February 10, 2022,⁶⁸⁰ and served in that position until April 7, 2023.⁶⁸¹

As CEMAT, Néré may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for nine incidents, including Man in the Hauts-Bassins region in February 2023 and Petit Zabré in the Center-East region in February 2023.⁶⁸²

Cdt./Lt. Col. Lassané Porgo

2nd Military Region

Commandant Lassané Porgo was appointed to be commander of the 2nd Military Region on November 14, 2022,⁶⁸³ and had taken up the position by at least May 31, 2023.⁶⁸⁴ He held the rank of commandant until at least December 31, 2024,⁶⁸⁵ and by at least April 3,

⁶⁸⁰ “Etat-major de l’armée de Terre : Le colonel Adam Néré prend les rênes,” *Sidwaya*, February 10, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241209123024/https://www.sidwaya.info/etat-major-de-larmee-de-terre-le-colonel-adam-nere-prend-les-renes/> (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁶⁸¹ Laoundiki, “Burkina : Le colonel Théophile Nikièma installé chef d’état-major de l’armée de terre,” *LeFaso.net*.

⁶⁸² He served as CEMAT during the following incidents: Békouré, Center-East region, February 2023; Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North region, February 2023; Ekeou, February 15, 2023; Gangaol, April 3, 2023; Gomboussougou, Center-South region, February 2023; Guide, Sahel region, January-March 2023; Man, Hauts-Bassins region, February 2023; Petit Zabré, Center-East region, February 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023. As noted, Néré was CEMAT until April 7, 2023 which partially overlaps with the incident Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023. Human Rights Watch has not been included in the overall count of incidents for this position. Néré served as CEMAT during the apparent summary executions on March 29, 2023 in Zambanga, Center-North region and the other events of Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023 may have occurred while he was CEMAT. This incident is included in the overall count of incidents for Néré as CEMAT.

⁶⁸³ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées, https://web.archive.org/web/20221115210830/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_portant-nomination-de-commandants-de-regions-Militaires-et-Assimilees-CDT-RM.pdf (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁸⁴ “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, June 6, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241110093451/https://www.aib.media/contingent-exceptionnel-complementaire-de-la-classe-2023-882-soldats-renforcent-les-rangs-des-forces-armees-nationales/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁸⁵ “Garnisons de Banfora et de Bobo-Dioulasso : Une délégation gouvernementale galvanise les forces combattantes,” *Ministère de la Fonction Publique, du Travail et de la Protection Sociale news release*, December 31, 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20250504152259/https://www.fonction-publique.gov.bf/accueil/actualites/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=2247&cHash=c19d7fe1d394fed91507fae61e02e26a (accessed September 11, 2025).

2025, had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel.⁶⁸⁶ He continued to serve as commander to at least June 1, 2025.⁶⁸⁷

As commander of the 2nd Military Region, Porgo may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least five incidents, including Bassé in the Hauts-Bassins region in late November 2023 and Ramatoulaye in the Hauts-Bassins region on July 8, 2023.⁶⁸⁸

Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga

4th Military Region

Lieutenant Colonel Bapio Narcisse Bassinga was appointed as commander of the 4th Military Region on November 14, 2022,⁶⁸⁹ and was in his position as commander by at least June 20, 2023.⁶⁹⁰ His rank was last reported as lieutenant colonel as of July 11, 2024,⁶⁹¹ and he was promoted to the rank of colonel at some point between July 11, 2024, and February 28, 2025, when he was replaced as commander of the 4th Military Region and transferred to be commander of the Central Army Group.⁶⁹²

As commander of the 4th Military Region, he may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least two incidents, including Gaskindé in the Sahel region on

⁶⁸⁶ “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique : Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique : Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline*, April 8, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250504000952/https://www.aib.media/regions/2025/04/08/journees-nationales-dengagement-patriotique-des-burkinabe-invites-a-promouvoir-lordre-et-la-discipline/> (accessed May 4, 2025).

⁶⁸⁷ “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*, June 1, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250605192645/https://aconews.net/securisation-des-examens-scolaires-le-ministre-en-charge-de-leducation-de-base-remercie-les-fds/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁸⁸ He served as commander of the 2nd Military Region during the following incidents: Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, November 2023; Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins region, September 2023; Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins region, January 31, 2025; Niangoloko, Cascades region, June 14, 2024; Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins region, July 8, 2023. Additionally, some incidents occurred between his date of appointment and the earliest date sources confirm he was in his position: Man, Hauts-Bassins region, February 2023; Pê, Hauts-Bassins region, mid-late May 2023.

⁶⁸⁹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁶⁹⁰ “Burkina/Défense nationale : Le patron de l’Armée de terre échange avec la troupe à Kaya et à Dori,” *LeFaso.net*, June 21, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230621181903/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article122360>, June 21, 2023 (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁶⁹¹ Ali Mamoudou Maïga, “Centre médical militaire de Dori: Des infrastructures sanitaires, du matériel biomédical et bureautique réceptionnés,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, July 11, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240912084729/https://www.aib.media/regions/2024/07/11/centre-medical-militaire-de-dori-des-infrastructures-sanitaires-du-materiel-biomedical-et-bureautique-receptionnees/> (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁶⁹² Souaïbou Nombre, “4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement,” *Sidwaya*, March 2, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250405231216/https://www.sidwaya.info/4e-region-militaire-le-chef-de-bataillon-amadou-sanou-prend-le-commandement/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

February 20, 2025, and Operation Tchéfari 2 in the Sahel region between December 11 and 14, 2023.⁶⁹³

Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba

1st Military Region

Lieutenant Colonel Éric Constantin Tapsoba was appointed as commander of the 1st military region on November 14, 2022,⁶⁹⁴ and had taken up that position by at least February 17, 2023.⁶⁹⁵ He continued to command the 1st Military Region until he was replaced on June 12, 2024.⁶⁹⁶

Lt. Col. Tapsoba may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least five incidents documented in this report, including Nondin and Soro in the North region on February 25, 2024, and Torobo and Ouahigouya in the North region in May 2024.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹³ Additionally, between the date of his appointment and the earliest date sources confirm he was in this position, the following incidents occurred: Guide, Sahel region, January-March, 2023; Ekeou, Sahel region, February 15, 2023; Gangaol, Sahel region, April 3, 2023.

⁶⁹⁴ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁶⁹⁵ On November 14, 2022, six commanders (Abdoul Rachid Sawadogo, Bapio Narcisse Bassinga, Éric Constantin Tapsoba, Eric D. Some Dabiré, Jean Marie Syriouma, and Lassané Porgo) were appointed for each of the six military regions. However, unlike every other military position, the formal ceremonies for these six commanders to be installed in their positions took place a significant period of time after the appointment decree. For Dabiré, his ceremony did not take place for more than a year, and the others did not have ceremonies until June 2023. Between the announcement of the appointments and the ceremonies, two commanders, Tapsoba and Porgo, were reported to be serving in their positions. Thus, for all six, the date of appointment is used in the analysis of any links between them and reported incidents. See Dieu-Donné Windpouyré Ouédraogo, “Complexe social de la première région militaire : Soutenir les FDS blessées et les ayants droits de celles tombées,” *L’Observateur Paalga*, February 18, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250504154810/https://www.lobspaalga.com/2023/02/18/complexe-social-de-la-premiere-region-militaire-soutenir-les-fds-blessees-et-les-ayants-droits-de-elles-tombees/> (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁶⁹⁶ Émil Abdoul Razak Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, July 25, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240912091518/https://www.aib.media/regions/2024/07/25/burkina-le-chef-de-bataillon-hamado-bambara-commande-desormais-la-1ere-region-militaire/> (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁶⁹⁷ He served as commander during the following incidents: Barsalogho, Center-North region, April 20, 2023; Karma, North region, April 20, 2023; Nondin and Soro, North region, February 25, 2024; Torobo and Ouahigouya, North region, May 2024; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023. Additionally, between his date of appointment and the earliest date that sources indicate he was in his position, the following incident occurred: Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North region, February 2023.

Cdt./Lt. Col. Jean Marie Syriouma

5th Military Region

Commandant Jean Marie Syriouma (also referred to as Jean Marie Siryouma⁶⁹⁸ or Jean-Marie Souriouma⁶⁹⁹) was appointed as commander of the 5th Military Region on November 14, 2022,⁷⁰⁰ and had taken up this position by at least April 2023.⁷⁰¹ On April 3, 2025, he was replaced as commander, and by that date had also been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel.⁷⁰²

Syriouma may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for five incidents documented in this report, including Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025, and Sanakuy in the Boucle du Mouhoun region on August 15, 2024.⁷⁰³

Col. Hamed Hermann Rouamba

Chief of Army General Staff, CEMAT

Colonel Hamed Hermann Rouamba became CEMAT on January 9, 2025,⁷⁰⁴ and continued to hold that position until at least April 3, 2025.⁷⁰⁵

Rouamba may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for four incidents documented in this report, including the operation of the Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy in the

⁶⁹⁸ Yacouba Sama, “Forces armées nationales : Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les rênes de la 5e Région militaire,” *LeFaso.net*, April 4, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250404154421/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article137207> (accessed October 10, 2025).

⁶⁹⁹ Hamadou Ouedraogo, “Le président Traoré nomme de nouveaux commandants de régions militaires,” *Burkina24*, November 15, 2022, <https://burkina24.com/2022/11/15/le-president-traore-nomme-de-nouveaux-commandants-de-regions-militaires/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁷⁰⁰ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁷⁰¹ “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, April 4, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20250404135044/https://www.aib.media/mouhoun-5e-region-militaire-le-lieutenant-colonel-sosthene-idrissa-coulibaly-prend-les-commandes/%22%20/t%20%22_blank (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁷⁰² Ibid.

⁷⁰³ He served as commander during the following incidents: Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun region, January 2024; Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023; Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun region, February 27 – April 2, 2025; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024; Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun region, June 2023.

⁷⁰⁴ Laoundiki, “Burkina : Le colonel Hamed Hermann Rouamba installé chef d'état-major de l'armée de terre,” *LeFaso.net*.

⁷⁰⁵ “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

Sahel region between January and March 2025 and Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025.⁷⁰⁶

Capt. Amadou Sanou

Capt. Amadou Sanou is likely the same person as Amadou Sanou who became the commander of the 4th military region in a formal ceremony on February 28, 2025. However, public sourcing has yet to confirm this.

Force Group for Securing the North

Sanou was appointed commander of the force group for securing the North on November 14, 2022,⁷⁰⁷ and was in that position by at least July 2, 2023.⁷⁰⁸ His career after this date is not currently established by public sources.⁷⁰⁹

Cdt./Lt. Col. Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly

Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun

Commandant Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun on June 30, 2023.⁷¹⁰ He was in the position and had

⁷⁰⁶ He served as CEMAT during the following incidents: Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins region, January 31, 2025; Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel region, January-March 2025; Gaskindé, Sahel region, February 20, 2025; Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun region, February 27 – April 2, 2025.

⁷⁰⁷ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces, https://web.archive.org/web/20221115210851/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_Portant-nomination-des-commandants-de-groupements-des-forces-CDT-GFS.pdf (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁷⁰⁸ Jules César Kabore, “Reconquête de l’intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkinaz4*, October 25, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240910215129/https://burkinaz4.com/2023/10/25/reconquete-de-lintegrite-territoriale-au-front-avec-les-forces-combattantes/> (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁷⁰⁹ Between the date of his appointment and the earliest date sources confirm he was in his position, the following incidents occurred: Barsalogo, Center-North region, April 20, 2023; Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North region, February 2023; Karma, North region, April 20, 2023; Zambanga, Center-North region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023.

⁷¹⁰ Bernard Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L’Observateur Paalga*, July 2, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250505172145/https://www.lobspaalga.com/2023/07/02/forces-armees-nationales-le-capitaine-ibrahim-traore-procede-a-des-nominations/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel as of January 18, 2025.⁷¹¹ He became commander of the 5th Military Region on April 3, 2025.⁷¹²

Capt. Wendpanga David Ouédraogo

10th Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR 10)

Captain Wendpanga David Ouédraogo, also referred to as David Ouédraogo or David W. Ouédraogo, was appointed as commander of the 10th Rapid Intervention Battalion on June 30, 2023,⁷¹³ and was in that position by at least February 8, 2025.⁷¹⁴ He continued to serve as commander until at least October 4, 2025.⁷¹⁵

Ouédraogo may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least two incidents mentioned in this report, including Gaskindé in the Sahel region on February 20, 2025, and Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹¹ “Le Commandant de la 5e Légion aux côtés des hommes engagés sur le théâtre des opérations,” *Gendarmerie nationale du Burkina Faso press release*, January 21, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250208162020/https://gendarmerienationale.bf/le-commandant-de-la-5e-legion-aux-cotes-des-hommes-engages-sur-les-sur-le-theatre-des-operations/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁷¹² “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Additionally, between the date of his appointment and the earliest date sources indicate he was in his position, the following incidents occurred: Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun region, January 2024; Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023; Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun region, August 15, 2024.

⁷¹³ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L'Observateur Paalga*. Carine P. Zongo, “Burkina Faso : des nominations dans l'Armée,” *24heures.bf*, July 2, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240228164204/https://www.24heures.bf/burkina-faso-des-nominations-dans-larmee/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁷¹⁴ “Mouhoun : Des jeunes sensibilisés dans la lutte pour la souveraineté nationale,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, February 10, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250325160641/https://www.aib.media/mouhoun-des-jeunes-sensibilises-dans-la-lutte-pour-la-souverainete-nationale/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Ouédraogo continued to serve as commander until at least October 4, 2025. See “Mouhoun/Le Vent Républicain : La contribution des femmes à la Révolution progressiste populaire au cœur des échanges,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, October 6, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20251007233516/https://www.aib.media/mouhoun-le-vent-republicain-la-contribution-des-femmes-a-la-revolution-progressiste-populaire-au-coeur-des-echanges/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁶ Additionally, between the date of his appointment and the date of the earliest source confirming he had taken up his position, the following incident occurred: Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun region, November 23, 2023.

Capt. Abdoul Aziz Ouattara

2nd Rapid Intervention Group

Captain Abdoul Aziz Ouattara, also called Watao⁷¹⁷ or Wattao,⁷¹⁸ was appointed commander of the 2nd Rapid Intervention Group on January 19, 2024,⁷¹⁹ and had taken up that position by at least January 2025.⁷²⁰ He continued to serve in that position until at least March 10, 2025.⁷²¹

Ouattara may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for at least one incident mentioned in this report, Gaskindé in the Sahel region on February 20, 2025. He also has command responsibility for incidents that occurred as part of Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025, to at least March 10, 2025, the last date his position as commander is currently confirmed by sources.

Capt. Papa Parfait Kambou

18th Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR 18)

Captain Papa Parfait Kambou became commander of BIR 18 on January 8, 2025,⁷²² and continued to serve in that position until at least May 25, 2025.⁷²³

Kambou may be liable as a matter of command responsibility for Operation Green Whirlwind 2 in the Boucle du Mouhoun region between February 27 and April 2, 2025, as sources confirmed the involvement of BIR 18 in the operation.

⁷¹⁷ “Succès Militaire : Les Forces Spéciales Intensifient la Lutte Contre le Terrorisme,” *Faso Times*, March 10, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250427220822/https://fasotimes.net/succes-militaire-les-forces-speciales-intensifient-la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁷¹⁸ Matteo Maillard, Matthieu Millecamps, and Mathieu Olivier, “Les Peuls face aux juntas du Sahel : enquête sur un peuple sacrifié,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 20, 2025, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1688395/politique/les-peuls-face-aux-juntas-du-sahel-enquete-sur-un-peuple-sacrifie/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁷¹⁹ “Burkina : nominations des commandants des Groupements d’intervention rapide,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 19, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240119230304/https://www.aib.media/regions/2024/01/19/burkina-nominations-des-commandants-des-groupements-dintervention-rapide/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁷²⁰ Maillard, Millecamps, and Olivier, “Les Peuls face aux juntas du Sahel : enquête sur un peuple sacrifié,” *Jeune Afrique*.

⁷²¹ “Succès Militaire : Les Forces Spéciales Intensifient la Lutte Contre le Terrorisme,” *Faso Times*.

⁷²² “Banwa : Le nouveau commandant du 18e BIR s’engage à obtenir des résultats probants,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 9, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250110155313/https://www.aib.media/banwa-le-nouveau-commandant-du-18e-bir-sengage-a-obtenir-des-resultats-probants/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁷²³ Salifou Ouédraogo, “Solenzo: Le BIR 18 offre 4 tonnes de riz aux PDI,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, May 30, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250601073806/https://www.aib.media/solenzo-le-bir-18-offre-4-tonnes-de-riz-aux-pdi/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

Capt. K. Farouk Azaria. T Sorgho

4th Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR 4)

Captain K. Farouk Azaria. T Sorgho was appointed commander of BIR 4 on November 14, 2022,⁷²⁴ and had taken up that position by at least November 27, 2024.⁷²⁵

Lt. Col./Col. Éric D. Some Dabiré

6th Military Region

Lieutenant Colonel Eric D. Some Dabiré was appointed as commander of the 6th Military Region on November 14, 2022,⁷²⁶ and had taken up that position by at least June 22, 2023.⁷²⁷ He continued to serve as commander until he was replaced on February 26, 2025, by which time he had also been promoted to the rank of colonel.⁷²⁸

Cdt./Lt. Col. Abdoul Rachid Sawadogo

3rd Military Region

Commandant Abdoul Rachid Sawadogo was appointed as commander of the 3rd Military Region on November 14, 2022,⁷²⁹ and had taken up the position by at least June 27, 2023,

⁷²⁴ Décret N°2022-0980/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de chefs de Corps des Forces Armées Nationales, https://web.archive.org/web/20221115210842/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_portant-nomination-de-chefs-de-cops-des-forces-armees-nationales.pdf (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁷²⁵ “Burkina : Le pouvoir fait des “révélations graves” sur des entreprises immobilières,” *LeFaso.net*, November 27, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250318080530/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article134456> (accessed March 13, 2026). Between the date of his appointment and the earliest date sources confirm he had taken up the position, the following incident occurred: Operation Tchéfari 2, Sahel region, December 11-14, 2023. Sources indicate that BIR 4 took part in the operation.

⁷²⁶ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁷²⁷ Kanliéyama Aboubakar Combarry, “Gourma : La 6ème région militaire bénéficiera d’un complexe social,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, June 27, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230628075456/https://www.aib.media/regions/2023/06/27/gourma-la-6eme-region-militaire-beneficiera-dun-complexe-social/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁷²⁸ “6e région militaire : Le colonel Eric Dabiré passe le commandement au chef d’escadron Aboubacar Dadijan,” *Burkina24*, February 26, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250226200757/https://burkina24.com/2025/02/26/6e-region-militaire-le-colonel-eric-dabire-passe-le-commandement-au-chef-descadron-aboubacar-dadijan/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Between the date of his appointment and the earliest date confirming he had taken up his position, the following incidents occurred: Békouré, Center-East region, February 2023; Petit Zabré, Center-East region, February 2023.

⁷²⁹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

at which time he had also been promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel.⁷³⁰ He continued to serve as commander of the 3rd Military Region until at least July 12, 2023.⁷³¹

⁷³⁰ “Burkina Faso : Le CEMAT avec les unités de la 3e RM,” *Burkina24*, July 4, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230704101608/https://burkina24.com/2023/07/04/burkina-faso-le-cemat-avec-les-unites-de-la-3e-rm/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁷³¹ “Garnison de Pô : 546 recrues présentées au drapeau,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, July 14, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240302230613/https://www.aib.media/garnison-de-po-546-recrues-presentees-au-drapeau/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Between the date of his appointment and the earliest date sources confirm he was in his position, the following incidents occurred: Gomboussougou, Center-South region, February 2023; Sissili province, Center-West region, April 2023.

VII. JNIM Leaders in Positions of Command

Iyad Ag Ghaly, a Malian national from the Tuareg ethnic group, has been JNIM’s supreme leader, or amir, since JNIM’s creation in 2017.⁷³² He is the former head of the armed group Ansar al-Dine. He is wanted by the ICC: in June 2024, an ICC pretrial chamber unsealed an arrest warrant against Ghaly for war crimes, including sexual violence, and crimes against humanity in northern Mali between January 2012 and January 2013.⁷³³ He remains at large. As top JNIM commander, Ghaly should be investigated as to whether he is criminally liable for JNIM abuses documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of command responsibility.

Amadou Kouffa, a Malian national from the Fulani ethnic group and former head of the armed group Katiba Macina, is JNIM’s second-in-command after Iyad Ag Ghaly. Analysts said he played a crucial role in expanding JNIM’s recruitment and activities in the Sahel region, particularly in Burkina Faso.⁷³⁴ The US State Department added Kouffa to the Specially Designated Global Terrorists list in November 2019.⁷³⁵ As JNIM’s second-in-command, Kouffa should be investigated as to whether he is criminally liable for JNIM abuses documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of command responsibility.

Mali is the historical base of JNIM’s operations, but since 2017, the armed group has expanded into several West African countries, including Burkina Faso, through its affiliated armed groups. In Burkina Faso, those armed groups are known as Ansaroul Islam, headed by Jafar Dicko, and Katiba Hanifa, led by Abou Hanifa, also known as Oumarou. Analysts believe that JNIM’s central leadership provides overall guidance to local branches that operate across the Sahel region and West African coastal states, and that the armed group uses a

⁷³² Héni Nsaibia, Dr. Eleanor Beevor, and Flore Berger, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), “Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa, Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM),” October 2023, <https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/JNIM-Non-state-armed-groups-and-illicit-economiesin-wWest-Africa-GI-TOC-ACLED-October-2023.pdf> (accessed February 12, 2026).

⁷³³ “Situation in Mali: ICC unseals arrest warrant against Iyad Ag Ghaly,” International Criminal Court press release, June 21, 2024, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-mali-icc-unseals-arrest-warrant-against-iyad-ag-ghaly> (accessed September 2, 2025).

⁷³⁴ Nsaibia, Beevor, and Berger, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and ACLED, “Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa, Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM).”

⁷³⁵ US Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Executive Order 13224,” signed on September 23, 2001, <https://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/#current> (accessed September 11, 2025).

flexible, cross border, transnational chain of command, combining military and religious authorities, to keep its unity and cohesion, prevent fragmentation, and maintain local branches aligned with the central leadership. ⁷³⁶

Jafar Dicko, head of the JNIM-affiliated armed group Ansaroul Islam, operating across Burkina Faso and in its northern and western regions in particular, also serves as the supreme leader of JNIM in Burkina Faso. As JNIM's top commander in Burkina Faso, Jafar Dicko should be investigated as to whether he is criminally liable for JNIM abuses documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of direct or command responsibility. These alleged abuses include the killing of at least 72 civilians in Goubéré in the North region in May 2024; the killing of at least 133 civilians in Barsalogo in the Center-North region in August 2024; the killing of at least 100 civilians in the villages of Gonon, Mara, Lanfiera, and Tiao in the Boucle du Mouhoun region in April 2025; and the killing of at least 26 civilians in Djibo in the Sahel region in May 2025.

Ousmane Dicko, aka Owais, Jafar Dicko's brother and deputy and JNIM deputy commander in Burkina Faso, should also be investigated.

Abou Hanifa, also known as Oumarou, is the head of the JNIM-affiliated armed group, Katiba Hanifa, which operates mostly in the Niger region and southeastern Burkina Faso. As commander of the Katiba Hanifa, Abou Hanifa should be investigated as to whether he is criminally liable for JNIM abuses documented in this report that amount to serious international crimes, as a matter of command responsibility. These abuses include the killing of at least 10 civilians and possibly many more in Diapaga in the East region in May 2025.

⁷³⁶ Nsaibia, Beevor, and Berger, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime and ACLED, "Non-state armed groups and illicit economies in West Africa, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)." Priya Sippy and Jacob Boswall, "How an al-Qaeda offshoot became one of Africa's deadliest militant groups," *BBC*, July 6, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg4r5wylwq60> (accessed November 30, 2025).

VIII. Prospects for Accountability

National Legal Proceedings

The conflict in Burkina Faso has been marked by near-total impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity by various parties, leaving civilians across the country without justice for the many atrocities they have endured. Rather than facing justice, the perpetrators of grave crimes are often rewarded for their unlawful conduct with promotions, including in the government and army. Victims of military and JNIM abuses and their relatives said they seldom lodged complaints with law enforcement officials or courts because they feared reprisals by the perpetrators or believed the authorities were not able or willing to help them, or because there was no presence of state authorities in their localities.

“We don’t dare file a complaint,” said a 40-year-old man from Sanakuy village, in the Boucle du Mouhoun region, where Burkinabè military and VDPs presumably killed five Fulani men in August 2024. “This was a military job. If justice still functioned in our country, the military would not act like this.”⁷³⁷

The few victims and relatives who filed reports with state authorities about the abuses they suffered by the security forces and VDPs complained about the absence or slow pace of investigations. Under the military junta led by Traoré, Burkinabè institutions with the mandate to investigate human rights violations, including the judiciary and the National Human Rights Commission, lack the necessary independence to carry out their obligation to investigate and prosecute crimes under international law.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with R.M., Mali, December 19, 2024

⁷³⁸ Created in 2021, Burkina Faso’s National Human Rights Commission is “the national institution for the promotion, protection, and defense of rights.” It is composed of 11 members “appointed by decree issued by the Council of Ministers for a term of four years, renewable once.” See “Organigramme. Qui compose la CNDH ?,” Commission nationale des droits humains, accessed December 1, 2025, <https://cndhburkina.bf/organigramme/>. In 2023, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) withdrew the accreditation of Burkina Faso’s National Human Rights Commission due to a lack of compliance with the Paris Principles. See “Accreditation status as of 19 July 2024,” GANHRI, accessed December 1, 2025), https://ganhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/StatusAccreditationChartNHRIs_July2024.pdf. See also Centre for Civil and Political Rights, “Burkina Faso : les entraves aux droits de l’homme au nom de la lutte contre le terrorisme ne convainquent pas le Comité des droits de l’homme,” March 11, 2025, <https://ccprcentre.org/ccprpages/burkina-faso-les-entraves-aux-droits-de-lhomme-au-nom-de-la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-ne-convainquent-pas-le-comit-des-droits-de-lhomme> (accessed December 1, 2025).

Victims of military and JNIM abuses and their relatives appear to have low confidence in these institutions, which in any case they find challenging to access. Government officials have typically denied or downplayed allegations of abuse, especially by Burkinabè military forces and VDPs, and often cast the blame for such abuses, including mass killings of civilians, on Burkina Faso's "internal enemies," such as political opponents and dissidents, and external "imperialist" actors,⁷³⁹ including Burkinabè in diaspora, international media, and human rights groups, without conducting credible investigations with a view to ensuring accountability for the abuses.

In only two out of the 57 incidents documented in this report—both implicating government forces and VDPs in abuses—, victims and their family members said they reported their cases to the authorities.⁷⁴⁰ There has been no progress in the investigations in either case at time of writing.

In at least three cases documented in this report—two of which implicate military forces and VDPs in abuses, and one that implicates JNIM fighters—authorities said they would open an investigation.⁷⁴¹ There is little transparency around any of these investigations, and no trial or other legal proceedings have yet begun.

Human Rights Watch is also aware that in at least three other cases implicating military forces and VDPs in abuses, national prosecutors have opened investigations. The cases are not documented in this report but have been reported by media and civil society

⁷³⁹ Lucien Kambou, "Journées d'engagement patriotique : "Les ennemis de la patrie, ce sont les traîtres et leurs complices" (Capitaine Ibrahim Traoré)," *24heures.bf*, October 2, 2024, <https://www.24heures.bf/journees-dengagement-patriotique-les-ennemis-de-la-patrie-ce-sont-les-traitres-et-leurs-complices-capitaine-ibrahim-traore/> (accessed March 19, 2026). Matteo Maillard, "Grand oral d'Ibrahim Traoré : la Côte d'Ivoire est « la base arrière des ennemis du Burkina », " *Jeune Afrique*, September 30, 2025, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1726327/politique/grand-oral-dibrahim-traore-la-cote-divoire-est-la-base-arriere-des-ennemis-du-burkina/> (accessed March 20, 2025). "Grand entretien avec le Capitaine Ibrahim TRAORÉ du 28 septembre 2025-BF1TV," YouTube live, *BF1TV*, September 28, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMdDghh5k8E> (accessed March 23, 2026).

⁷⁴⁰ Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins region, July 8, 2023 (see III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs, 2nd Military Region (Cascades, South-West and Hauts-Bassins administrative regions)); Bassé, Hauts-Bassins region, late November 2023 (see III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs, 2nd Military Region (Cascades, South-West and Hauts-Bassins administrative regions)).

⁷⁴¹ Karma, North region, April 20, 2023 (see III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs, 1st Military Region (North and Center-North administrative regions)); Nondin, Soro, North region, February 25, 2024 (see III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs, 1st Military Region (North and Center-North administrative regions)); Barsalogo, Center-North region, April 20, 2023 (see III. Abuses by Government Armed Forces and VDPs, 1st Military Region (North and Center-North administrative regions)).

organizations.⁷⁴² In one of the three cases, a trial was held and resulted in the conviction of six VDPs.⁷⁴³ Human Rights Watch was not aware of any progress in the other two investigations.

All suspects implicated in terrorism-related offenses are transferred to Ouagadougou's High Security Prison, and all of their cases are investigated and adjudicated by the Ouagadougou-based Specialized Judicial Unit Against Terrorism-Related Crimes (Pole Judiciaire Spécialisé dans la Répression des Actes de Terrorisme).⁷⁴⁴ The Specialized Unit was created by a December 2017 law and has dedicated judges, staff, and a trial chamber. Its mandate is to “combat acts of terrorism,” and it is “responsible for investigating, prosecuting, conducting inquiries, and, in the case of offenses, judging acts of terrorism and terrorist financing.”⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴² According to Radio France Internationale (RFI) and to the Collective Against Impunity and Community Stigmatization (Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés, CISC), a Burkinabè rights group, on February 1, 2023, security forces escorting a logistics convoy heading to the Boungou industrial mine in the East region killed at least 30 civilians, including 7 women and a toddler, in the villages of Piega, Sakoani, and Kankagou. See “Burkina Faso: un convoi minier tire sur des civils, au moins 30 morts,” *RFI*, February 3, 2023, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20230203-burkina-faso-un-convoi-minier-tire-sur-des-civils-au-moins-30-morts> (accessed March 14, 2026). In a February 3, 2023, statement, the government promised an investigation to “establish the facts,” and identify those responsible. It is unclear whether any investigation has taken place or what its current status would be. See Elie Kaboré's X account, @eliekabore, February 3, 2023, <https://x.com/eliekabore/status/1621604022749696002> (accessed September 3, 2025).

On November 12, 2023, the European Union called for an investigation into a massacre in the Center-North region in which about 100 people were reportedly killed. See “Burkina Faso: Déclaration du Porte-Parole sur un massacre dans Centre-Nord,” European Union External Action Service declaration, November 12, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/burkina-faso-d%C3%A9claration-du-porte-parole-sur-un-massacre-dans-centre-nord_fr?s=86 (accessed September 12, 2025).

The government said that on November 5, 2023, gunmen killed at least 70 people in Zaongo village and that the incident was being investigated. See “At least 70 killed in attack on northern Burkina Faso village on Nov. 5 - prosecutor,” *Reuters*, November 13, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/least-70-killed-attack-northern-burkina-faso-village-nov-5-prosecutor-2023-11-13/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

According to Radio France Internationale (RFI), in November 2025, a military court sentenced four VDPs to terms ranging from two to three years in prison for “mutilation of a corpse and disrespect for the dead,” and two other VDPs for murder. See “Burkina Faso: six Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie condamnés pour meurtre,” *RFI*, November 28, 2025, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20251128-burkina-faso-six-volontaires-pour-la-d%C3%A9fense-de-la-patrie-condamn%C3%A9s-pour-meurtre> (accessed November 29, 2025).

⁷⁴³ “Burkina Faso: six Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie condamnés pour meurtre,” *RFI*.

⁷⁴⁴ Loi N°006-2017/AN portant création, organisation et fonctionnement d'un pôle judiciaire spécialisé dans la répression des actes de terrorisme, [https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=3a6d2c8751a630081e7a850e1f4463775885f07af218c2194aad18666d471f6e\)mltdHM9MTc2NDYzMzYwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=07977859-2449-60cf-3682-6c35254f6116&psq=P%3%b4le+judiciaire+sp%3%agcialis%3%ag+dans+la+r%3%agpression+des+actes+de+terrorisme&u=a1aHRocHM6LY93d3cuYWNhZGVtaWVkbGZS5iZi9pbmRleC5waHAvdGVsZWNoYXJnZW1lbnQvY2FoZWdvcnkvNTQtdGVycm9yaXNtZT9kb3dubG9hZDoxNDM6bG9pLXBvcnRhbnQtY3JlYXRpb24tb3JnYW5pc2FoaW9uLWVobWVbZmNoaW9ubmVtZW50LWQtdW4tcG9sZS1qdWRpY2lhaXJlLXNwZWNoYXNpc2UtZG9uYXN1YS1yZXByZXRlcy1hY3Rlcy1kZS1oZXJyb3Jpc21](https://www.bing.com/ck/a?!&&p=3a6d2c8751a630081e7a850e1f4463775885f07af218c2194aad18666d471f6e)mltdHM9MTc2NDYzMzYwMA&ptn=3&ver=2&hsh=4&fclid=07977859-2449-60cf-3682-6c35254f6116&psq=P%3%b4le+judiciaire+sp%3%agcialis%3%ag+dans+la+r%3%agpression+des+actes+de+terrorisme&u=a1aHRocHM6LY93d3cuYWNhZGVtaWVkbGZS5iZi9pbmRleC5waHAvdGVsZWNoYXJnZW1lbnQvY2FoZWdvcnkvNTQtdGVycm9yaXNtZT9kb3dubG9hZDoxNDM6bG9pLXBvcnRhbnQtY3JlYXRpb24tb3JnYW5pc2FoaW9uLWVobWVbZmNoaW9ubmVtZW50LWQtdW4tcG9sZS1qdWRpY2lhaXJlLXNwZWNoYXNpc2UtZG9uYXN1YS1yZXByZXRlcy1hY3Rlcy1kZS1oZXJyb3Jpc21) (accessed December 2, 2025).

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

However, investigations are moving slowly, and the unit faces challenges, including lack of sufficient funds and personnel, which hinder its capabilities to deliver on its mandate and ensure due process. The unit heard its first case only in 2021 and then took another year to hear more cases.⁷⁴⁶

A member of the Burkinabè judiciary told Human Rights Watch that the Specialized Unit demonstrated serious failings in the legal proceedings involving those detained on terrorism charges, including undermining fair trial rights, including the presumption of innocence, and the rights to an adequate defense, to have legal assistance, to have access to a free interpreter during proceedings, to be promptly brought before a judge, and to be tried without undue delay, among others.⁷⁴⁷

He said:

The lack of solid evidence implicating the defendants is a serious issue. Even if the initial investigation did not yield anything about them [the suspects] ... they are still kept in detention for two, three years ... However, the magistrates, being also intelligent, keep them because if they were released, our military could execute them. So, we are faced with this dilemma: we think it's better to violate the right to liberty in order to preserve their right to life. It's very absurd as a concept, but that's how it goes.⁷⁴⁸

He added that suspects who are acquitted or who serve their sentence remain at risk:

Even after the sentence, if they are acquitted, we still need to negotiate their way out with the intelligence services to ensure that, once they go back to their places of origin, they won't face risks.... Another serious issue is the lack of access to legal counsel for the defendants. Many cannot

⁷⁴⁶ “Burkina Faso: Islamist Armed Groups Massacre Civilians,” Human Right Watch news release, September 15, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/15/burkina-faso-islamist-armed-groups-massacre-civilians>.

⁷⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a member of the Burkinabè judiciary, August 14, 2025.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

afford a lawyer, so they just appear in court without one, which is in violation of our domestic law and international humanitarian law.⁷⁴⁹

A Burkinabè lawyer who spoke to Human Rights Watch identified these challenges as well as others, including the lack of training and resources for field-based police and gendarmes who conduct preliminary investigations and the lack of interpreters to translate for defendants who do not speak French: “At the beginning [in 2021] there was only one interpreter who spoke Fulfulde, the language most widely spoken by the defendants who are mainly Fulani,” the lawyer said. “But last year [2024] a recruitment process for interpreters was launched and the situation improved ... with several new interpreters being hired.”⁷⁵⁰

Civil society members and lawyers said that the high-security prison where those suspected of terrorism-related offenses are held is overcrowded and that the vast majority of detainees are being held far beyond the legal time limit. “There are at least 1,000 detainees and the prison wasn’t built to host so many people,” a human rights lawyer told Human Rights Watch in early September 2025. “Many are kept in detention although there is insufficient evidence proving that they have any link with terrorism.”⁷⁵¹

Regional and International Accountability Perspectives

The available avenues for victims of grave human rights violations and abuses to seek accountability are limited at the regional level.

Burkina Faso, alongside with Mali and Niger, officially left ECOWAS on January 29, 2025, having served notice a year earlier, accusing the bloc of undermining their sovereignty and imposing unfair sanctions on Niger following the military coup there in July 2023.⁷⁵² This withdrawal has raised concerns over access to justice for victims of serious human rights

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a Burkinabè lawyer, August 27, 2025.

⁷⁵¹ Human Rights Watch telephone interview with a human rights lawyer, September 21, 2025.

⁷⁵² Ilaria Allegrozzi, “Sahel States’ Withdrawal from ECOWAS Undermines Accountability,” commentary, Human Rights Watch dispatch, February 4, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/04/sahel-states-withdrawal-ecowas-undermines-accountability>.

abuses in these countries to raise cases with the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, which has jurisdiction to hear human rights cases brought by citizens of member states.⁷⁵³

The court has issued landmark decisions on human rights issues, including in Burkina Faso, since it was founded in 1991.⁷⁵⁴ A unique feature of the court is that applicants do not need to exhaust local remedies before filing a complaint.

The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights faces serious limitations, even if individuals can file a case against the government of Burkina Faso, as the court's ability to enforce its decisions is weak, given that many states fail to comply with rulings that go against their political interests.⁷⁵⁵

Burkina Faso joined the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 2004.⁷⁵⁶ Burkina Faso has domesticated the Rome Statute in national legislation.⁷⁵⁷

On September 22, 2025, Burkina Faso, along with Mali and Niger, announced its intention to withdraw from the Rome Statute.⁷⁵⁸ The joint statement issued by the three military

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ "Hadijatou Mani v Niger," Interrights, accessed September 7, 2025, <https://www.interrights.org/niger-slavery/index.html#:~:text=In%20its%20judgment%2C%20the%20Community,its%20obligations%20under%20international%20law.>

⁷⁵⁵ "Why the African Court should matter to you," *Amnesty International*, June 9, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2023/06/why-the-african-court-should-matter-to-you/> (accessed September 4, 2025). "Withdrawal of States from African Court a blow to access to justice in the region," International Commission of Jurists' news release, May 1, 2020, <https://www.icj.org/withdrawal-of-states-from-african-court-a-blow-to-access-to-justice-in-the-region/> (accessed September 4, 2025).

Some cases involving Burkina Faso and/or Burkinabè individuals were however dealt with by the African Court. They include: "Beneficiaries of the late Norbert Zongo, Abdoulaye Nikiema alias Ablassé, Ernest Zongo and Blaise Ilboudo & The Burkinabè Human and Peoples' Rights Movement v. Burkina Faso," Application No. 013/2011 — Judgment 5 June 2015 (merits decided on March 28, 2014). The Court found that Burkina Faso violated its obligations (failure to investigate the 1998 journalist's murder) and ordered reparations. See African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Beneficiaries of late Norbert Zongo, Abdoulaye Nikiema alias Ablassé, Ernest Zongo and Blaise Ilboudo & the Burkinabè Human and People's Rights Movement v. Burkina Faso*, Application n°013/2011, Judgment of March 28, 2014, https://worldcourts.com/acthpr/eng/decisions/2014.03.28_Zongo_Beneficiaries_v_Burkina_Faso.pdf (accessed December 1, 2025).

⁷⁵⁶ "Burkina Faso," International Criminal Court, accessed September 5, 2025, <https://asp.icc-cpi.int/states-parties/african-states/burkina-faso>.

⁷⁵⁷ Loi n°052-2009/AN portant détermination des compétences et de la procédure de mise en œuvre du Statut de Rome relatif à la Cour pénale internationale par les juridictions Burkinabè, https://cjad.nottingham.ac.uk/documents/implementations/pdf/Burkina_Faso_Implementing_Legislation.pdf (accessed September 7, 2025).

⁷⁵⁸ "Sahel Countries: ICC Withdrawal Endangers Civilians," Human Rights Watch news release, September 24, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/24/sahel-countries-icc-withdrawal-endangers-civilians>.

leaders announcing the withdrawal from the ICC described the court as a “neo-colonial” tool and said their withdrawal was a reaffirmation of their states’ sovereignty. They added that the court has been unable to “handl[e] and prosecut[e] proven war crimes, crimes against humanity, crimes of genocide, and crimes of aggression,” and announced they will rely on “indigenous mechanisms for the consolidation of peace and justice.”⁷⁵⁹

Under the Rome Statute, withdrawal from the ICC does not come into effect until one year after the state has formally deposited its notification of withdrawal to the UN secretary-general.⁷⁶⁰ Burkina Faso has yet to deposit its notification of withdrawal at time of writing.

The ICC is a court of last resort. Under the principle of “complementarity,” cases are only admissible before the ICC where national authorities have not conducted genuine, domestic proceedings.⁷⁶¹ The Office of the Prosecutor conducts what are known as “preliminary examinations” to determine whether or not to proceed or seek to proceed with a formal investigation based on the requirements set out in the Rome Statute.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁹ “Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso to withdraw from International Criminal Court,” *France 24*, September 23, 2025, <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20250922-niger-mali-and-burkina-faso-icc-withdrawal> (accessed March 23, 2026).

⁷⁶⁰ Rome Statute, art. 127. For example, Burundi and the Philippines both deposited a written notice of withdrawal, where Burundi sent its notice on 27 October 2016, which took effect on 27 October 2017, and the Philippines sent its notice on 17 March 2018, which took effect on 17 March 2019.

⁷⁶¹ Rome Statute, art. 17.

⁷⁶² “Preliminary Examinations,” International Criminal Court, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/situations-preliminary-examinations>.

Recommendations

To the Government of Burkina Faso

- Publicly order all members of the security forces and VDPs in Burkina Faso to fully abide by international human rights law and humanitarian law.
- Cease collective punishment, including by killings and mass arrests, of community members living in areas where JNIM operates.
- End the ethnic profiling of Fulani communities by government forces and VDPs.
- End the crackdown on political opposition, peaceful dissent, and media, including arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and forced conscription of perceived opponents, dissidents, journalists, and civil society activists.
- Investigate and appropriately discipline or prosecute, in accordance with international fair trial standards, members of the security forces and Islamist armed groups responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other international crimes. Promptly make findings of investigations public.
- Coordinate with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to seek technical, financial, and logistical assistance for domestic investigative and judicial bodies.
- Suspend, pending investigations, security force personnel and VDPs credibly implicated in serious rights abuses.
- Adopt robust measures at national and regional levels to counter discrimination, stigmatization, and violence against the Fulani community, including by raising awareness among law enforcement and military personnel operating in high-risk areas to avoid conflating all Fulani people with members of Islamist armed groups, and ensure impartiality in security operations, by designing and implementing community-led peace and social-cohesion initiatives.
- Comply fully with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, including the rights to life, dignity, equality and non-discrimination, due process, freedom of expression, and freedom of movement.
- Adequately resource and support the Burkinabè judges and judicial personnel mandated to investigate suspected abuses by Islamist fighters and security force personnel, notably the Specialized Judicial Unit for the Suppression of Acts of Terrorism and the military prosecutor's office.

- Provide prompt and fair redress to victims of violations or their relatives including through compensation and the recovering and returning of all looted or destroyed property.
- Establish an independent and accessible oversight mechanism to ensure individuals and affected communities can make complaints about human rights violations by members of the security forces and VDPs.
- Protect communities from forced displacement, and uphold the rights of displaced people, including to adequate assistance and to safe, dignified, and voluntary returns.
- Increase resources to provide mental health support for members of the armed forces.

To the Armed Forces of Burkina Faso

- Publicly order all armed forces and VDPs to fully abide by international humanitarian law and human rights law, including by taking all feasible measures to minimize civilian harm.
- Fully and impartially investigate all allegations of war crimes by military personnel and appropriately discipline or prosecute those responsible, regardless of rank.
- Ensure rules of engagement and operational procedures of all forces and VDPs abide by international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Ensure all forces, including VDPs, receive appropriate training on international humanitarian law. Seek assistance from international agencies that can provide the appropriate assistance.
- Properly vet and resource provost marshals, responsible for ensuring discipline during operations and for protecting detainees, and ensure their deployment in major combat units.
- Take all necessary measures to protect civilians during counterinsurgency operations, ensure that such operations are in line with international human rights and humanitarian law, and prevent counterterrorism operations from amounting to collective punishment.
- Take all necessary measures to protect civilians from Islamist armed groups, including by increasing patrolling and establishing additional security posts in vulnerable areas.
- Ensure security forces protect all civilians impartially, regardless of their ethnicity.

- Vet all forces and VDPs to ensure individuals who have been responsible for abuses do not take part in military operations.
- Ensure strict oversight of the conduct and discipline of VDPs and appropriately sanction those who have been involved in abuses.

To JNIM

- Cease all unlawful killings, kidnappings, looting, forced displacement, and other serious human rights abuses, as well as threats of violence against civilians.
- Publicly order all JNIM fighters to abide by international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Ensure lawful treatment of enemy combatants captured during operations, notably that all soldiers and VDPs captured should be treated humanely.
- Immediately lift sieges on villages and cities that unlawfully deprive civilians of access to food, water, necessities, and humanitarian aid, and allow free movement of civilians.
- Allow full, safe, and unimpeded access of humanitarian personnel and the urgent delivery of humanitarian assistance in areas under JNIM control.
- Immediately cease the use of improvised explosive devices.
- Immediately release all civilians in custody, except those necessarily detained for imperative security reasons.
- Stop imposing “taxes” on civilians in areas under JNIM control.
- Sanction or remove JNIM fighters implicated in serious violations of international humanitarian law, particularly abuses against civilians.

To the International Criminal Court Office of the Prosecutor

- Open a preliminary examination into the situation in Burkina Faso to determine whether or not to proceed with a formal investigation of crimes falling within the ICC’s jurisdiction.

To the AU Peace and Security Council

- Formally add the situation in Burkina Faso to the Council's agenda and request monthly briefings from relevant AU bodies, including the Special Envoy on the

Prevention of Genocide and Atrocity Crimes, and the Special Envoy on Silencing the Guns, on the situation in the country.

- Convene a dedicated session under article 7 of the AU Peace and Security Council Protocol to examine protection-of-civilians risks and atrocity-crime indicators.
- Call for the lifting of restrictions on media and civil society to allow independent monitoring, consistent with AU norms.
- Require Burkina Faso to report to the African Union Peace and Security Council on measures taken to ensure that counterterrorism operations adhere to African human rights and international humanitarian law norms.
- Call on all parties to respect international humanitarian law and human rights law and cease all attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure.

To the UN Security Council

- Put the situation in Burkina Faso as a priority on the council's agenda, ensure regular public Security Council briefings on Burkina Faso, and regularly schedule briefings by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel. Regularly invite members of war-affected communities in Burkina Faso to brief the council.
- Call on the UN Special Adviser of the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide to conduct fact-finding missions and provide formal briefings to the Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council.
- Impose targeted sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, on JNIM and military commanders, officials, and VDPs responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Burkina Faso, including people identified in this report.
- Establish a sanctions committee and panel of experts to monitor compliance with the targeted sanctions.

To the African Union

- Monitor and support Burkina Faso's domestic accountability efforts by publicly pressing for investigations into abuses against civilians by all sides.
- Support the training of Burkinabè judicial personnel in best practices for investigating war crimes and other international 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 Burkinabè 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.
- Create a special mechanism on oversight and accountability in counterterrorism, one that could monitor state compliance with African human rights standards in counterterrorism operations, and document and report on civilian harm, including civilian casualties, human rights, and international humanitarian law violations by state forces and VDPs, as well as hate speech, ethnic targeting, and restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms.

To the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

- Conduct a fact-finding mission in Burkina Faso, in line with article 45 of the African Charter.
- Request country visits to Burkina Faso by its special rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions; prisons and conditions of detention; freedom of expression; refugees/IDPs; and the rights of women and girls in Africa.
- Invoke article 62 reporting duties, requiring Burkina Faso to submit updated reports addressing human rights violations, including those documented in this report.

To the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

- Conduct an investigation into human rights violations committed against girls and boys by all sides to the conflict in Burkina Faso.
- Open an inquiry under article 45 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child into grave violations against children, including killings, forced displacement, enforced disappearances, forced recruitment by the military, the VDPs, and JNIM, the blocking of humanitarian aid, and attacks on schools.
- Establish a special mechanism on children's rights and counterterrorism, one that could monitor whether Burkina Faso's counterterrorism operations are consistent with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the AU Child Rights

- Guidelines in Conflict, the Safe Schools Declaration (where applicable) and provide technical guidance on non-recruitment of children, protection of schools, and handling of children associated with armed groups.
- Submit regular child-protection updates to the AU Peace and Security Council “Harmonized PoC Framework” and request the AU Peace and Security Council to act where human rights violations against children reach crisis levels.

To the UN Human Rights Council

- Add the human rights situation in Burkina Faso to the agenda of the UN Human Rights Council and establish an international independent investigation into all the alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law, and of potential international crimes in Burkina Faso, and to report to the UN Human Rights Council.

To the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

- Conduct robust monitoring and regular public reporting on the rights situation in Burkina Faso and take measures to address impunity and advance accountability for serious abuses.
- Support the government, justice institutions and national human rights bodies through technical assistance and capacity building, to enable justice and accountability for grave abuses and crimes, including those identified in this report, in accordance with international human rights standards.
- Increase engagement with local human rights and civil society groups, community leaders, and victims’ associations, supporting them with training, protection measures, and funding.

To the European Union and EU Member States

- Publicly support and expand efforts to put the human rights situation in Burkina Faso on the formal agendas of the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council.
- Ensure that the EU’s renewed approach on the Sahel prioritizes respect for human rights and international humanitarian law, notably the protection of civilians at risk, prevention of violations, remedies for victims, and the promotion of justice and accountability throughout the region.

- Use public diplomacy and high-level engagement in bilateral, regional and international forums to speak out against grave human rights abuses by all sides.
- Press authorities to protect civilians during counterinsurgency operations and to ensure such operations are conducted in line with international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Call on Burkinabè authorities to thoroughly, independently, and impartially investigate human rights abuses by all sides, including those that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, with the view to holding those responsible into account.
- Offer to support—politically, financially, and with expertise—independent oversight and accountability mechanisms that would operate in line with international standards, to ensure compliance by security forces with international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Increase support for independent civil society groups, human rights defenders, independent media, research institutions, and other actors working on monitoring, documenting, and reporting human rights abuses and accountability-related issues.
- Support the provision of public services, including in the areas of health, psychosocial assistance, education, and justice.
- Use the EU’s global human rights sanction regimes or set up a dedicated sanctions regime to adopt measures on individuals responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including individuals identified in this report for their role in violations.
- Condition EU and member state resumption of security cooperation with Burkinabè military forces on demonstrated improvement in adherence to international human rights and humanitarian law by security forces and the VDPs, the adoption and implementation of measures to promote respect for rights in security operations, appropriate vetting of troops, and the investigation and prosecution of security personnel implicated in abuses.

To all Governments

- Investigate and, as appropriate, effectively prosecute individuals suspected of committing serious international crimes in Burkina Faso through the principle of

universal jurisdiction and in accordance with national laws with international fair trial standards.

- Use public and private diplomacy with Burkina Faso's government to call on the authorities to conduct fair and effective domestic accountability efforts and to rescind any effort to withdraw from the International Criminal Court.

Appendices

Appendix I: Burkina Faso Military Chain of Command in Reported Incidents

1st Military Region (North and Center-North Administrative Regions)

Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North Region, February 2023

Two months prior to the attacks, Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba was appointed commander of the 1st Military Region, on November 14, 2022.⁷⁶³ Sources indicate Tapsoba had taken up that position by at least February 17, 2023, the date of the attack.⁷⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of early February. Capt. Amadou Sanou⁷⁶⁵ also had been appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the North on November 14, 2022, prior to the attack.⁷⁶⁶ Sources indicate Sanou had taken up the role by at least October 25, 2023, although Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of early February 2023.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶³ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées. Émil Abdoul Razak Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, July 25, 2024,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240912091518/https://www.aib.media/regions/2024/07/25/burkina-le-chef-de-bataillon-hamado-bambara-commande-desormais-la-1ere-region-militaire/> (accessed September 14, 2025).

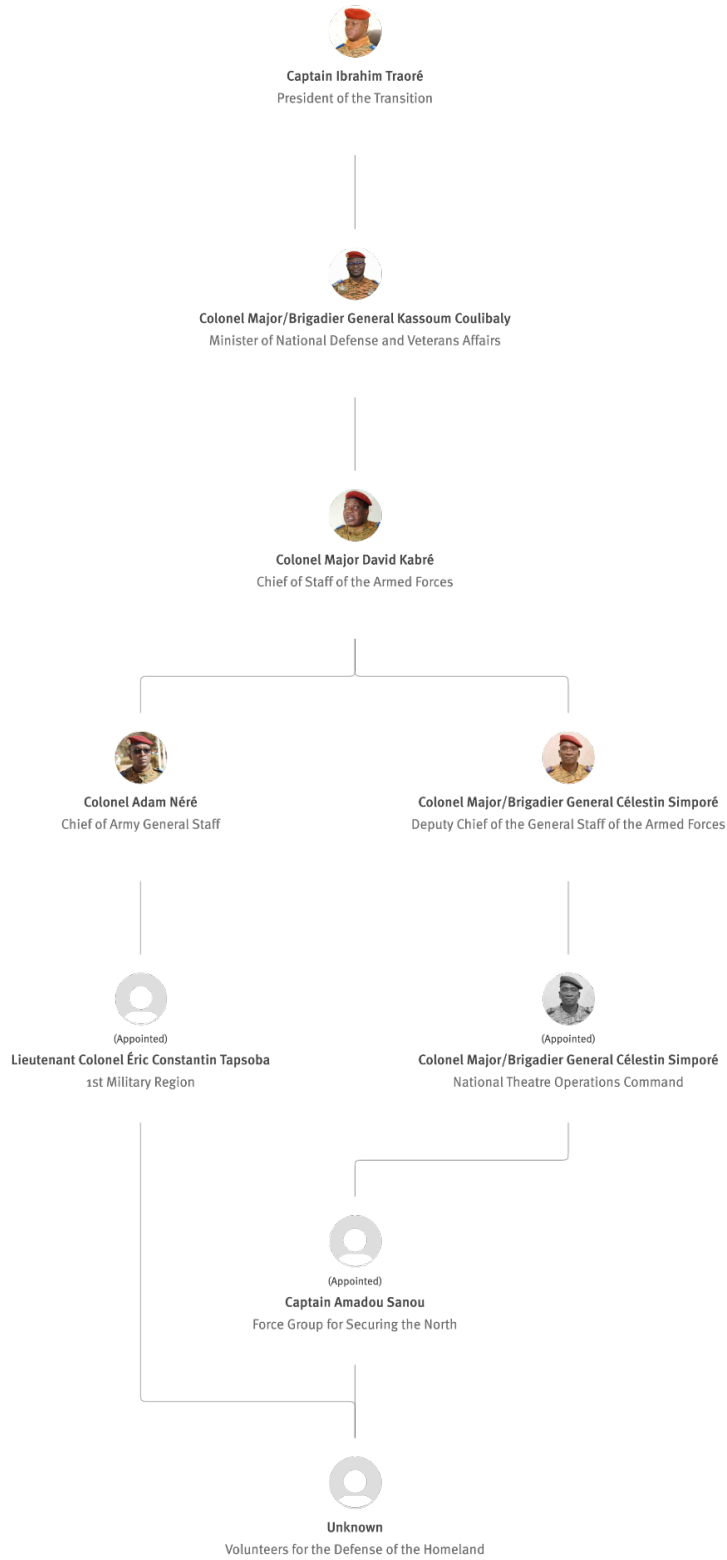
⁷⁶⁴ Dieu-Donné Windpouyré Ouédraogo, “Complexe social de la première région militaire : Soutenir les FDS blessées et les ayants droits de celles tombées,” *L'Observateur Paalga*, February 18, 2023,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20250504154810/https://www.lobspaalga.com/2023/02/18/complexe-social-de-la-premiere-region-militaire-soutenir-les-fds-blessees-et-les-ayants-droits-de-celles-tombees/> (accessed September 14, 2025). Tapsoba served as commander until at least June 12, 2024. See Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁶⁵ This may be the same person as the Amadou Sanou who became commander of the 4th Military Region on February 28, 2025.

⁷⁶⁶ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces, https://web.archive.org/web/20221115210851/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_Portant-nomination-des-commaandants-de-groupements-des-forces-CDT-GFS.pdf (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁷⁶⁷ Jules César Kabore, “Reconquête de l'intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkina24*, October 25, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240910215129/https://burkina24.com/2023/10/25/reconquete-de-lintegrite-territoriale-au-front-avec-les-forces-combattantes/> (accessed September 14, 2025).



Chain of Command for Bonsonmoré and Goutoula, North Region, February 2023

Zambanga, Center-North Region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023

At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba served as commander of the 1st Military Region, having been appointed on November 14, 2022,⁷⁶⁸ and having taken up that position by at least February 18, 2023.⁷⁶⁹ The killings occurred after Capt. Amadou Sanou⁷⁷⁰ was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the North on November 14, 2022.⁷⁷¹ Sources indicate Sanou had taken up the role by at least October 25, 2023.⁷⁷² Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had taken command by either March 29 or beginning of April 2023.

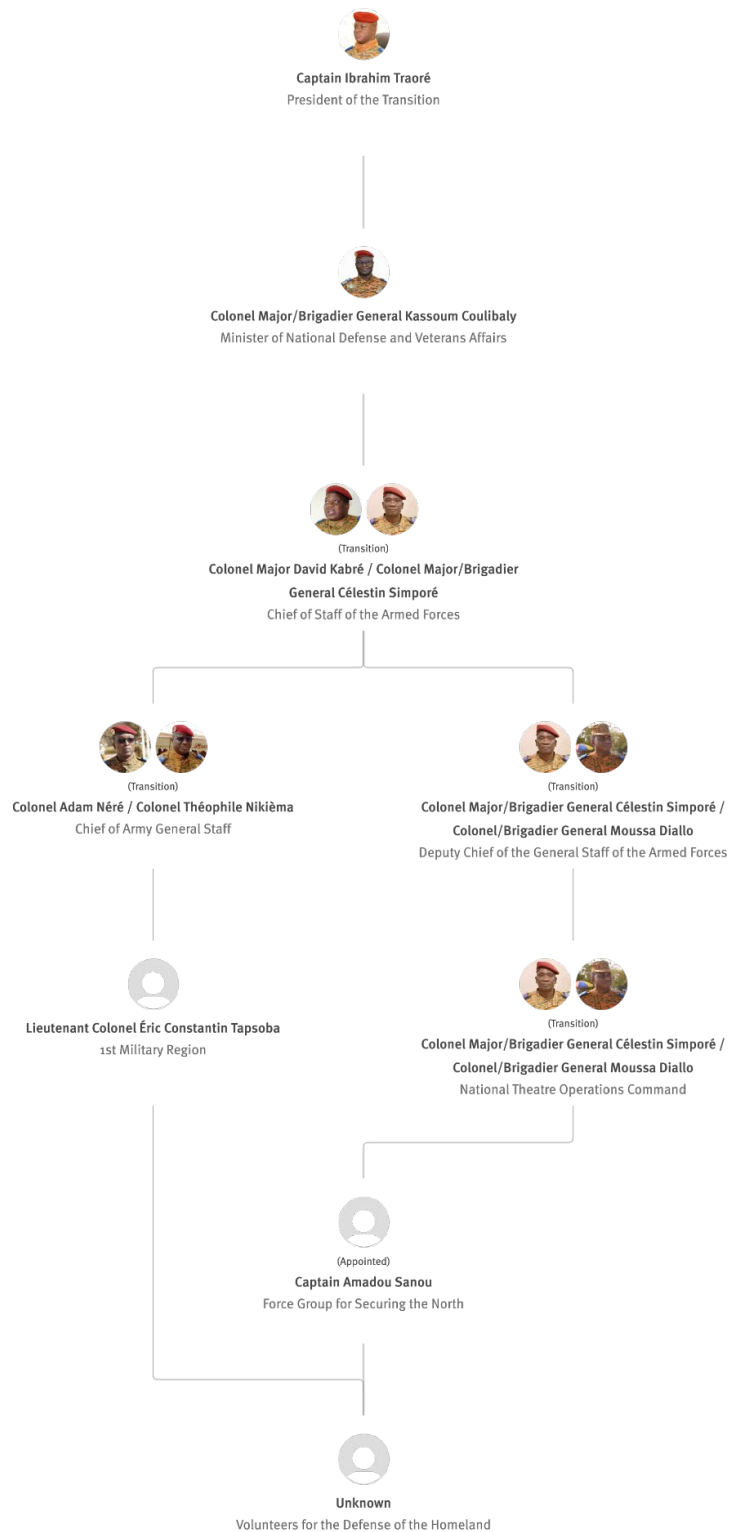
⁷⁶⁸ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées. Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁶⁹ Ouédraogo, “Complexe social de la première région militaire : Soutenir les FDS blessées et les ayants droits de celles tombées,” *L’Observateur Paalga*. Tapsoba served as commander until at least June 12, 2024, see Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁷⁰ This may be the same person as the Amadou Sanou who became commander of the 4th Military Region on February 28, 2025.

⁷⁷¹ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁷⁷² Kabore, “Reconquête de l’intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkina24*.



Chain of Command for Zambanga, Center-North Region, March 29, 2023 – early April 2023

Karma, North Region, April 20, 2023

At the time of the attack, Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba served as commander of the 1st Military Region, having been appointed on November 14, 2022⁷⁷³ and having taken up that position by at least February 18, 2023.⁷⁷⁴ The attack occurred after Capt. Amadou Sanou⁷⁷⁵ was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the North on November 14, 2022.⁷⁷⁶ Sources indicate Sanou had taken up the role by at least October 25, 2023.⁷⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of April 20, 2023. The attack occurred after Capt. Jean Ouyia was appointed commander of BIR 3 on November 14, 2022.⁷⁷⁸ His career path after this date is not known.

⁷⁷³ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées. Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

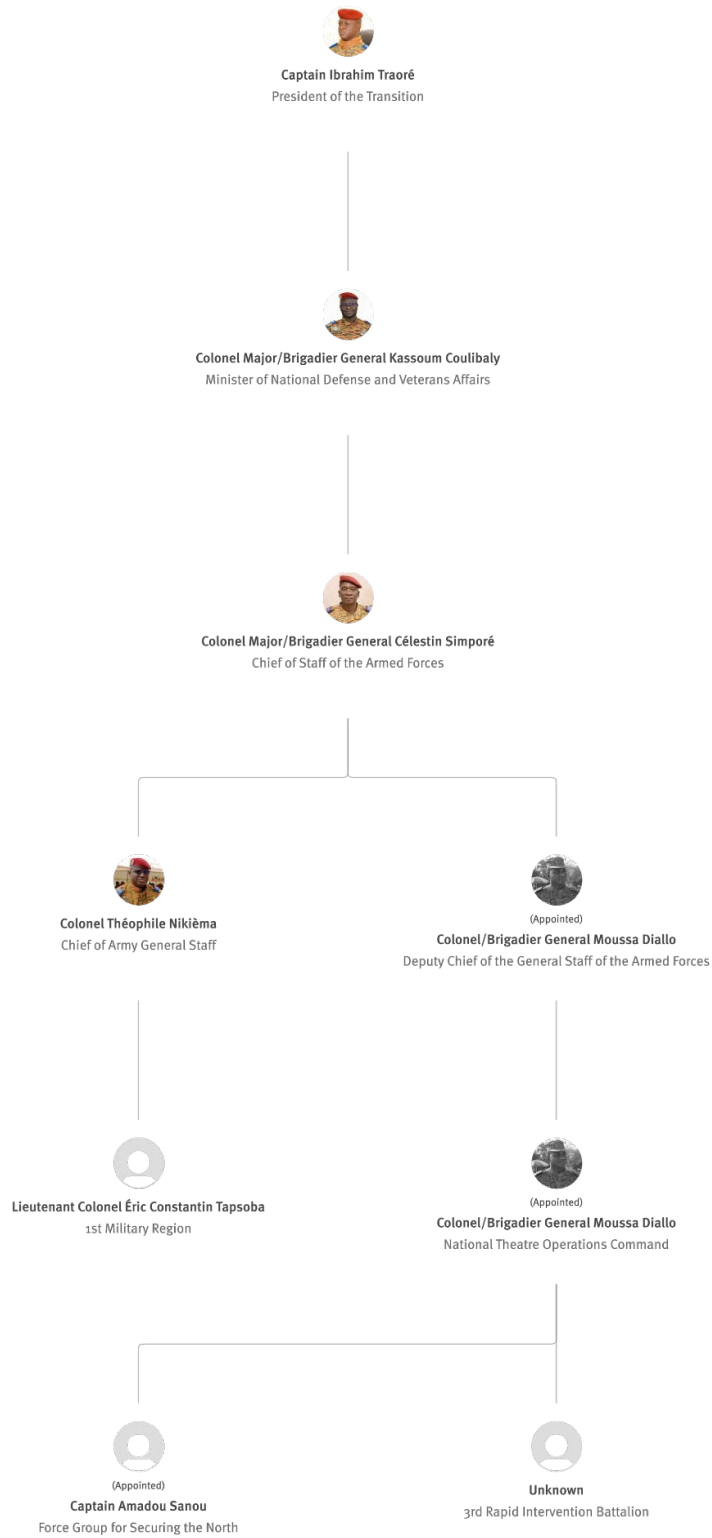
⁷⁷⁴ Ouédraogo, “Complexe social de la première région militaire : Soutenir les FDS blessées et les ayants droits de celles tombées,” *L'Observateur Paalga*. Tapsoba served as commander until at least June 12, 2024, see Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁷⁵ This may be the same person as the Amadou Sanou, who became commander of the 4th Military Region on February 28, 2025.

⁷⁷⁶ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁷⁷⁷ Kabore, “Reconquête de l'intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkina24*.

⁷⁷⁸ Décret N°2022-0980/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de chefs de Corps des Forces Armées Nationales, https://web.archive.org/web/20221115210842/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_portant-nomination-de-chefs-de-cops-des-forces-armees-nationales.pdf (accessed March 13, 2026).



Chain of Command for Karma, North Region, April 20, 2023

Barsalogo, Center-North Region, April 20, 2023

At the time of the apparent summary executions, Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba was serving as commander of the 1st Military Region having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁷⁷⁹ and taken that position up by at least February 18, 2023.⁷⁸⁰ The apparent summary executions occurred after Capt. Amadou Sanou⁷⁸¹ was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the North on November 14, 2022.⁷⁸² Sources indicate Sanou had taken up the role by at least October 25, 2023.⁷⁸³ Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether he continued to hold that role as of April 20, 2023, when the apparent summary executions occurred.

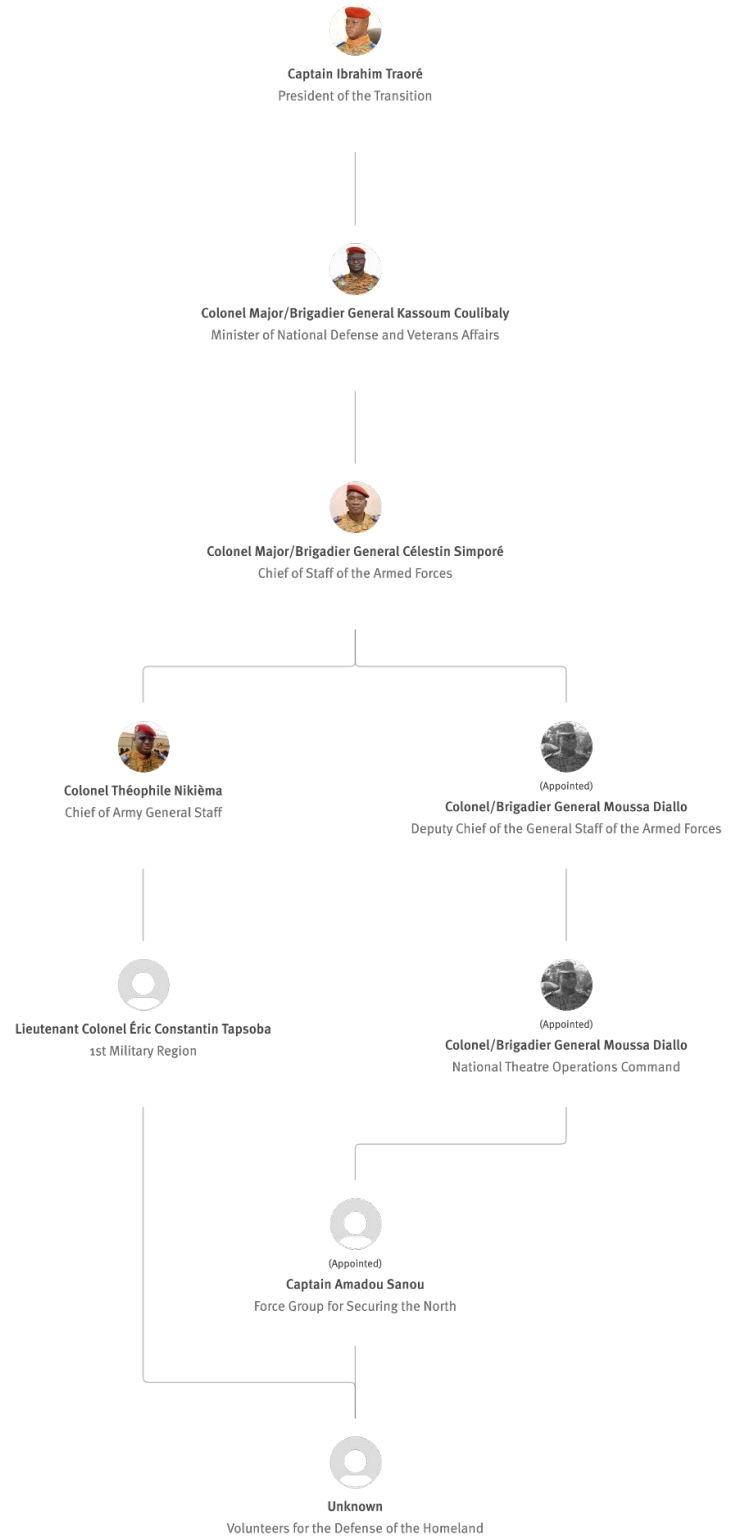
⁷⁷⁹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées. Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁸⁰ Ouédraogo, “Complexe social de la première région militaire : Soutenir les FDS blessées et les ayants droits de celles tombées,” *L'Observateur Paalga*. Tapsoba served as commander until at least June 12, 2024, see Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁸¹ This may be the same person as the Amadou Sanou, who became commander of the 4th Military Region on February 28, 2025.

⁷⁸² Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁷⁸³ Kabore, “Reconquête de l'intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkina24*.



Chain of Command for Barsalogo, Center-North Region, April 20, 2023

Nondin and Soro, North Region, February 25, 2024

At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba was serving as commander of the 1st Military Region having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁷⁸⁴ and taken that position up by at least February 18, 2023.⁷⁸⁵ The killings occurred after Capt. Amadou Sanou⁷⁸⁶ was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the North on November 14, 2022.⁷⁸⁷ Sources indicate Sanou had taken up the role by at least October 25, 2023.⁷⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether he continued to hold that role as of February 25, 2024, when the killings occurred.

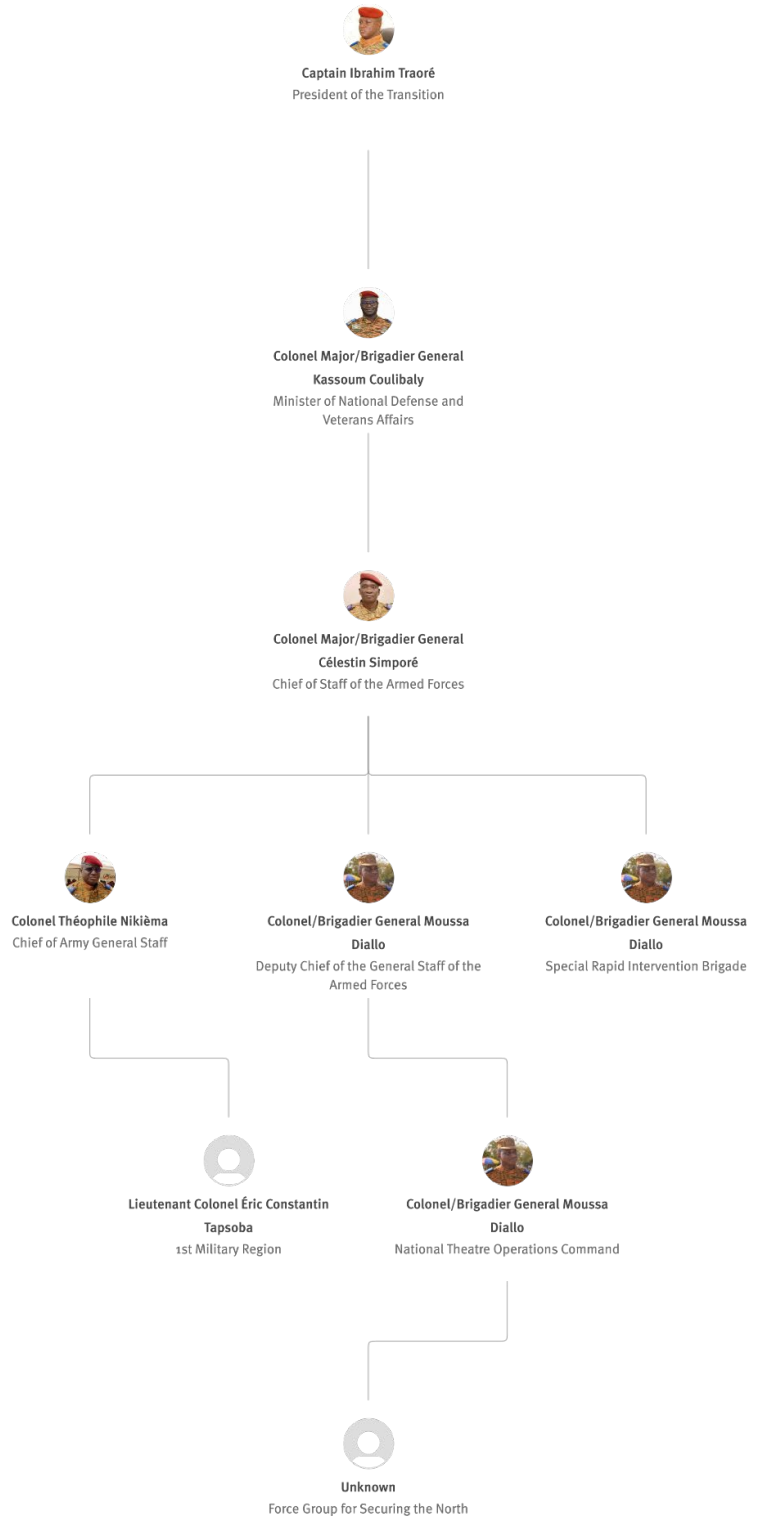
⁷⁸⁴ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées. Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁸⁵ Ouédraogo, “Complexe social de la première région militaire : Soutenir les FDS blessées et les ayants droits de celles tombées,” *L'Observateur Paalga*. Tapsoba served as commander until at least June 12, 2024, see Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁸⁶ This may be the same person as the Amadou Sanou, who became commander of the 4th Military Region on February 28, 2025.

⁷⁸⁷ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁷⁸⁸ Kabore, “Reconquête de l'intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkina24*.



Chain of Command for Nondin and Soro, North Region, February 25, 2024

Torobo and Ouahigouya, North Region, May 2024

At the time of the attack, Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba was serving as commander of the 1st Military Region, having been appointed on November 14, 2022,⁷⁸⁹ and having taken up that position by at least February 18, 2023.⁷⁹⁰ The attack occurred after Capt. Amadou Sanou⁷⁹¹ was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the North on November 14, 2022.⁷⁹² Sources indicate Sanou had taken up the role by at least October 25, 2023.⁷⁹³ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he continued to serve in that position as of May 2024.

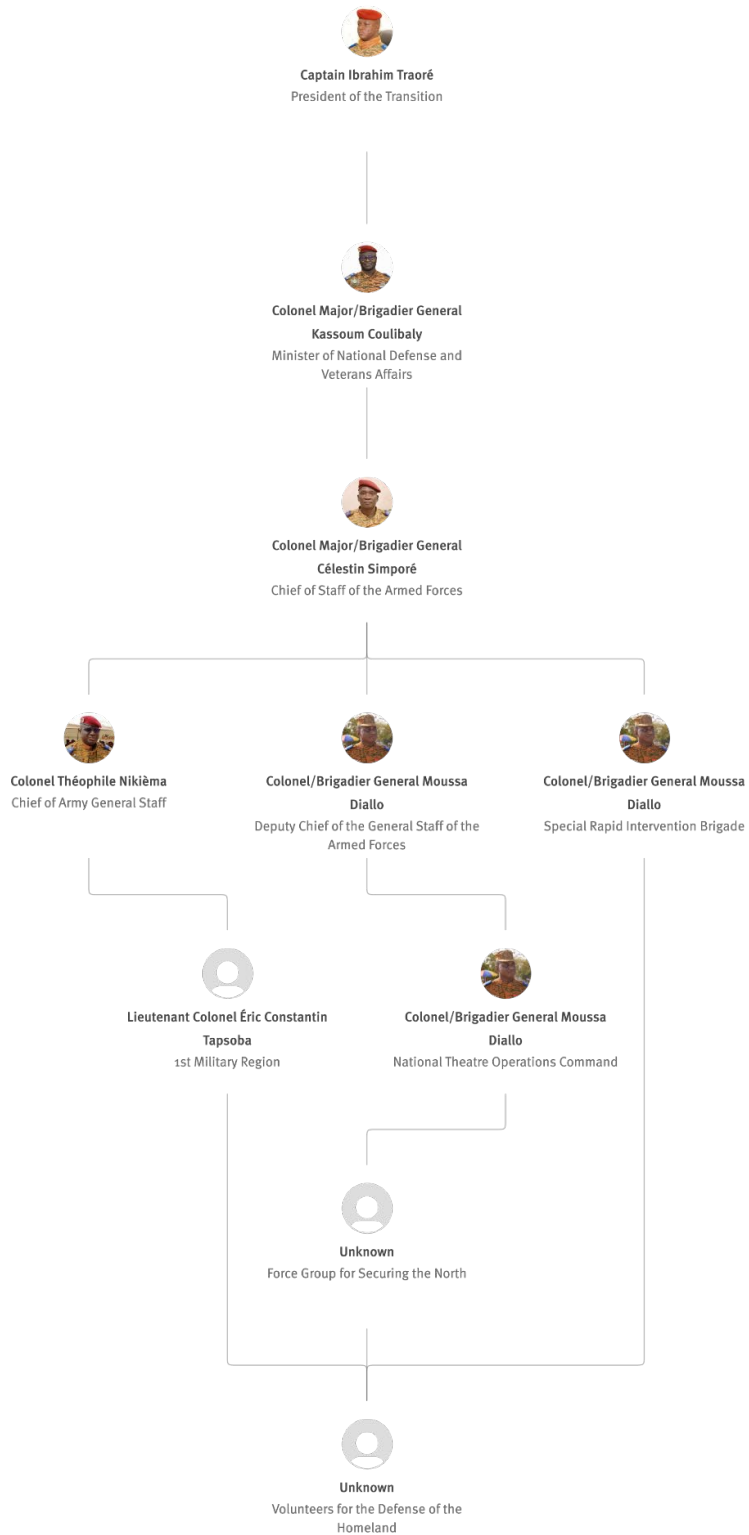
⁷⁸⁹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées. Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁹⁰ Ouédraogo, “Complexe social de la première région militaire : Soutenir les FDS blessées et les ayants droits de celles tombées,” *L’Observateur Paalga*. Tapsoba served as commander until at least June 12, 2024, see Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁹¹ This may be the same person as the Amadou Sanou who became commander of the 4th Military Region on February 28, 2025.

⁷⁹² Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁷⁹³ Kabore, “Reconquête de l’intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkina24*.



Chain of Command for Torobo and Ouahigouya, North Region, May 2024

Touka, Center-North Region, July 13, 2024

The killings occurred after Lt. Col. Éric Constantin Tapsoba was replaced as commander of the 1st Military Region with the appointment of Lt. Col. Hamado Bambara on June 12, 2024.⁷⁹⁴ Bambara however did not assume command until July 25, 2024.⁷⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether Tapsoba continued to be commander as of July 13, 2024, when the killings occurred. The killings occurred after Capt. Amadou Sanou⁷⁹⁶ was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the North on November 14, 2022.⁷⁹⁷ Sources indicate Sanou had taken up the role by at least October 25, 2023.⁷⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch was unable to determine whether he continued to hold that role as of July 13, 2024, when the killings occurred.

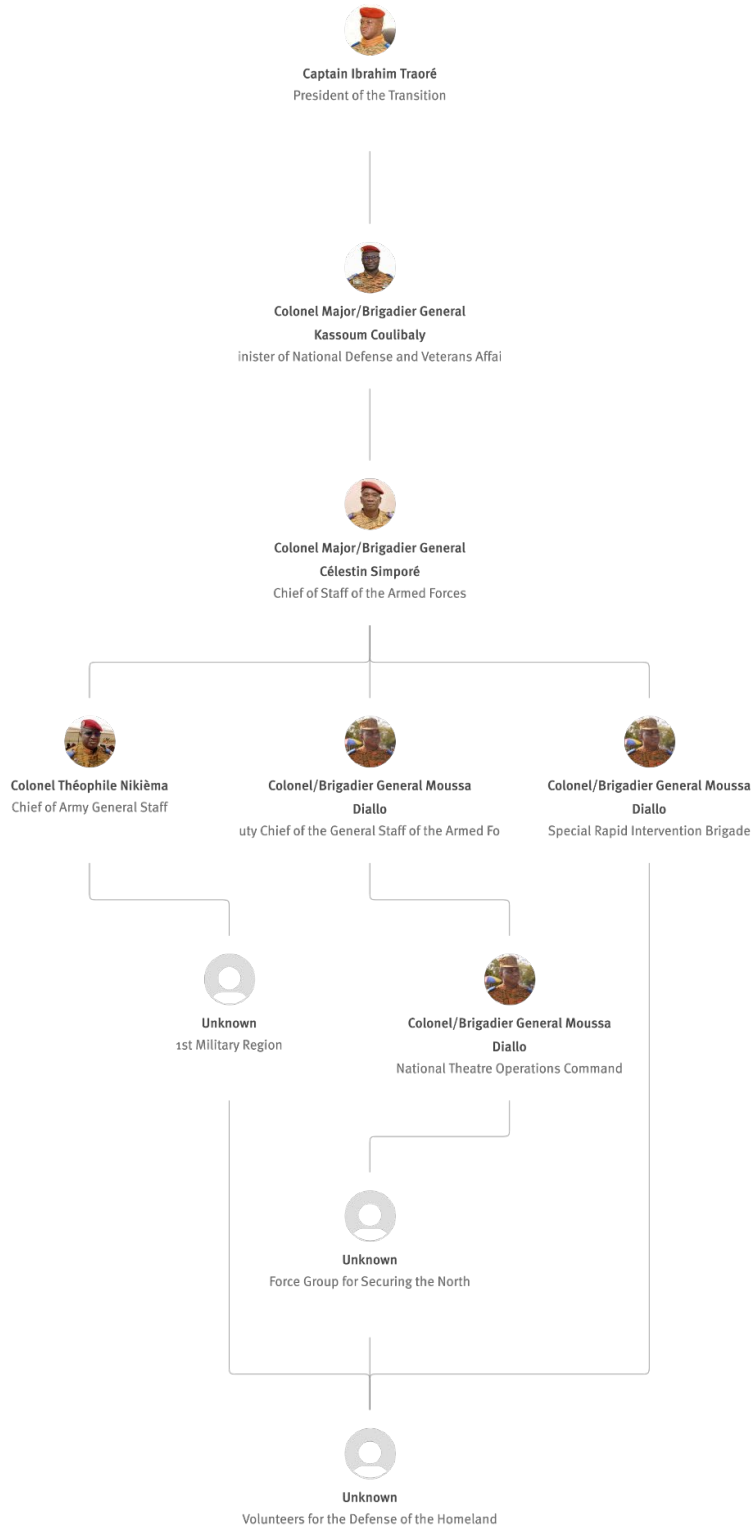
⁷⁹⁴ Segda, “Burkina : Le chef de bataillon Hamado Bambara commande désormais la 1ere région militaire,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁶ This may be the same person as the Amadou Sanou who became commander of the 4th Military Region on February 28, 2025.

⁷⁹⁷ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁷⁹⁸ Kabore, “Reconquête de l’intégrité territoriale : Au front avec les forces combattantes !” *Burkina24*.



Chain of Command for Touka, Center-North Region, July 13, 2024

2nd Military Region (Cascades, South-West, and Hauts-Bassins Administrative Regions)

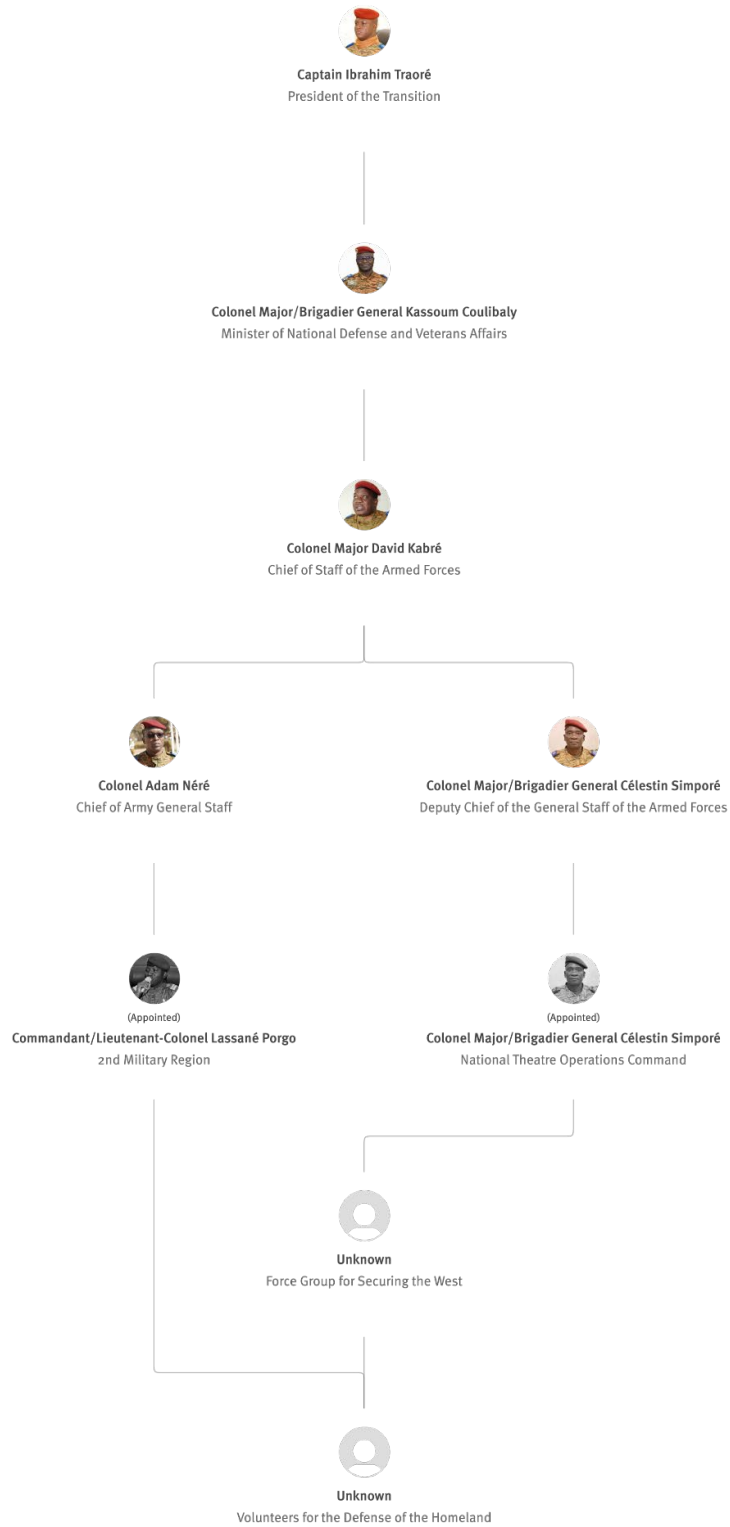
Man, Hauts-Bassins Region, February 2023

Human Rights Watch reviewed three lists compiled by the witnesses with the names of the 10 victims, all men, ages 23 to 70. These killings took place after Cdt. Lassané Porgo was appointed as commander of the 2nd Military Region on November 14, 2022.⁷⁹⁹ Porgo had taken up that position by at least May 31, 2023.⁸⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had taken command as of February 2023. These killings also took place after Capt. Lokpala Kambou was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the West on November 14, 2022.⁸⁰¹ His career path after this date is not known at time of writing.

⁷⁹⁹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁰⁰ “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, June 6, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20241110093451/https://www.aib.media/contingent-exceptionnel-complementaire-de-la-classe-2023-882-soldats-renforcent-les-rangs-des-forces-armees-nationales/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Porgo continued to serve as commander and, by April 3, 2025, had been promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. See Adaman Drabo, “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique : Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, April 8, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250504000952/https://www.aib.media/regions/2025/04/08/journees-nationales-dengagement-patriotique-des-burkinabe-invites-a-promouvoir-lordre-et-la-discipline/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Porgo continued to serve as commander until at least June 1, 2025. See “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*, June 1, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250605192645/https://aconews.net/securisation-des-examens-scolaires-le-ministre-en-charge-de-leducation-de-base-remercie-les-fds/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁸⁰¹ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Man, Hauts-Bassins Region, February 2023

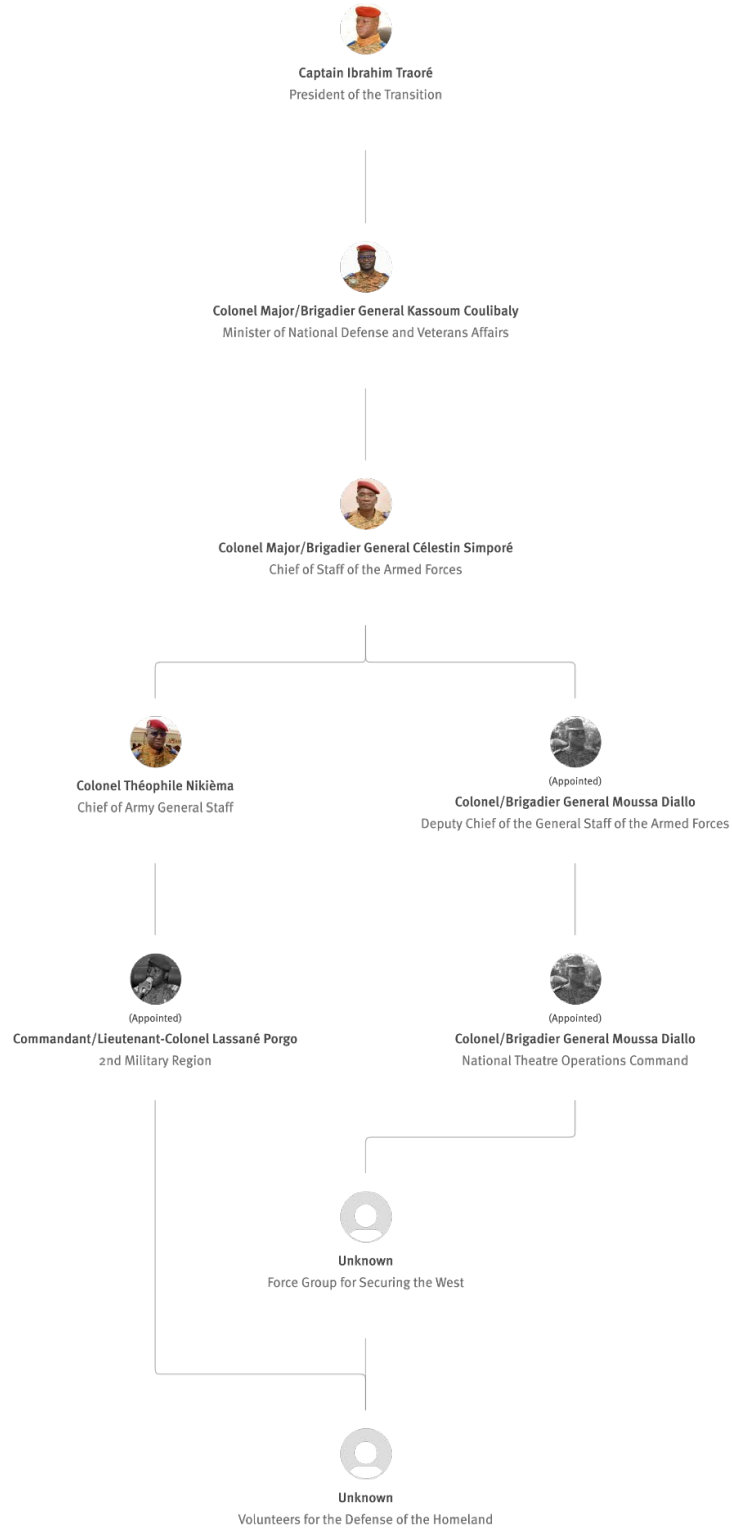
Pê, Hauts-Bassins Region, mid-late May 2023

At the time of the killings, Cdt. Lassané Porgo served as commander of the 2nd Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022.⁸⁰² He had and taken up that position by at least May 31, 2023.⁸⁰³ The killings and alleged killings took place after Capt. Lokpala Kambou was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the West on November 14, 2022.⁸⁰⁴ His career after that date was not known at time of writing.

⁸⁰² Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁰³ “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel by at least April 3, 2025. See Drabo, “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique : Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo continued to serve as commander until at least June 1, 2025. See “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*.

⁸⁰⁴ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Pê, Hauts-Bassins Region, mid-late May 2023

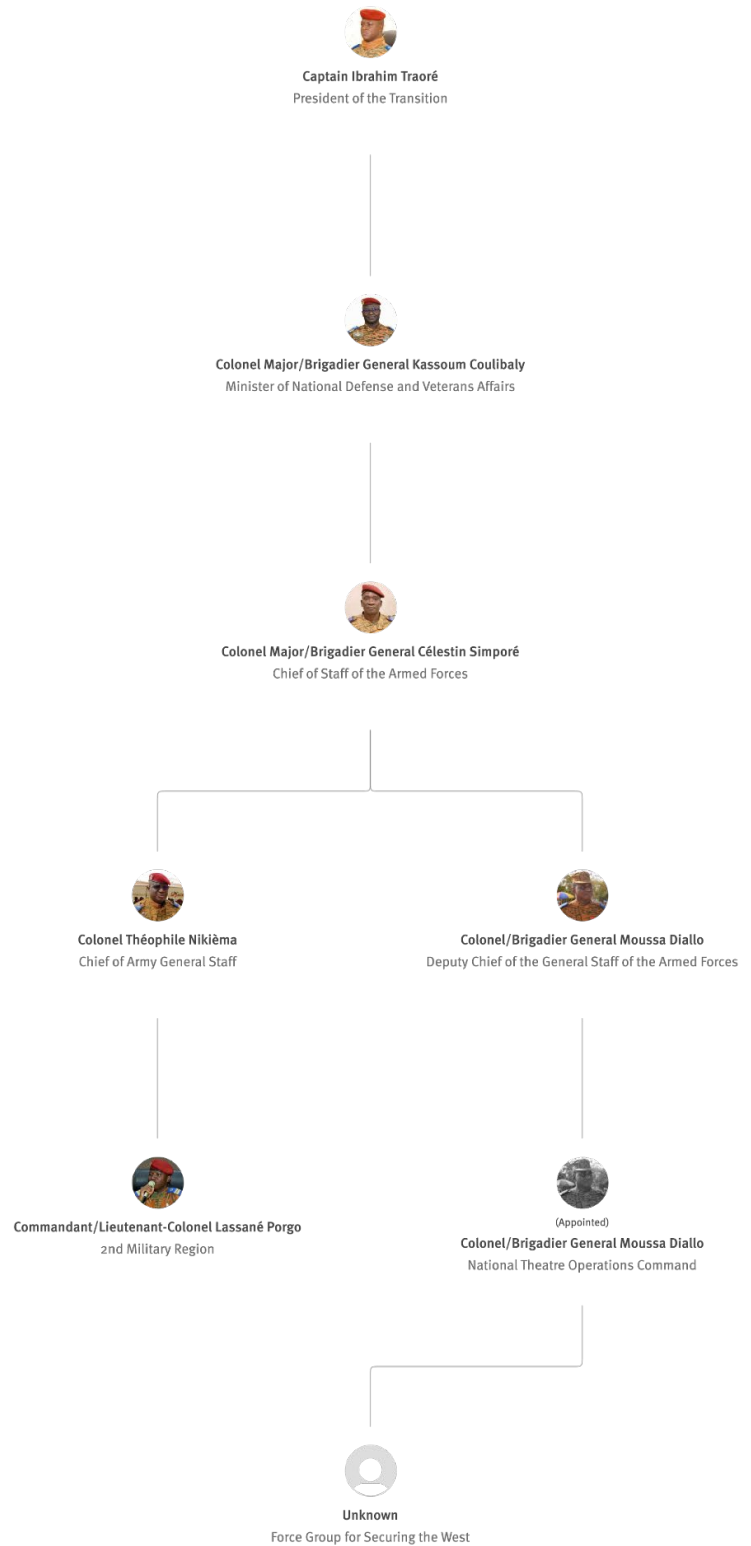
Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins Region, July 8, 2023

At the time of the killings, Cdt. Lassané Porgo served as commander of the 2nd Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁰⁵ and taken up that position by at least May 31, 2023.⁸⁰⁶ The killings occurred after Capt. Lokpala Kambou was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the West on November 14, 2022.⁸⁰⁷ His career after this date is not known at time of writing.

⁸⁰⁵ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁰⁶ “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo continued to serve as commander and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel by at least April 3, 2025. See Drabo, “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique : Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo continued to serve as commander until at least June 1, 2025. See “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*.

⁸⁰⁷ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Ramatoulaye, Hauts-Bassins Region, July 8, 2023

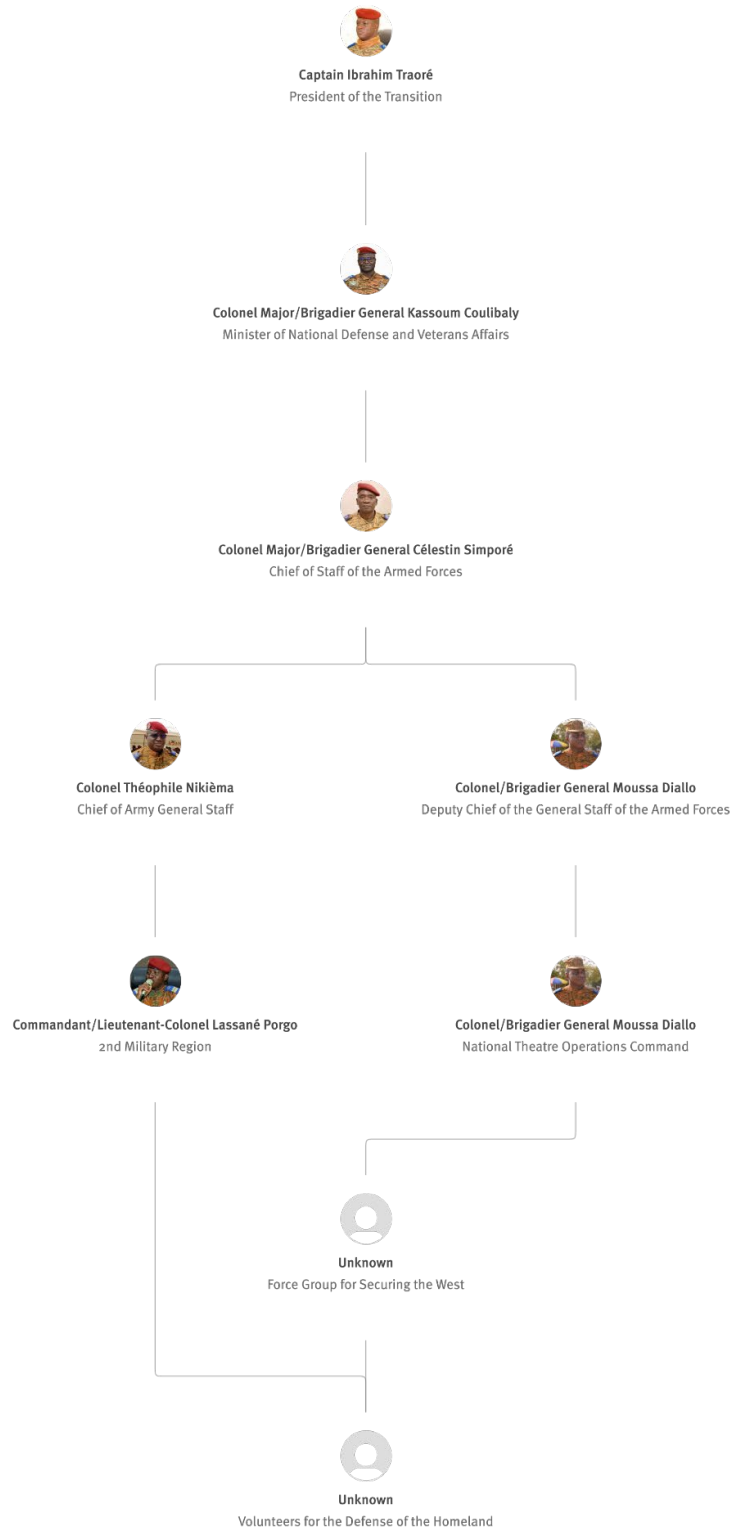
Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins Region, September 2023

At the time of the killings, Cdt. Lassané Porgo served as commander of the 2nd Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁰⁸ and taken up that position by at least May 31, 2023⁸⁰⁹. The killings and alleged killings occurred after Capt. Lokpala Kambou was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the West on November 14, 2022.⁸¹⁰ His career after this date was not known.

⁸⁰⁸ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁰⁹ “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel by at least April 3, 2025. See Drabo, “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique :Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo continued to serve as commander until at least June 1, 2025. See “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*.

⁸¹⁰ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Djigouéma, Hauts-Bassins Region, September 2023

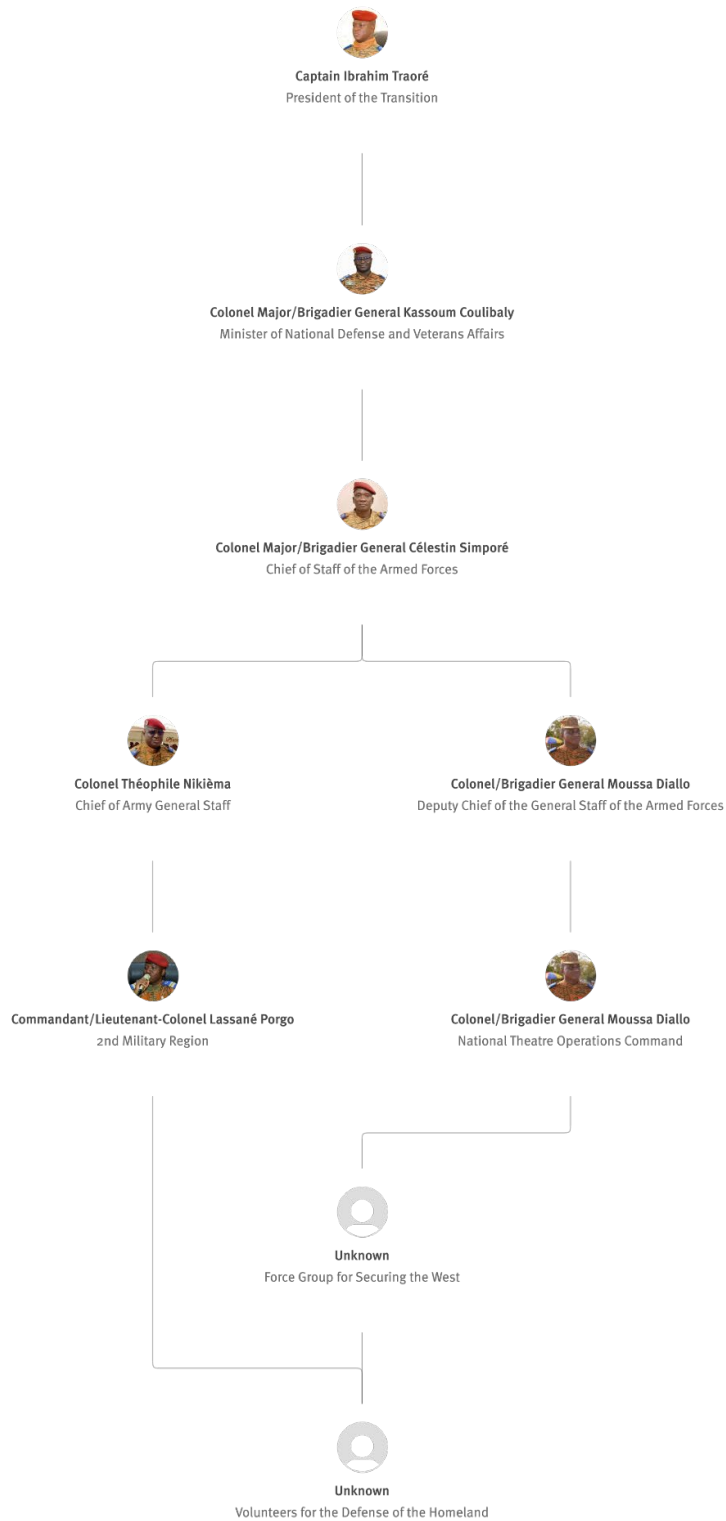
Bassé, Hauts-Bassins Region, late November 2023

At the time of the attack, Cdt. Lassané Porgo served as commander of the 2nd Military Region, having been appointed on November 14, 2022,⁸¹¹ and taken up this position by at least May 31, 2023.⁸¹² The attack and killings also took place after Capt. Lokpala Kambou was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the West on November 14, 2022.⁸¹³ His career after this date is not known at time of writing.

⁸¹¹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸¹² “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel by April 3, 2025. See Drabo, “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique :Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo continued to serve as commander until at least June 1, 2025. See “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*.

⁸¹³ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Bassé, Hauts-Bassins Region, late November 2023

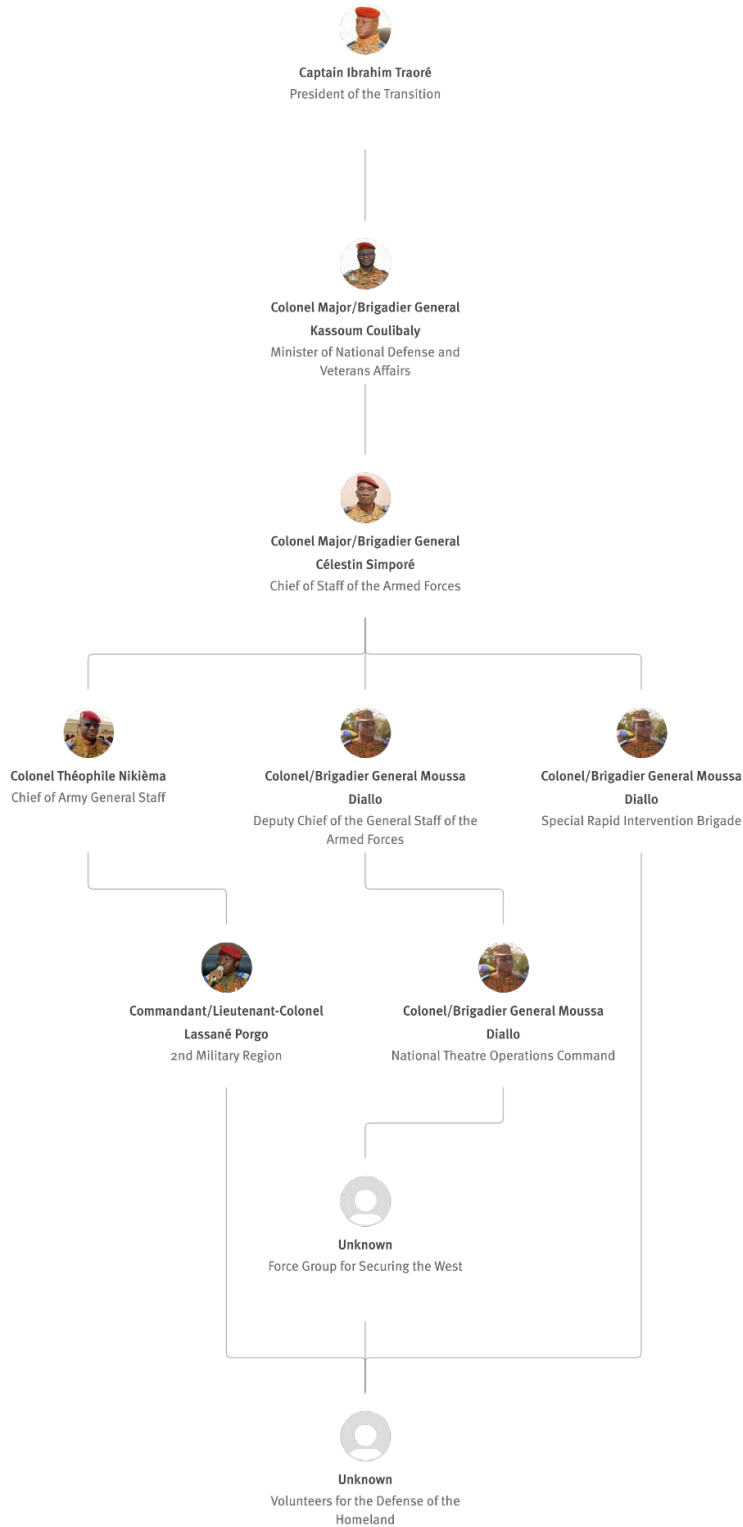
Niangoloko, Cascades Region, Burkina Faso, June 14, 2024

At the time of the killing, Cdt. Lassané Porgo served as commander of the 2nd Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸¹⁴ and taken up that position by at least May 31, 2023.⁸¹⁵ The killing occurred after Capt. Lokpala Kambou was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the West on November 14, 2022.⁸¹⁶ His career path after this date is not currently known.

⁸¹⁴ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸¹⁵ “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel by April 3, 2025. See Drabo, “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique :Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo continued to serve as commander until at least June 1, 2025. See “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*.

⁸¹⁶ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Niangoloko, Cascades Region, Burkina Faso, June 14, 2024

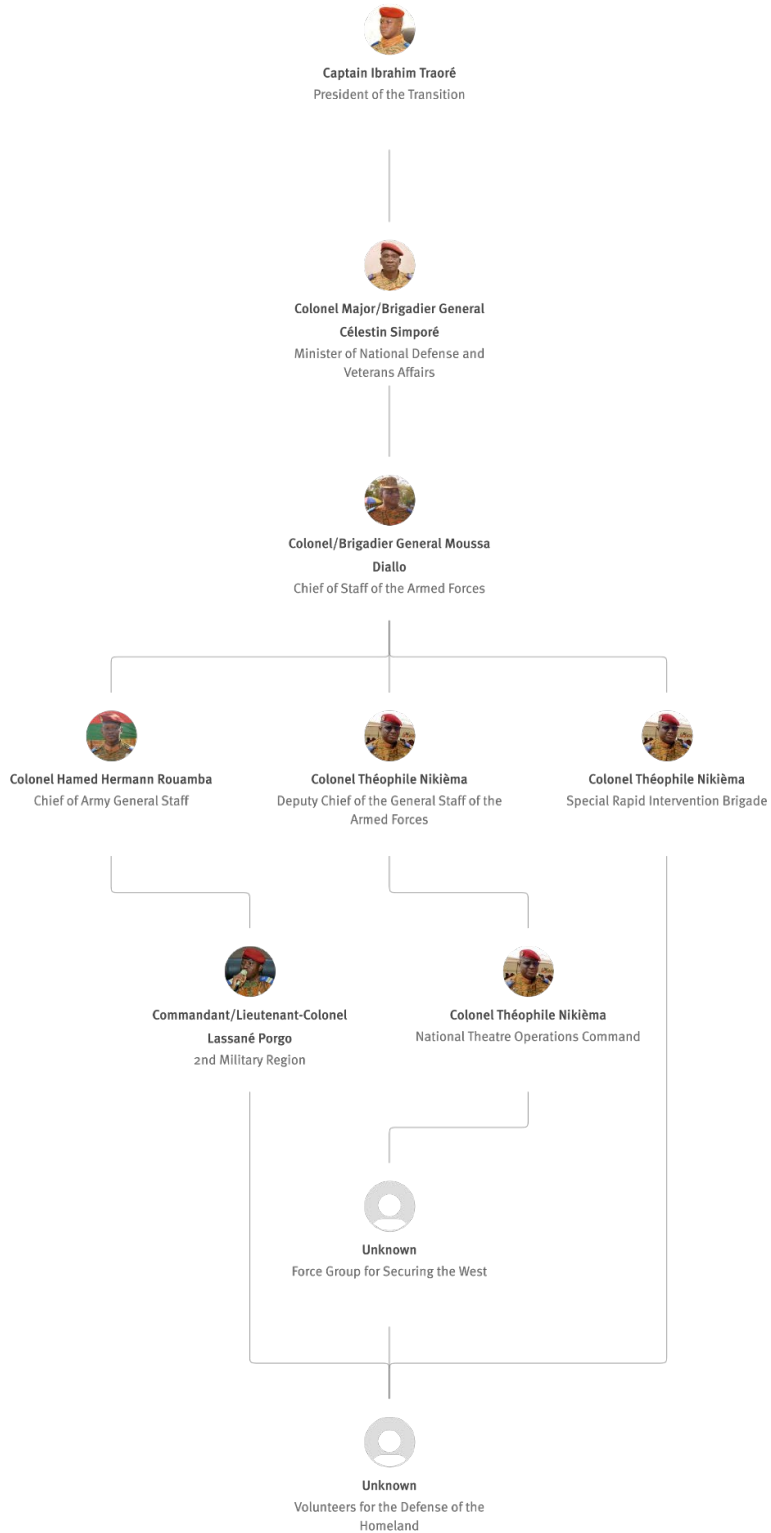
Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins Region, January 31, 2025

At the time of the killings and alleged killings, Cdt. Lassané Porgo served as commander of the 2nd Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸¹⁷ and taken up that position by at least May 31, 2023.⁸¹⁸ The killings and alleged killings took place after Capt. Lokpala Kambou was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the West on November 14, 2022.⁸¹⁹ His career after this date is not known at time of writing.

⁸¹⁷ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸¹⁸ “Contingent exceptionnel complémentaire de la classe 2023 : 882 soldats renforcent les rangs des Forces armées nationales,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel by April 3, 2025. See Drabo, “Journées nationales d’engagement patriotique :Des Burkinabè invités à promouvoir l’ordre et la discipline,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*. Porgo continued to serve as commander until at least June 1, 2025. See “Sécurisation des examens scolaires : Le ministre en charge de l’Education de base remercie les FDS,” *Aconews.net*.

⁸¹⁹ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Dô-Diassa and Fanfiéla, Hauts-Bassins Region, January 31, 2025

3rd Military Region (Center-South, Center-West, and Plateau Central Administrative Regions)

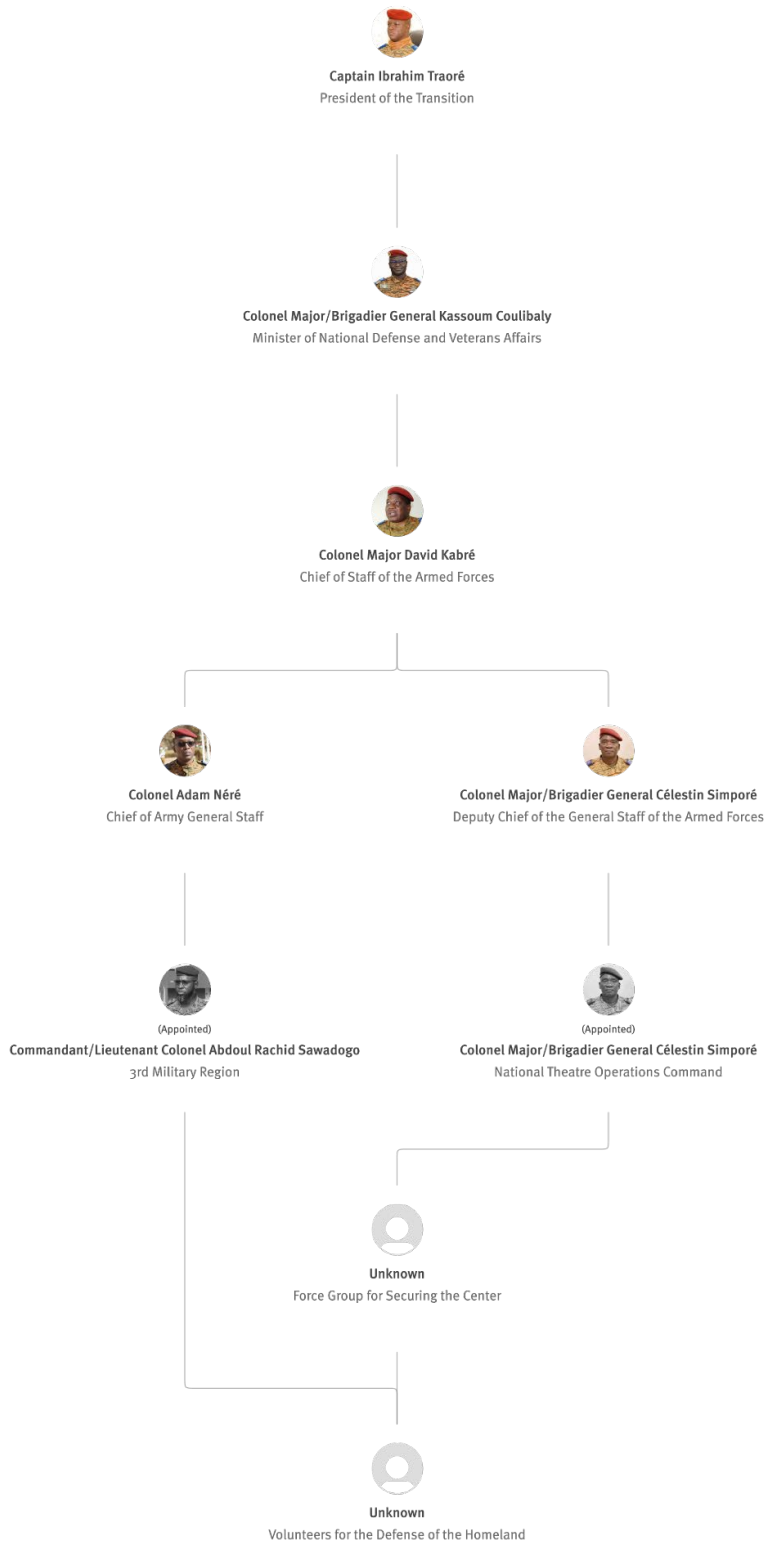
Gomboussougou, Center-South Region, February 2023

These killings took place after Lt. Col. Abdoul Rachid Sawadogo had been appointed commander on November 14, 2022.⁸²⁰ Sources indicate that Sawadogo had taken up the role by at least June 27, 2023.⁸²¹ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of February 2023. The killings also took place after Cdt. K. Ibrahim Bouda was appointed as commander of Force Group for Securing the Center on November 14, 2022.⁸²² His career path after this date is not known at time of writing.

⁸²⁰ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸²¹ “Burkina Faso : Le CEMAT avec les unités de la 3e RM,” *Burkina24*, July 4, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230704101608/https://burkina24.com/2023/07/04/burkina-faso-le-cemat-avec-les-unites-de-la-3e-rm/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Sawadogo continued to serve as commander until at least July 12, 2023. See “Garnison de Pô : 546 recrues présentées au drapeau,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, July 14, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240302230613/https://www.aib.media/garnison-de-po-546-recrues-presentees-au-drapeau/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁸²² Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Gomboussougou, Center-South Region, February 2023

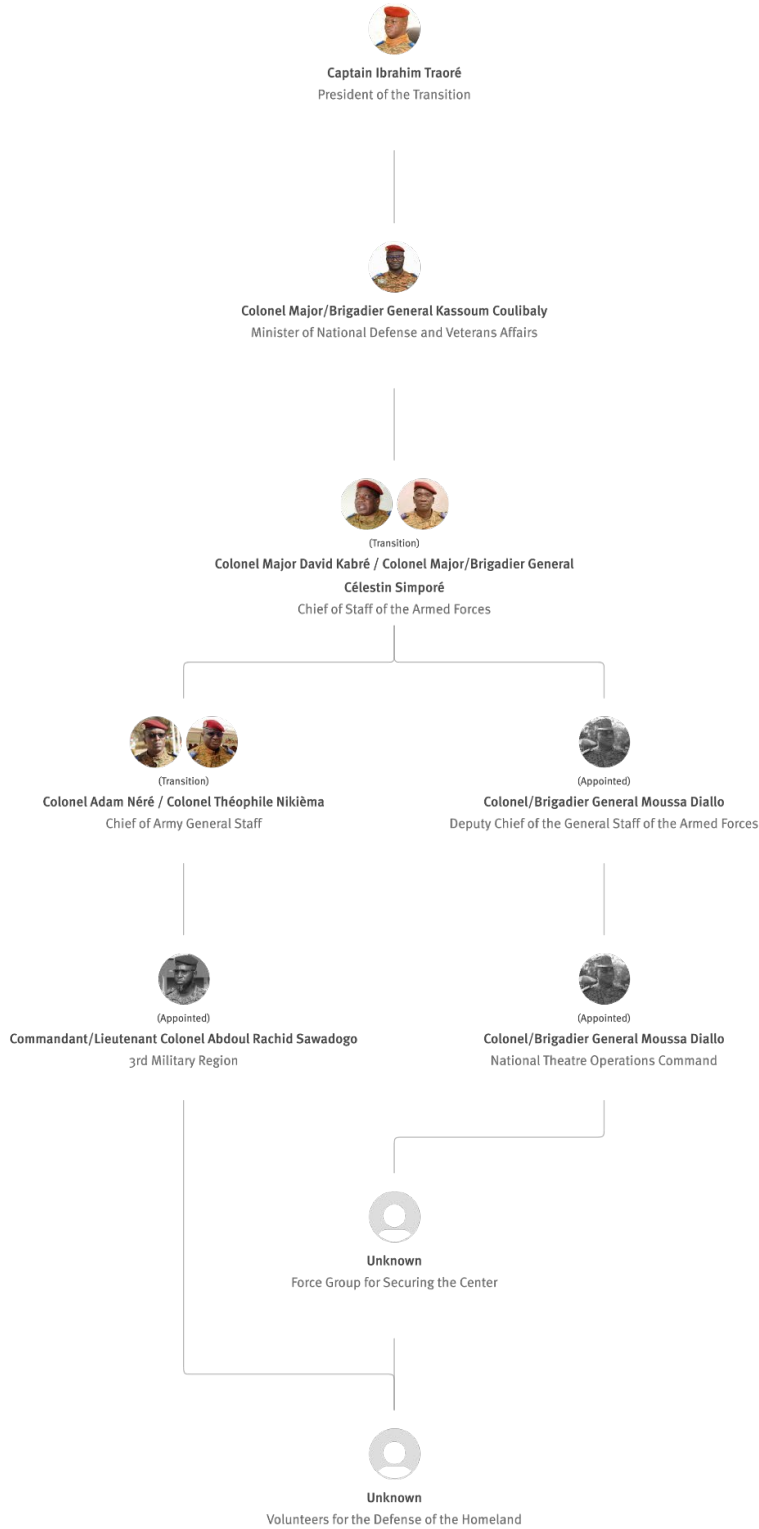
Sissili province, Center-West Region, April 2023

The abduction and torture took place after Lt. Col. Abdoul Rachid Sawadogo had been appointed commander on November 14, 2022.⁸²³ Sources indicate that Sawadogo had taken up the role by at least June 27, 2023.⁸²⁴ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of April 2023. The abduction and torture also took place after Cdt. K. Ibrahim Bouda was appointed as commander of Force Group for Securing the Center on November 14, 2022.⁸²⁵ His career path after this date is not known at time of writing.

⁸²³ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸²⁴ “Burkina Faso : Le CEMAT avec les unités de la 3e RM,” *Burkina24*, July 4, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230704101608/https://burkina24.com/2023/07/04/burkina-faso-le-cemat-avec-les-unites-de-la-3e-rm/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Sawadogo continued to serve as commander until at least July 12, 2023. See “Garnison de Pô : 546 recrues présentées au drapeau,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, July 14, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240302230613/https://www.aib.media/garnison-de-po-546-recrues-presentees-au-drapeau/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁸²⁵ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Sissili province, Center-West Region, April 2023

4th Military Region (Sahel Administrative Region)

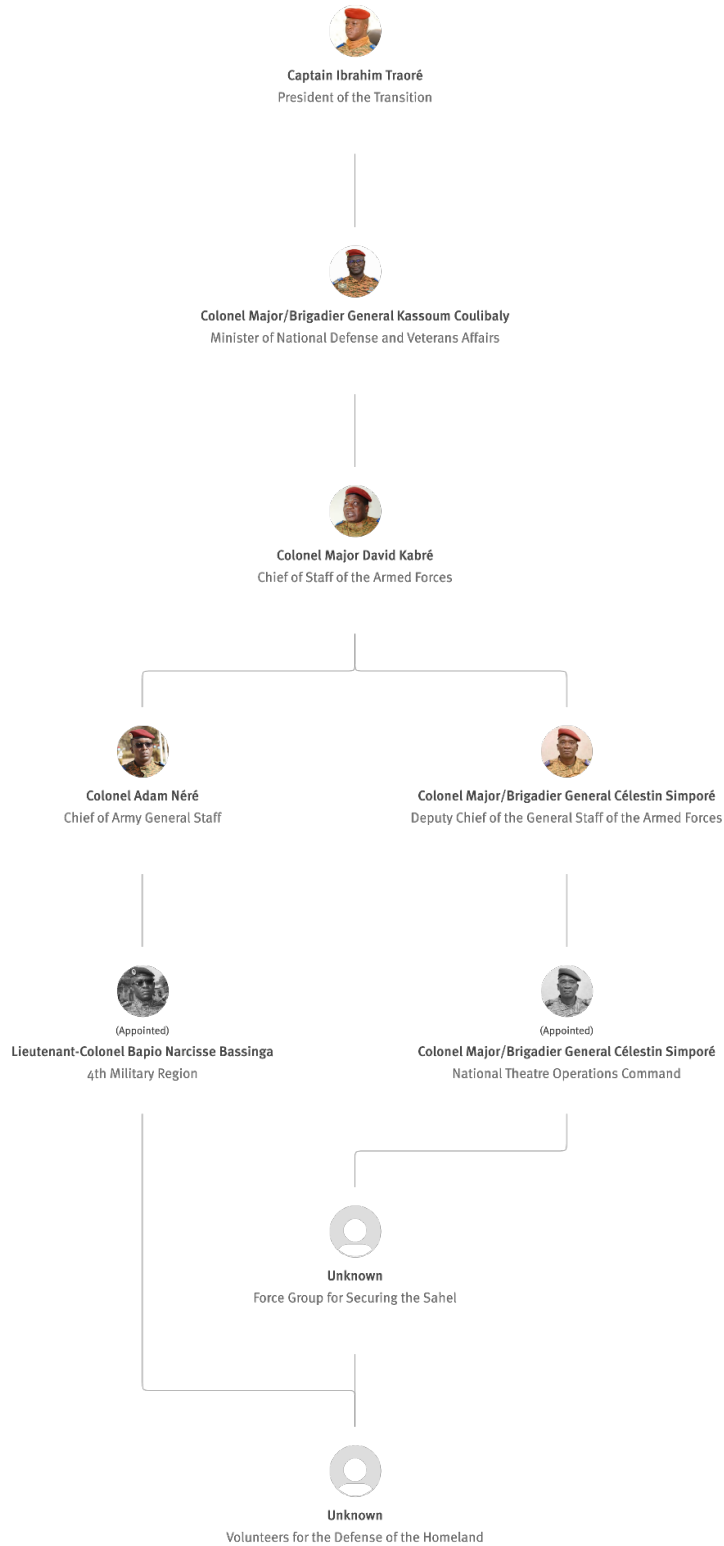
Guide, Sahel Region, January-March 2023

The killings took place after Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga was appointed commander of the 4th Military Region on November 14, 2022.⁸²⁶ Sources indicate Bassinga took up this position by at least June 20, 2023,⁸²⁷ but Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of January 2023. The killings also took place after Capt. Abdoulaye Toula was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Sahel on November 14, 2022.⁸²⁸ His career path after that point is not known at the time of writing.

⁸²⁶ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸²⁷ “Burkina/Défense nationale : Le patron de l’Armée de terre échange avec la troupe à Kaya et à Dori,” *LeFaso.net*, June 21, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230621181903/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article122360> (accessed on September 12, 2025). Bassinga served as commander until February 28, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to colonel. See Souaibou Nombre, “4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement,” *Sidwaya*, March 2, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250405231216/https://www.sidwaya.info/4e-region-militaire-le-chef-de-bataillon-amadou-sanou-prend-le-commandement/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁸²⁸ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Guide, Sahel Region, January-March 2023

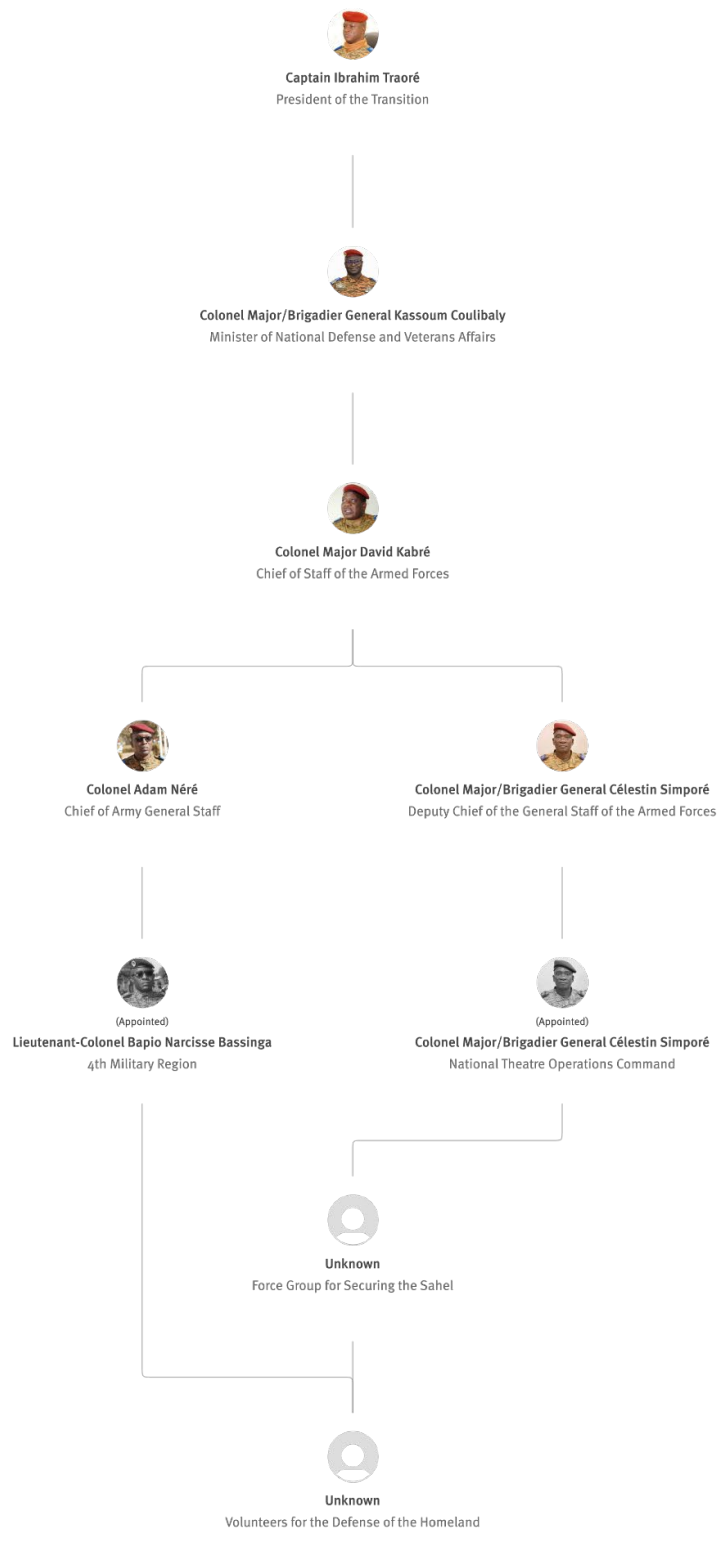
Ekeou, Sahel Region, February 15, 2023

The arrests and discovery of bodies took place after Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga was appointed commander of the 4th Military Region on November 14, 2022.⁸²⁹ Sources indicate that Bassinga had taken up that position by at least June 20, 2023.⁸³⁰ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of February 2023. The arrests and discovery of bodies also took place after Capt. Abdoulaye Toula was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Sahel on November 14, 2022.⁸³¹ His career path after that point is not known at time of writing.

⁸²⁹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸³⁰ “Burkina/Défense nationale : Le patron de l’Armée de terre échange avec la troupe à Kaya et à Dori,” *LeFaso.net*. “1re et 4e Régions militaires au Burkina Faso : Les commandants installés,” *Faso7*, June 21, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230621180716/https://faso7.com/2023/06/21/1re-et-4e-regions-militaires-au-burkina-faso-les-commandants-installes/> (accessed September 10, 2025). Bassinga served in that position until February 28, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to the rank of colonel. See Nombre, “4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement,” *Sidwaya*.

⁸³¹ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Ekeou, Sahel Region, February 15, 2023

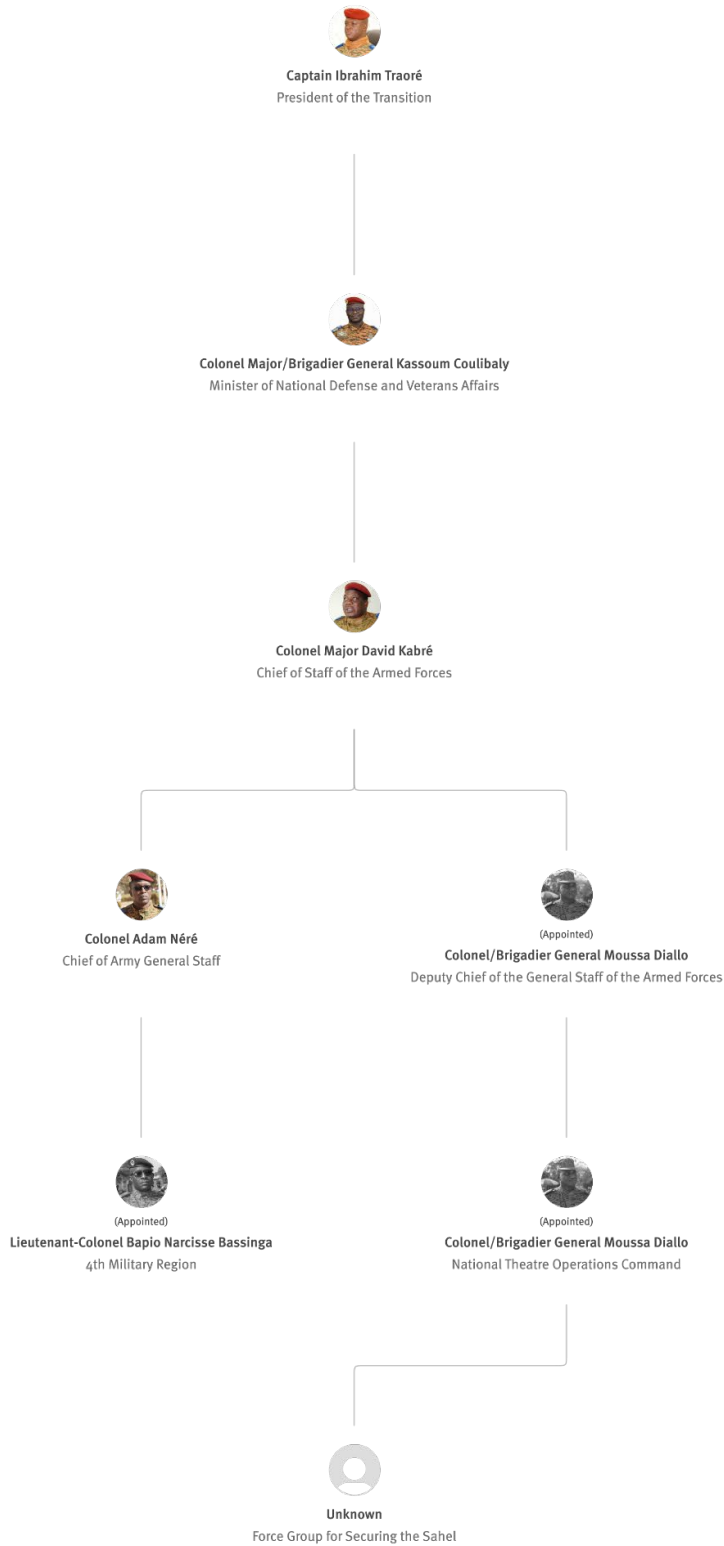
Gangaol, Sahel Region, April 3, 2023

At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga was serving as commander of the 4th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸³² and taken up the position by at least June 20, 2023.⁸³³ The killings occurred after Capt. Abdoulaye Toula was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Sahel on November 14, 2022.⁸³⁴ His career path after that point is not known at time of writing.

⁸³² Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸³³ “Burkina/Défense nationale : Le patron de l’Armée de terre échange avec la troupe à Kaya et à Dori,” *LeFaso.net*. Bassinga served as commander until February 28, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to colonel. See Nombre, “4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement,” *Sidwaya*.

⁸³⁴ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Gangaol, Sahel Region, April 3, 2023

Operation Tchéfari 2, December 11-14, 2023

At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga was serving as the commander of the 4th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸³⁵ and taken up the position by at least June 20, 2023.⁸³⁶ Capt. Abdoulaye Toula was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Sahel on November 14, 2022, however, his career path after that point is not known at time of writing.⁸³⁷ The killings occurred after Capt. K. Farouk Azaria. T Sorgho (also referred to as Farouk Azaria Sorgho) was appointed the commander of BIR 4 on November 14, 2022,⁸³⁸ and took up that position by at least November 27, 2024.⁸³⁹ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of December 11 to 14, 2023. The killings occurred after Capt. N. Justin Yameogo and Capt. Oumarou Dima were appointed the commanders of BIR 5 and BIR 6, respectively, on November 14, 2022.⁸⁴⁰ Their careers after that date are not currently known.

⁸³⁵ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

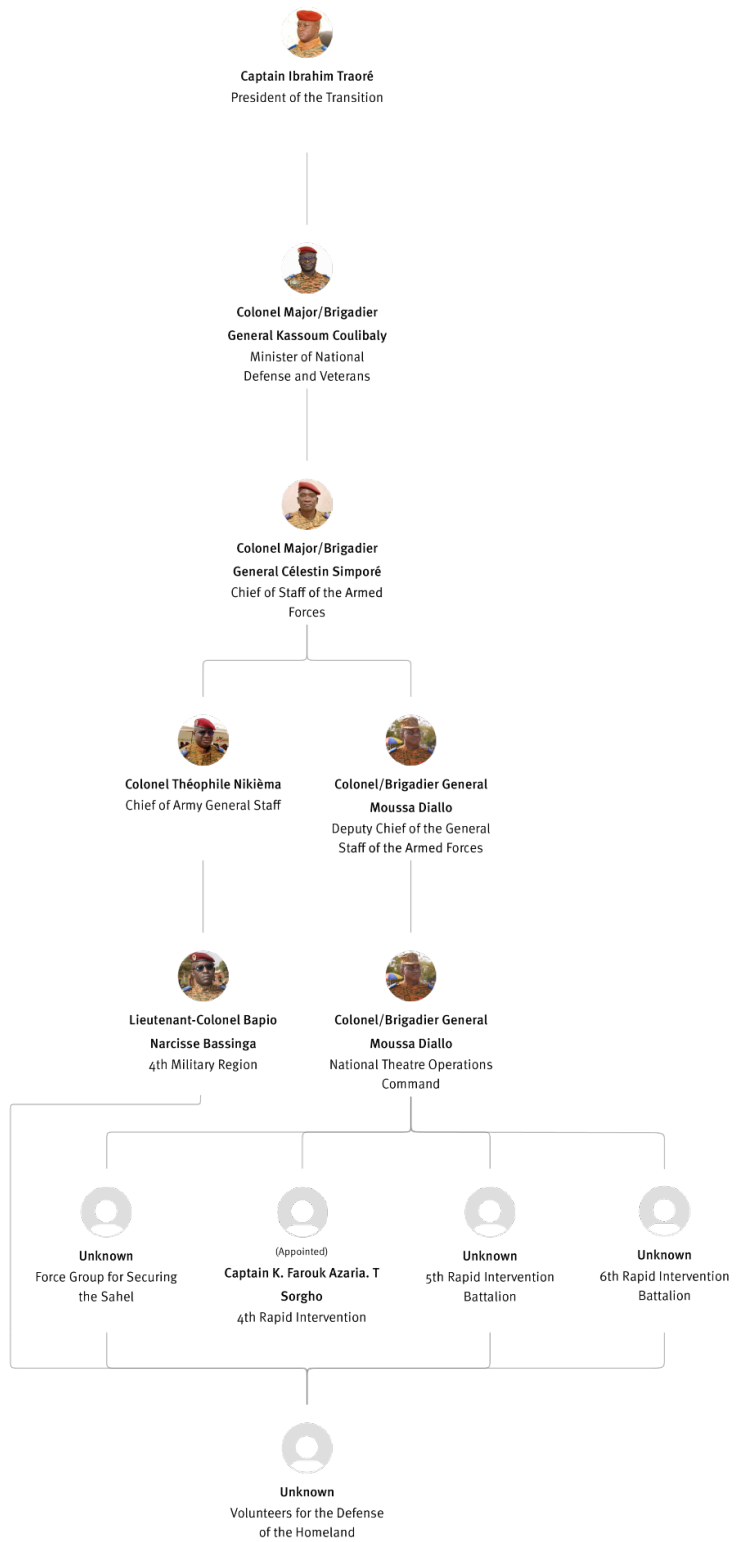
⁸³⁶ “Burkina/Défense nationale : Le patron de l’Armée de terre échange avec la troupe à Kaya et à Dori,” *LeFaso.net*. Bassinga served as commander until February 28, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to colonel. See Nombre, “4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement,” *Sidwaya*.

⁸³⁷ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁸³⁸ Décret N°2022-0980/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de chefs de Corps des Forces Armées Nationales.

⁸³⁹ “Burkina : Le pouvoir fait des “révélations graves” sur des entreprises immobilières,” *LeFaso.net*, November 27, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250318080530/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article134456> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁸⁴⁰ Décret N°2022-0980/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de chefs de Corps des Forces Armées Nationales.



Chain of Command for Operation Tchéfari 2, December 11-14, 2023

Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel Region, January-March 2025

At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga was serving as commander of the 4th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁴¹ and taken up the position by at least June 20, 2023.⁸⁴² At the time of the convoy's return, Capt. Amadou Sanou was serving as commander of the 4th Military Region having assumed command on February 28, 2025.⁸⁴³ The killings occurred after Capt. Abdoulaye Toula was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Sahel on November 14, 2022,⁸⁴⁴ however, his career path after that point is not known at time of writing. The killings occurred after the appointments on June 30, 2023, of Capt. Wendlassida Karol Nana and Capt. Azisse Ramdé as commanders of BIR 9 and BIR 8, respectively.⁸⁴⁵ However their careers after this date are not currently known.

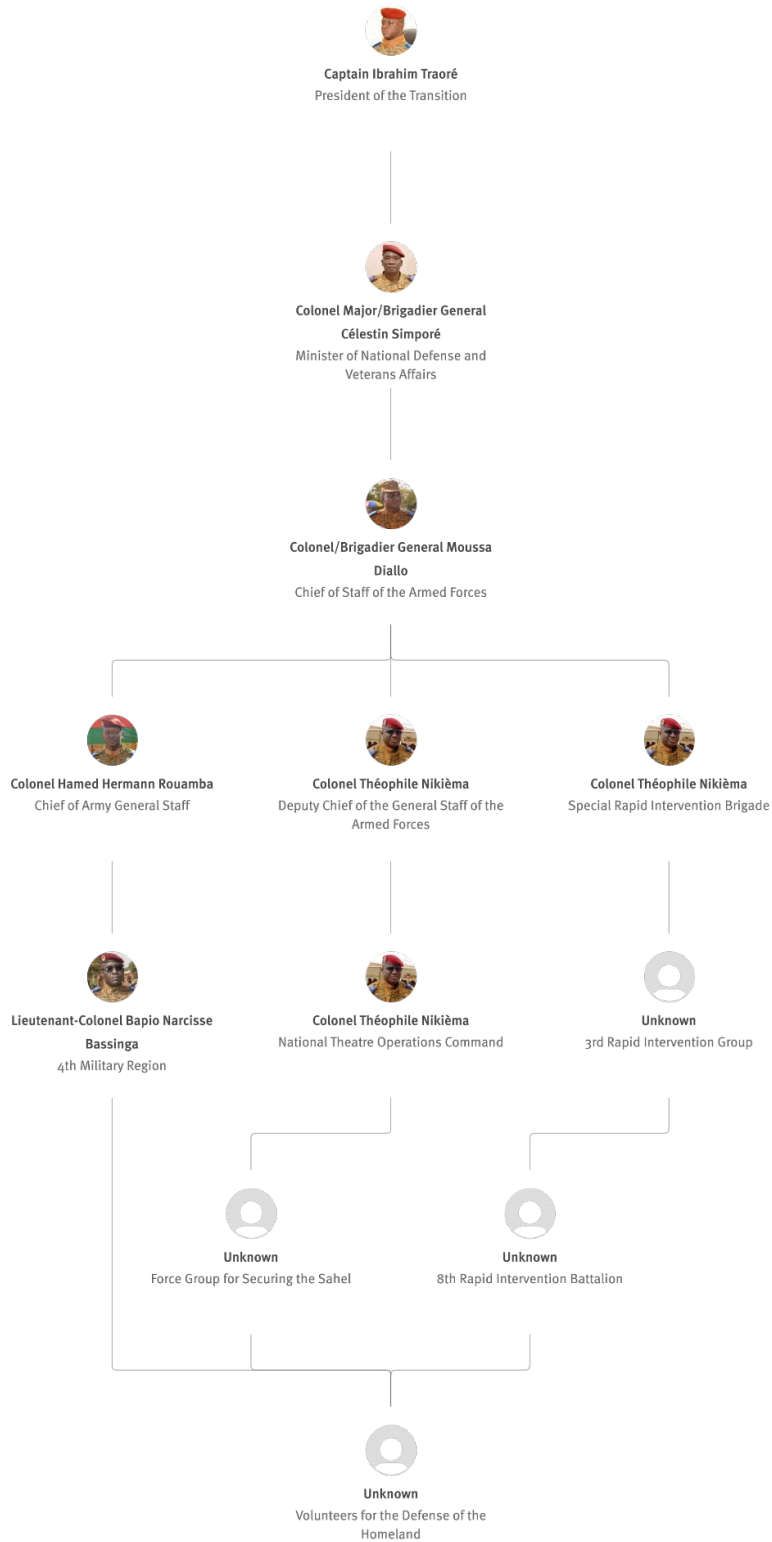
⁸⁴¹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁴² "Burkina/Défense nationale : Le patron de l'Armée de terre échange avec la troupe à Kaya et à Dori," *LeFaso.net*. Bassinga served as commander until February 28, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to colonel. See Nombre, "4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement," *Sidwaya*.

⁸⁴³ Nombre, "4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement," *Sidwaya*. Sanou continued to serve as commander until at least May 10, 2025. See "Sahel : Immersion des jeunes de Dori dans la révolution progressiste et populaire burkinabè à travers une conférence publique," *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, May 12, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250513033219/https://www.aib.media/sahel-immersion-des-jeunes-de-dori-dans-la-revolution-progressiste-et-populaire-burkinabe-a-travers-une-conference-publique/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁸⁴⁴ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

⁸⁴⁵ Bernard Kaboré, "Forces armées nationales: le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations," *L'Observateur Paalga*, July 2, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250505172145/https://www.lobspaalga.com/2023/07/02/forces-armees-nationales-le-capitaine-ibrahim-traore-procede-a-des-nominations/> (accessed March 16, 2026). Carine P. Zongo, "Burkina Faso : des nominations dans l'Armée," *24heures.bf*, July 2, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240228164204/https://www.24heures.bf/burkina-faso-des-nominations-dans-larmee/> (accessed September 12, 2025).



Chain of Command for Dori-Sebba-Dori Convoy, Sahel Region, January-March 2025

Gaskindé, Sahel Region, February 20, 2025

At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Bapio Narcisse Bassinga was serving as commander of the 4th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁴⁶ and taken up the position by at least June 20, 2023.⁸⁴⁷ The killings occurred after Capt. Abdoulaye Toula was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Sahel on November 14, 2022,⁸⁴⁸ however, his career path after that point is not known at time of writing. At the time of the killings, BIR 10 was under the command of GIR 2.⁸⁴⁹ Capt. Abdoul Aziz Ouattara served as commander of GIR 2 at the time of the killings, having been appointed commander on January 19, 2024,⁸⁵⁰ and having assumed that position by at least January 2025.⁸⁵¹ At the time of the killings, Capt. Wendpanga David Ouédraogo was serving as the commander of BIR 10, having been appointed as commander on June 30, 2023,⁸⁵² and taken up this position by at least February 8, 2025.⁸⁵³

⁸⁴⁶ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁴⁷ “Burkina/Défense nationale : Le patron de l’Armée de terre échange avec la troupe à Kaya et à Dori,” *LeFaso.net*. Bassinga served as commander until February 28, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to colonel. See Nombre, “4e région militaire : le chef de bataillon Amadou Sanou prend le commandement,” *Sidwaya*.

⁸⁴⁸ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.

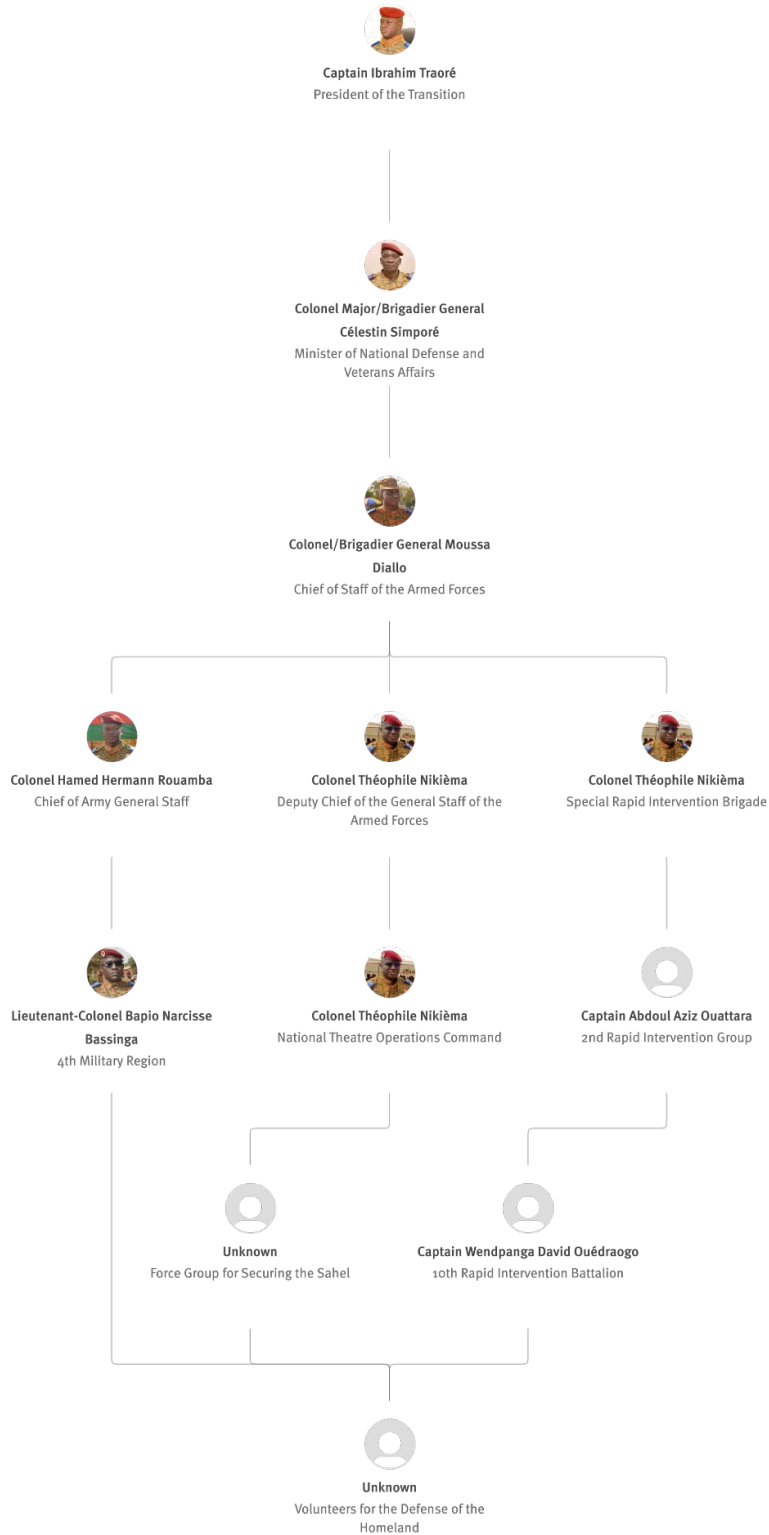
⁸⁴⁹ Décret n°2024-0003/PRES-TRANS/MDAC portant création, organisation et fonctionnement d’une Brigade spéciale et d’intervention rapide, document on file with Human Rights Watch, art. 7. “Succès Militaire : Les Forces Spéciales Intensifient la Lutte Contre le Terrorisme,” *Faso Times*, March 10, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250427220822/https://fasotimes.net/succes-militaire-les-forces-speciales-intensifient-la-lutte-contre-le-terrorisme/> (accessed March 13, 2026). “Boucle du Mouhoun/Opération «Tourbillon Vert 2» : Un succès majeur contre le terrorisme dans la région,” *Aconews.net*, April 2, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250418230926/https://aconews.net/boucle-du-mouhoun-operation-tourbillon-vert-2-un-succes-majeur-contre-le-terrorisme-dans-la-region/> (accessed March 16, 2026).

⁸⁵⁰ “Burkina : nominations des commandants des Groupements d’intervention rapide,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 19, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240119230304/https://www.aib.media/regions/2024/01/19/burkina-nominations-des-commandants-des-groupements-d-intervention-rapide/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁸⁵¹ Matteo Maillard, Matthieu Millecamps, and Mathieu Olivier, “Les Peuls face aux juntas du Sahel : enquête sur un peuple sacrifié,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 20, 2025, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1688395/politique/les-peuls-face-aux-juntas-du-sahel-enquete-sur-un-peuple-sacrifie/> (accessed March 13, 2026). He continued to serve in that role until at least March 10, 2025. See “Succès Militaire : Les Forces Spéciales Intensifient la Lutte Contre le Terrorisme,” *Faso Times*.

⁸⁵² Bernard Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L’Observateur Paalga*, July 2, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250505172145/https://www.lobspaalga.com/2023/07/02/forces-armees-nationales-le-capitaine-ibrahim-traore-procede-a-des-nominations/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Carine P. Zongo, “Burkina Faso: des nominations dans l’Armée,” *24heures.bf*, July 2, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240228164204/https://www.24heures.bf/burkina-faso-des-nominations-dans-larmee/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁸⁵³ “Mouhoun : Des jeunes sensibilisés dans la lutte pour la souveraineté nationale,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, February 10, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250325160641/https://www.aib.media/mouhoun-des-jeunes-sensibilises-dans-la-lutte-pour-la-souverainete-nationale/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Ouédraogo continued to serve as commander until at least October 4, 2025. See “Mouhoun/Le Vent Républicain : La contribution des femmes à la Révolution progressiste populaire au cœur des échanges,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, October 6, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20251007233516/https://www.aib.media/mouhoun-le-vent-republicain-la-contribution-des-femmes-a-la-revolution-progressiste-populaire-au-coeur-des-echanges/> (accessed March 13, 2026).



Chain of Command for Gaskindé, Sahel Region, February 20, 2025

5th Military Region (Boucle du Mouhoun Administrative Region)

Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, June 2023

At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Jean Marie Syriouma (also spelled Jean Marie Siryouma) served as commander of the 5th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁵⁴ and taken up that position by at least April 2023.⁸⁵⁵ The killings also occurred around when Cdt. Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun on June 20, 2023.⁸⁵⁶ Sources indicate Coulibaly had taken up the role by at least January 18, 2025.⁸⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command when the killings occurred in June 2023. He later became commander of the 5th Military Region on April 3, 2025.⁸⁵⁸

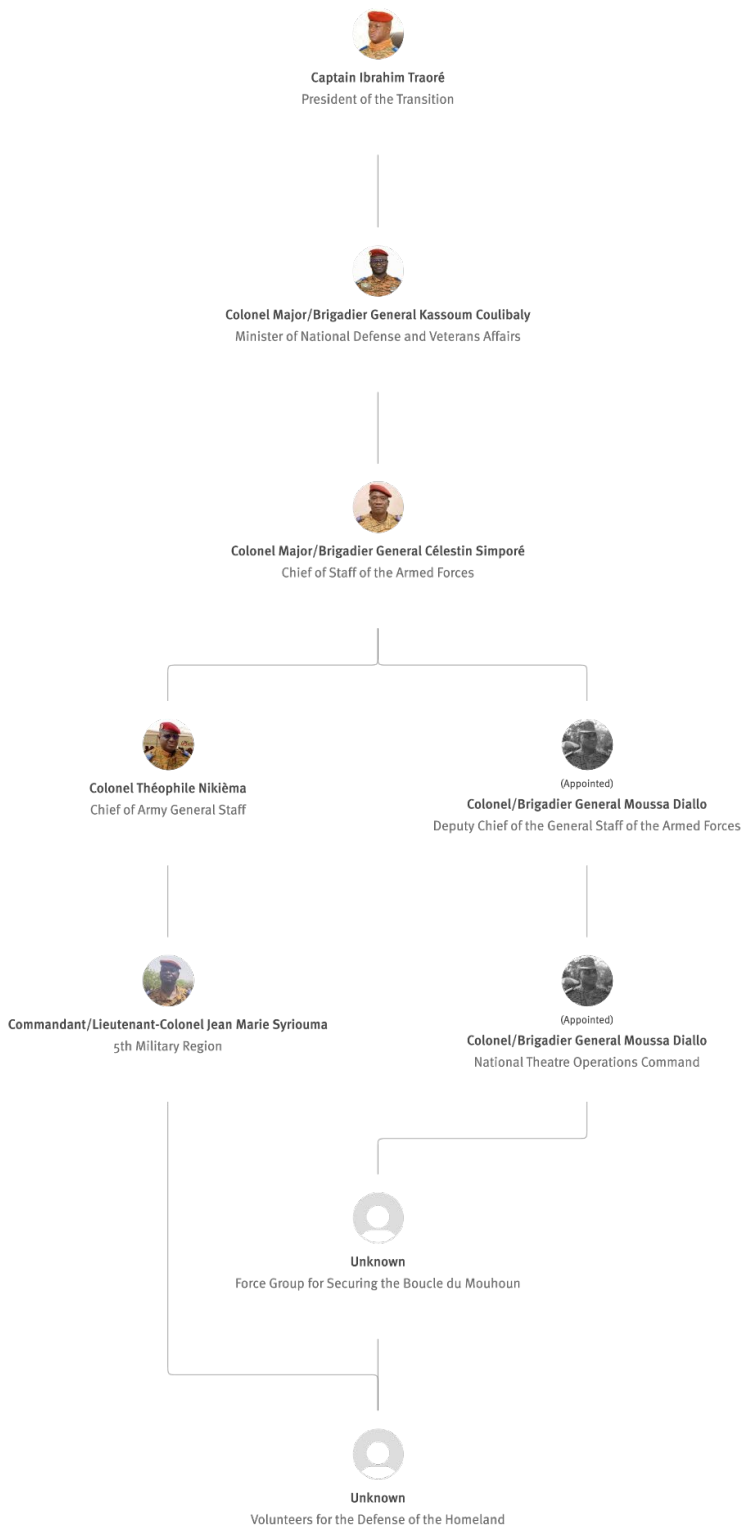
⁸⁵⁴ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁵⁵ Syriouma continued to serve as commander until he was replaced on April 3, 2025. See “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, April 4, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230621181903/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article122360> (accessed September 14, 2025).

⁸⁵⁶ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L'Observateur Paalga*.

⁸⁵⁷ Souleymane Ouédraogo, “5e Légion de Gendarmerie : Le Commandant de Légion aux côtés des hommes engagés sur le théâtre des opérations,” *Aconews.net*, January 21, 2025, <https://aconews.net/5e-legion-de-gendarmerie-le-commandant-de-legion-aux-cotes-des-hommes-engages-sur-le-theatre-des-operations/> (accessed March 16, 2026).

⁸⁵⁸ Yacouba Sama, “Forces armées nationales : Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les rênes de la 5e Région militaire,” *LeFaso.net*, April 4, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250404154421/https://lefaso.net/spip.php?article137207> (accessed October 10, 2025).



Chain of Command for Yaho, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, June 2023

Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, November 23, 2023

BIR 10 was also reported as operating in Koumana and several other villages in Bondoukou department on December 30, 2023.⁸⁵⁹ The killings occurred after Capt. Wendpanga David Ouédraogo was appointed as commander of BIR 10 on June 30, 2023.⁸⁶⁰ Sources indicate he was in this position by at least February 8, 2025.⁸⁶¹ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of November 23, 2023. The Boucle du Mouhoun region, where the killings in Koumana occurred, falls under the 5th military region⁸⁶² and the Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun.⁸⁶³ At the time of the attack and killings, Lt. Col. Jean Marie Syriouma (also spelled Jean Marie Siryouma) served as commander of the 5th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁶⁴ and taken that position up by at least April 2023.⁸⁶⁵ The attack and killings also occurred after Cdt. Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun on June 20, 2023.⁸⁶⁶ Sources indicate Coulibaly had taken up the role by at least January 18, 2025.⁸⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of late November 2023.

⁸⁵⁹ “Boulsa : Une trentaine de terroristes neutralisés dans le Namentenga, des criminels défaits à Loropéni,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*, December 30, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240304095935/https://www.aib.media/boulsa-une-trentaine-de-terroristes/> (accessed September 2, 2025).

⁸⁶⁰ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L'Observateur Paalga*. Zongo, “Burkina Faso : des nominations dans l'Armée,” *24heures.bf*.

⁸⁶¹ “Mouhoun : Des jeunes sensibilisés dans la lutte pour la souveraineté nationale,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁸⁶² Décret N°2022-0975/PRES-TRANS portant organisation du territoire national en Régions Militaires. “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

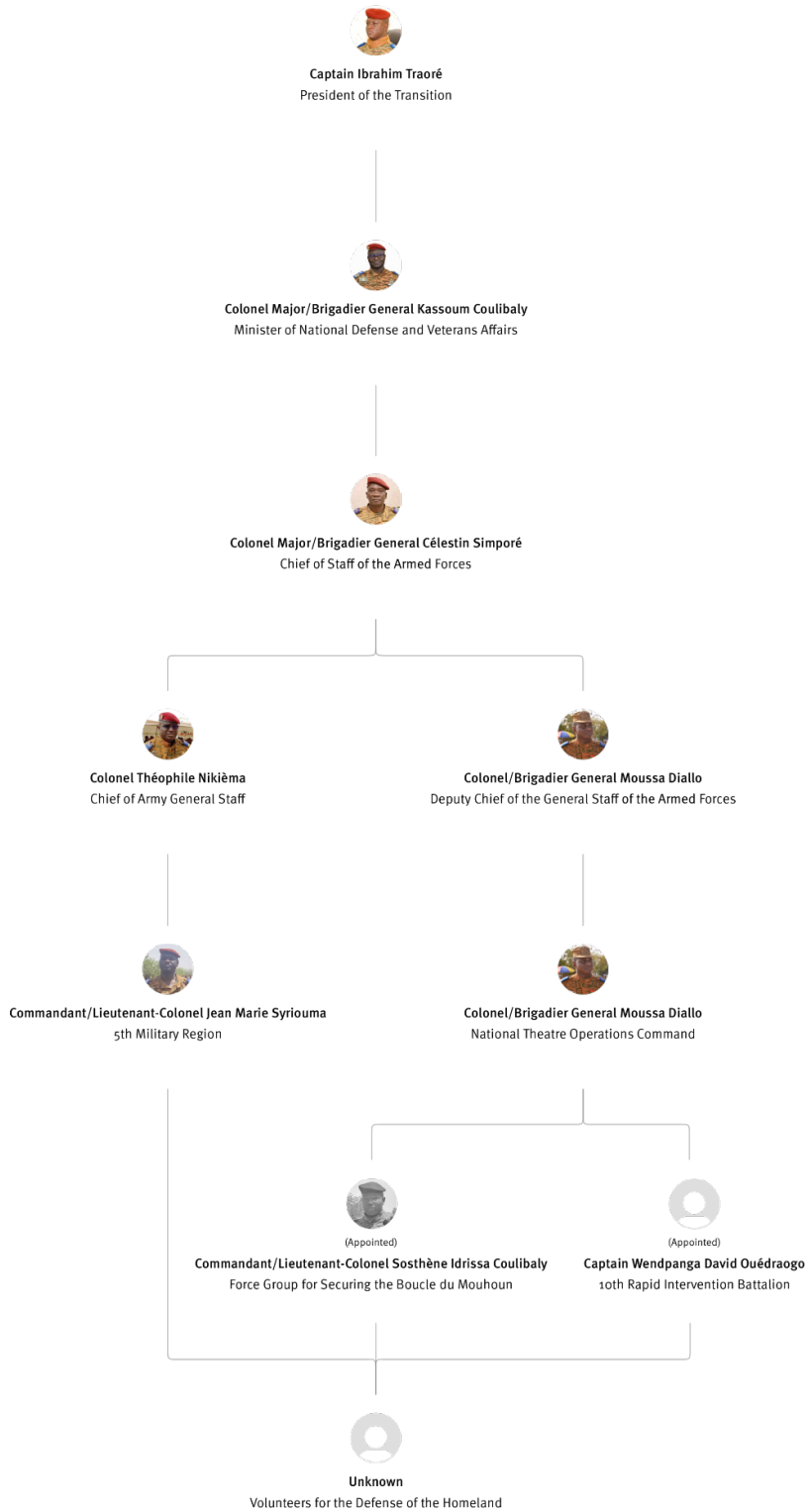
⁸⁶³ Décret n°2022-0976/PRES-TRANS/MDAC/MATDS/MJDHRI/MEFP/MEEA portant organisation, attributions et fonctionnement du Commandement des Opérations du Théâtre National (COTN), https://web.archive.org/web/20221115210829/https://www.sidwaya.info/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Decret_Portant-organisation-attribution-et-fonctionnement-du-COTN.pdf (accessed March 13, 2026). Human Rights Watch telephone interview with M.O., April 24, 2025.

⁸⁶⁴ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁶⁵ Syriouma continued to serve as commander until he was replaced on April 3, 2025. See “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁸⁶⁶ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L'Observateur Paalga*.

⁸⁶⁷ Ouédraogo, “5e Légion de Gendarmerie : Le Commandant de Légion aux côtés des hommes engagés sur le théâtre des opérations,” *Aconews.net*.



Chain of Command for Koumana, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, November 23, 2023

Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, January 2024

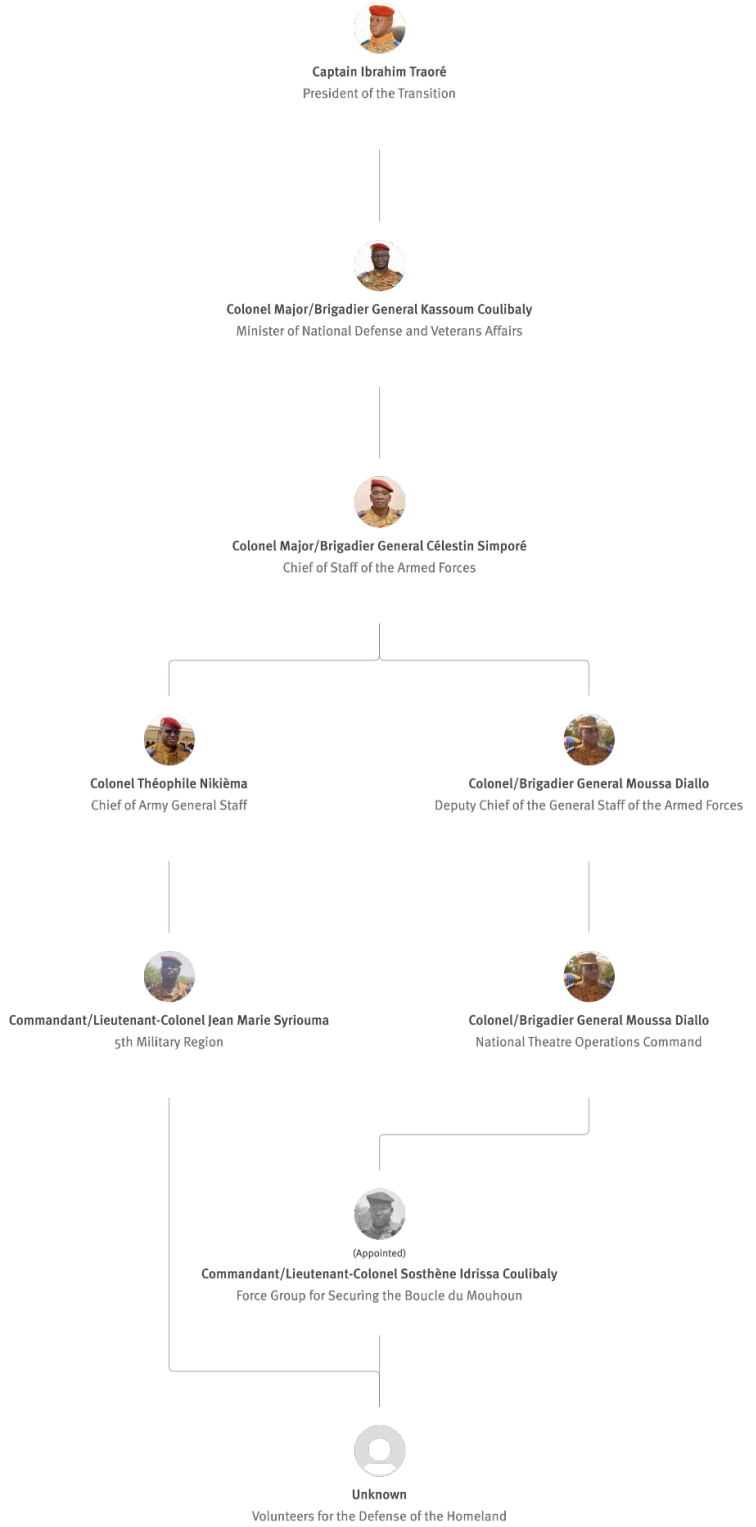
At the time of the killings, Lt. Col. Jean Marie Syriouma (also spelled Jean Marie Siryouma) served as commander of the 5th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁶⁸ and taken up that position by at least April 2023.⁸⁶⁹ The killings also occurred after Cdt. Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun on June 20, 2023.⁸⁷⁰ Sources indicate Coulibaly had taken up the role by at least January 18, 2025.⁸⁷¹ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command by at least January 2024, when the attack and killings occurred.

⁸⁶⁸ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁶⁹ Syriouma continued to serve as commander until he was replaced on April 3, 2025. See “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁸⁷⁰ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L'Observateur Paalga*.

⁸⁷¹ Ouédraogo, “5e Légion de Gendarmerie : Le Commandant de Légion aux côtés des hommes engagés sur le théâtre des opérations,” *Aconews.net*.



Chain of Command for Konga, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, January 2024

Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, August 15, 2024

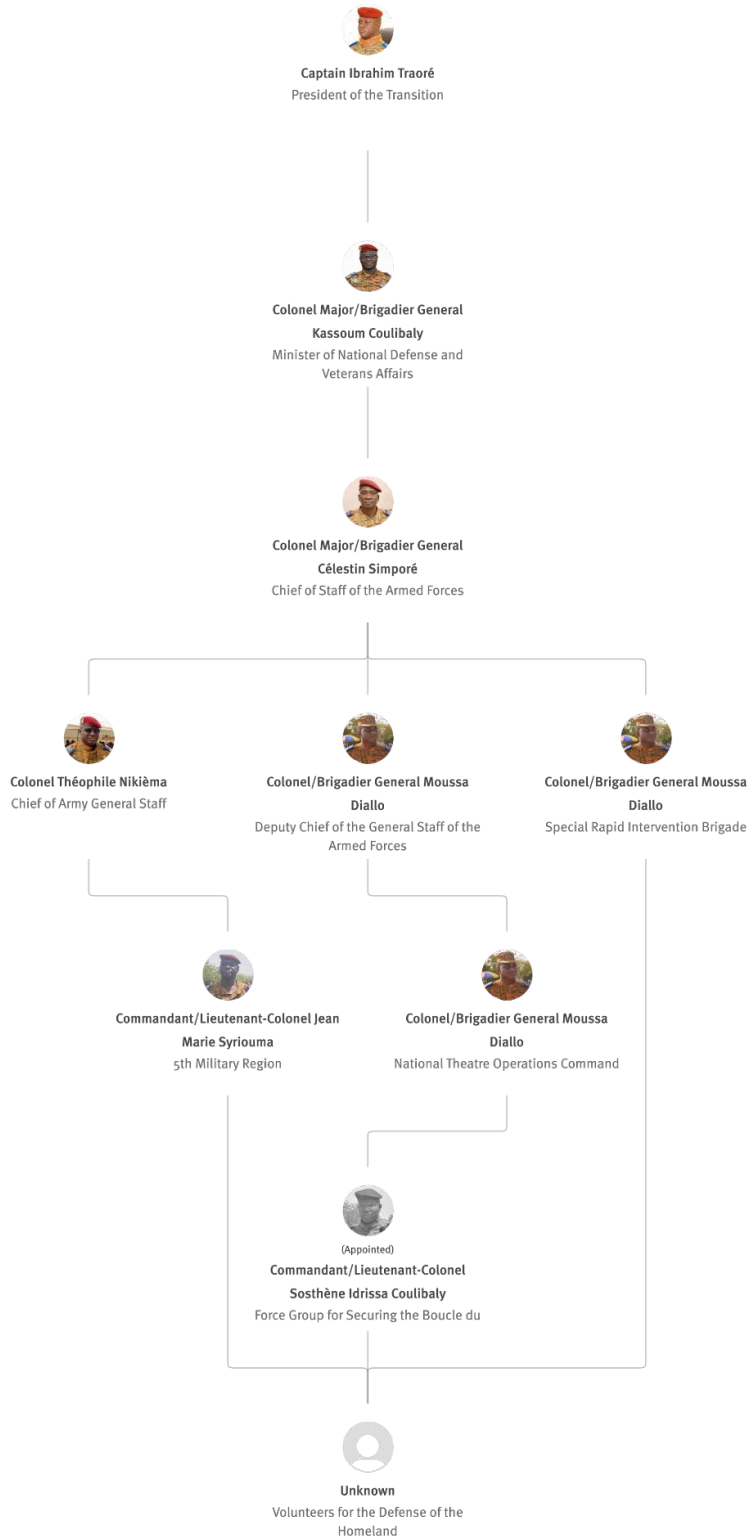
At the time of the apparent killings, Lt. Col. Jean Marie Syriouma (also spelled Jean Marie Siryouma) served as commander of the 5th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022,⁸⁷² and taken that position up by at least April 2023.⁸⁷³ The killings also occurred after Cdt. Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly was appointed commander of the Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun on June 20, 2023.⁸⁷⁴ Sources indicate Coulibaly had taken up the role by at least January 18, 2025.⁸⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command by January 2024, when the attack and killings occurred.

⁸⁷² Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁷³ Syriouma continued to serve as commander until he was replaced on April 3, 2025. See “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d'Information du Burkina*.

⁸⁷⁴ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L'Observateur Paalga*.

⁸⁷⁵ Ouédraogo, “5e Légion de Gendarmerie : Le Commandant de Légion aux côtés des hommes engagés sur le théâtre des opérations,” *Aconews.net*.



Chain of Command for Sanakuy, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, August 15, 2024

Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, February 27 – April 2, 2025

Capt. Abdoul Aziz Ouattara served as commander of GIR 2 during the time of at least some of the killings, having been appointed commander on January 19, 2024,⁸⁷⁶ taken up that position by at least January 2025,⁸⁷⁷ and last seen in the position as of March 10, 2025.⁸⁷⁸ At the time of the killings, Capt. Wendpanga David Ouédraogo was serving as the commander of BIR 10, having been appointed as commander on June 30, 2023,⁸⁷⁹ and taken up this position by at least February 8, 2025.⁸⁸⁰ At the time of the killings, Capt. Papa Parfait Kambou served as commander of BIR 18, having become commander in a hand-over ceremony on January 8, 2025.⁸⁸¹ Capt. Teegwendé Laurent Zallé was appointed commander of BIR 23 on January 19, 2024,⁸⁸² and was in that position by at least January 30, 2025.⁸⁸³ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he continued to hold that role when the killings occurred from February 27 to April 2, 2025.

At the time of the attack and killings, Lt. Col. Jean Marie Syriouma (also spelled Jean Marie Siryouma) served as commander of the 5th Military Region, having been appointed commander on November 14, 2022.⁸⁸⁴ He had taken up that position by at least April 2023.⁸⁸⁵ The killings also occurred after Cdt. Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly was appointed

⁸⁷⁶ “Burkina : nominations des commandants des Groupements d’intervention rapide,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁸⁷⁷ Maillard, Millecamps, and Olivier, “Les Peuls face aux juntes du Sahel : enquête sur un peuple sacrifié,” *Jeune Afrique*.

⁸⁷⁸ “Succès Militaire : Les Forces Spéciales Intensifient la Lutte Contre le Terrorisme,” *Faso Times*.

⁸⁷⁹ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L’Observateur Paalga. Zongo*, “Burkina Faso : des nominations dans l’Armée,” *24heures.bf*.

⁸⁸⁰ “Mouhoun : Des jeunes sensibilisés dans la lutte pour la souveraineté nationale,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*. He continued to serve as commander until at least October 4, 2025. See “Mouhoun/Le Vent Républicain : La contribution des femmes à la Révolution progressiste populaire au cœur des échanges,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

⁸⁸¹ “Banwa : Le nouveau commandant du 18e BIR s’engage à obtenir des résultats probants,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 9, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250110155313/https://www.aib.media/banwa-le-nouveau-commandant-du-18e-bir-sengage-a-obtenir-des-resultats-probants/> (accessed March 13, 2026). Kambou continued to serve as commander until at least May 25, 2025. See Salifou Ouédraogo, “Solenzo: Le BIR 18 offre 4 tonnes de riz aux PDI,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, May 30, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250601073806/https://www.aib.media/solenzo-le-bir-18-offre-4-tonnes-de-riz-aux-pdi/> (accessed March 13, 2026).

⁸⁸² “Burkina : Les responsables des nouveaux BIR sont connus,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 19, 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20240807153717/https://www.aib.media/burkina-les-responsables-des-nouveaux-bir-sont-connus/> (accessed March 16, 2026).

⁸⁸³ “Le BIR 23 poursuit le nettoyage au Nayala : 11 terroristes neutralités, deux capturés,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, January 30, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250204151026/https://www.aib.media/le-bir-23-poursuit-le-nettoyage-au-nayala-11-terroristes-neutralites-deux-captures/> (accessed March 16, 2026).

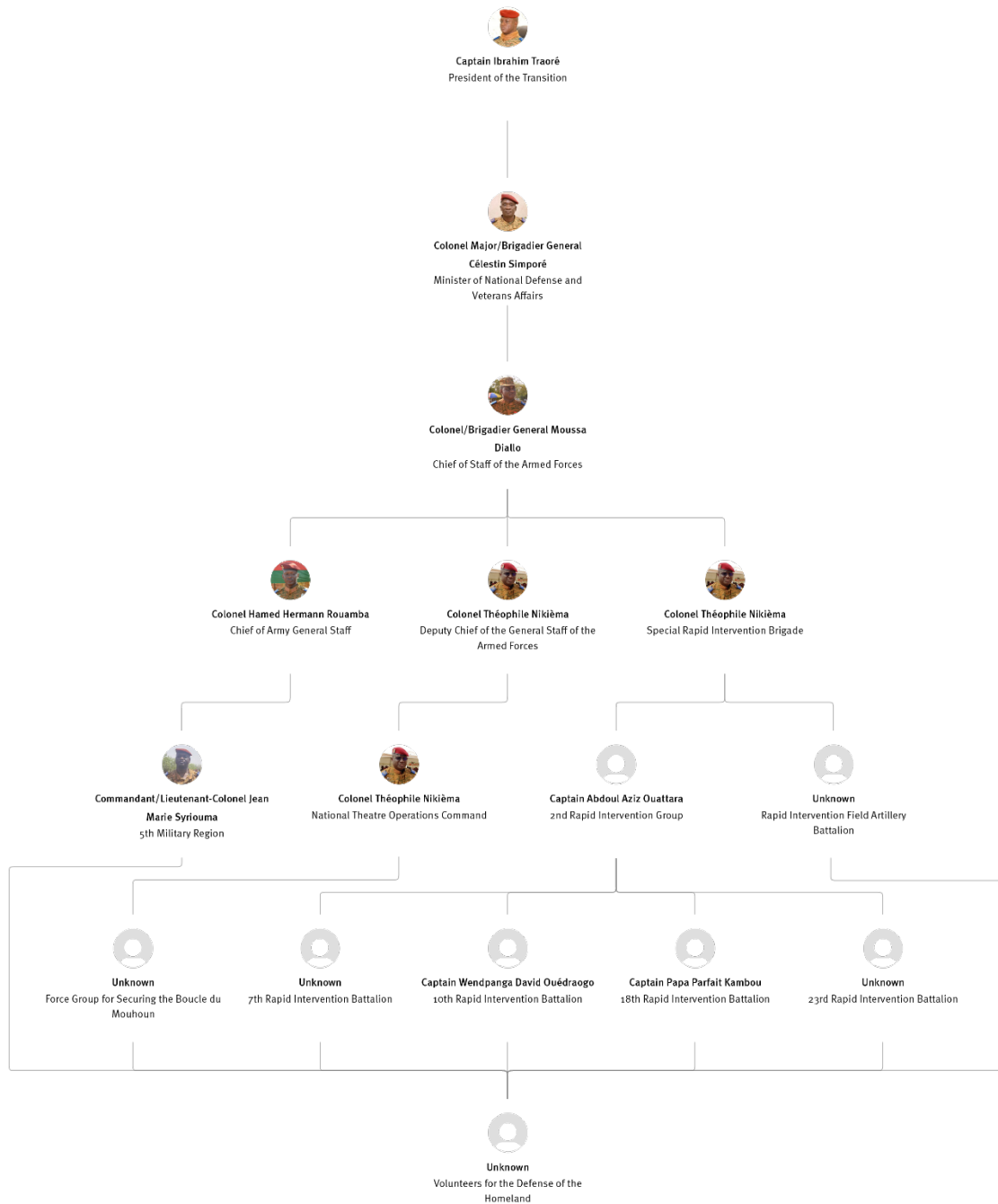
⁸⁸⁴ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁸⁵ Syriouma continued to serve as commander until he was replaced on April 3, 2025. See “Mouhoun/5e Région militaire : Le Lieutenant-colonel Sosthène Idrissa Coulibaly prend les commandes,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*.

commander of the Force Group for Securing the Boucle du Mouhoun on June 20, 2023.⁸⁸⁶ Sources indicate Coulibaly had taken up the role by at least January 18, 2025.⁸⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he continued to hold that role when the killings occurred between February 27 and April 2, 2025.

⁸⁸⁶ Kaboré, “Forces armées nationales : le capitaine Ibrahim Traoré procède à des nominations,” *L’Observateur Paalga*.

⁸⁸⁷ Ouédraogo, “5e Légion de Gendarmerie : Le Commandant de Légion aux côtés des hommes engagés sur le théâtre des opérations,” *Aconews.net*.



Chain of Command for Operation Green Whirlwind 2, Boucle du Mouhoun Region, February 27 – April 2, 2025

6th Military Region (Center-East and East Administrative Regions)

Petit Zabré, Center-East Region, February 2023

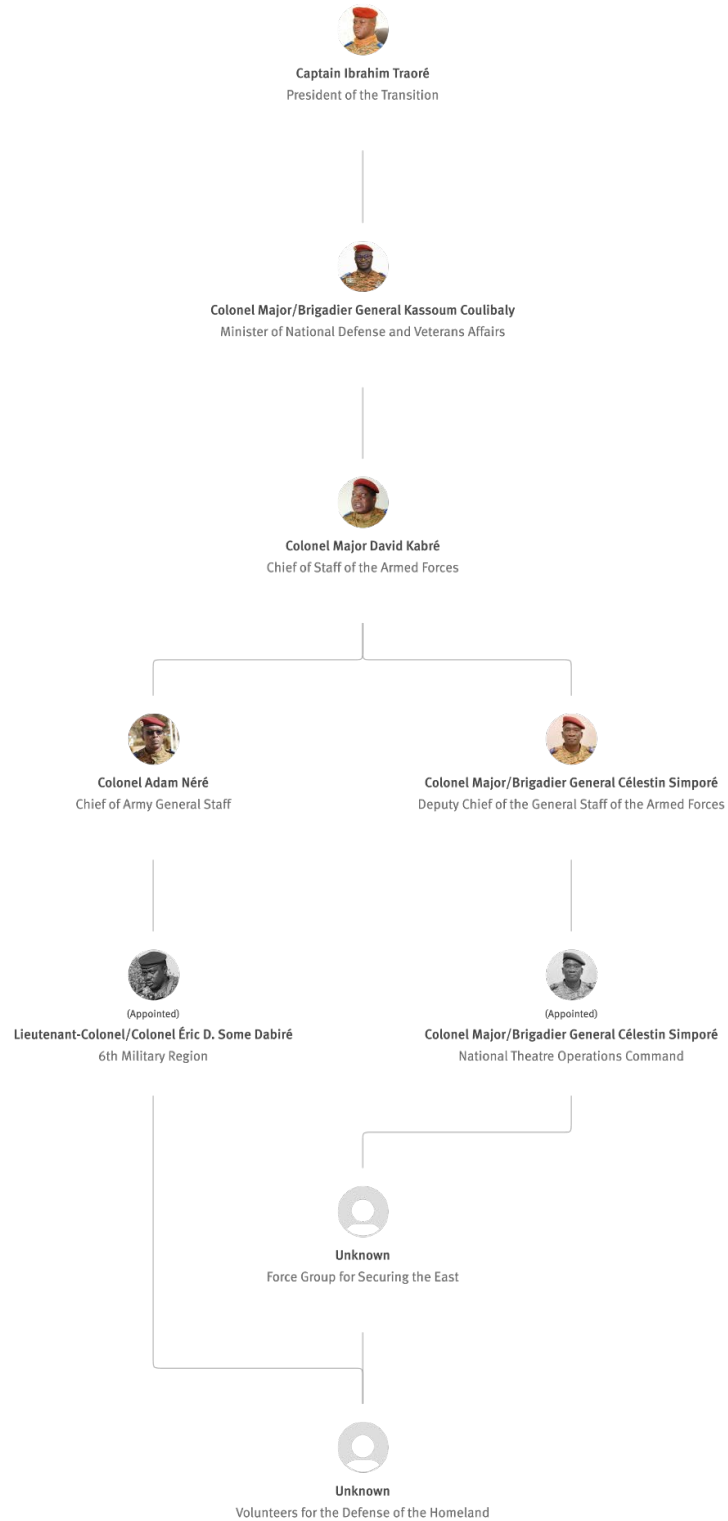
The killings took place after Lt. Col. Eric D. Some Dabiré had been appointed as commander of the 6th Military Region on November 14, 2022.⁸⁸⁸ Sources indicate Dabiré had taken up that position by at least June 22, 2023.⁸⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of February 2023. The killings also took place after Capt. Maurice Ouedraogo was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the East on November 14, 2022.⁸⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he continued to hold this role when the killings occurred.

⁸⁸⁸ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁸⁹ Kanliéyama Aboubakar Combaré, “Gourma : La 6^{ème} région militaire bénéficiera d’un complexe social,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*, June 27, 2023,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230628075456/https://www.aib.media/regions/2023/06/27/gourma-la-6eme-region-militaire-beneficiera-dun-complexe-social/> (accessed September 12, 2025). Dabiré continued to serve as commander until February 26, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to the rank of colonel. See “6^e région militaire : Le colonel Eric Dabiré passe le commandement au chef d’escadron Aboubacar Dadijan,” *Burkina24*, February 26, 2025, <https://web.archive.org/web/20250226200757/https://burkina24.com/2025/02/26/6e-region-militaire-le-colonel-eric-dabire-passe-le-commandement-au-chef-descadron-aboubacar-dadijan/> (accessed September 12, 2025).

⁸⁹⁰ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Petit Zabré, Center-East Region, February 2023

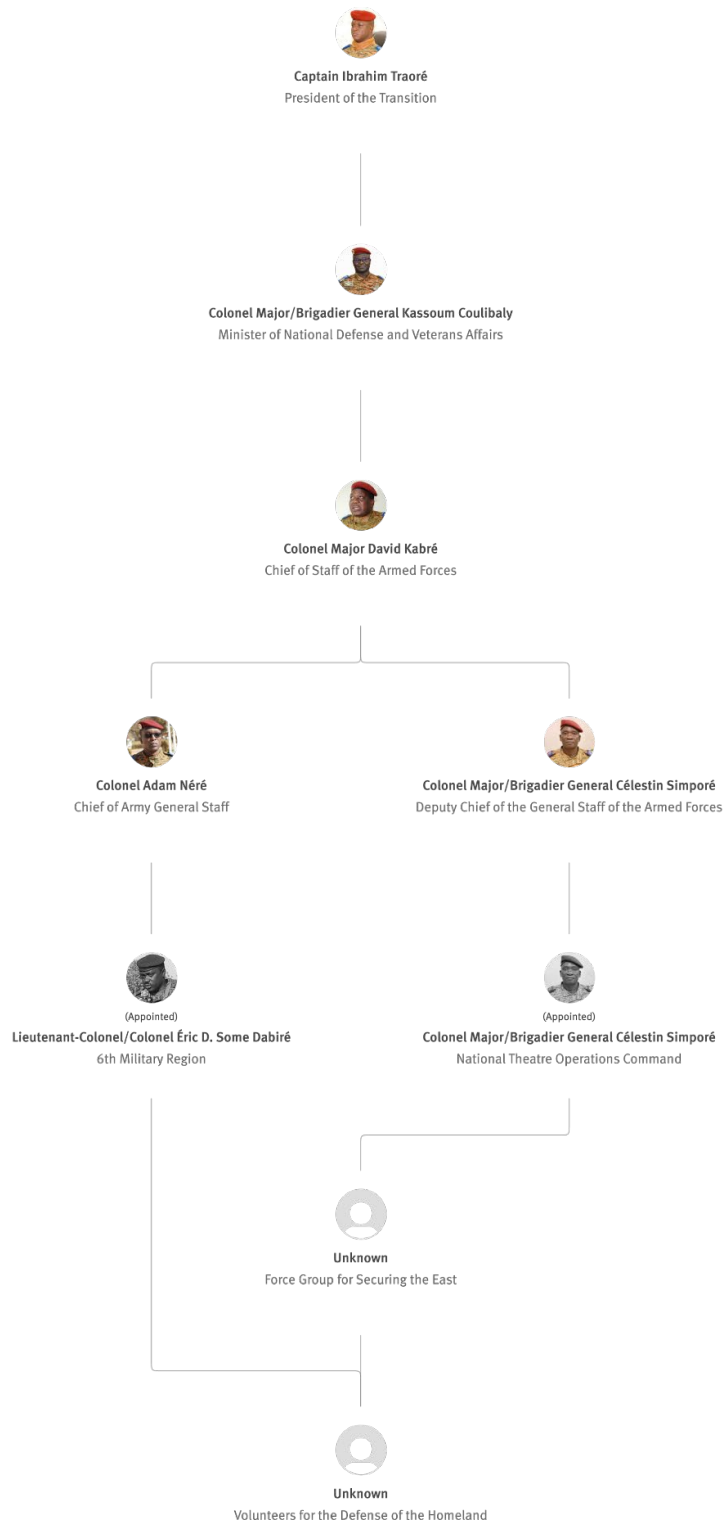
Békouré, Center-East Region, February 2023

The killings took place after Lt. Col. Eric D. Some Dabiré had been appointed as commander of the 6th Military Region on November 14, 2022.⁸⁹¹ Dabiré had taken up that position by at least June 22, 2023.⁸⁹² Human Rights Watch was unable to ascertain whether he had assumed command as of February 2023. The killings also took place after Capt. Maurice Ouedraogo was appointed as commander of the Force Group for Securing the East on November 14, 2022.⁸⁹³ His career path after this date is not known at time of writing.

⁸⁹¹ Décret n°2022-0978/PRES-TRANS portant nomination de Commandants de Régions Militaires et Assimilées.

⁸⁹² Combarry, “Gourma : La 6ème région militaire bénéficiera d’un complexe social,” *Agence d’Information du Burkina*. Dabiré continued to serve as commander until February 26, 2025, by which time he had been promoted to the rank of colonel. See “6e région militaire : Le colonel Eric Dabiré passe le commandement au chef d’escadron Aboubacar Dadijan,” *Burkina24*.

⁸⁹³ Décret n°2022-0979/PRES-TRANS portant nomination des Commandants de Groupements des Forces.



Chain of Command for Békouré, Center-East Region, February 2023

Appendix II: Software-Assisted Analysis of Primary Sources

This appendix details the methodology used by Human Rights Watch to develop software that extracted and analyzed 36,243 news segments from the RTB YouTube channel, and 2,476 posts from ChirpWire channel. The collection period spanned from September 15, 2021, to April 23, 2025. The software generated a searchable database of locations, military units, dates, and—at times—individuals involved, which helped researchers corroborate witness accounts, confirm the involvement of key actors in atrocities, and support a broader effort to map the warring parties’ chain of command.

Content Extraction

The software first extracted all available videos and posts published on both channels, then converted each item into a textual snapshot. For RTB news segments, this included the video title, description, date of publication, and a transcription of the video using Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR). For ChirpWire posts, this included the post text, date of publication, any text extracted from images using Optical Character Recognition (OCR), and ASR transcriptions for embedded videos. Using this textual snapshot, the software then filtered for posts whose text contained mentions of armed activities and chain of command.

For each relevant post, a Large Language Model (LLM) then generated key information relevant to Human Rights Watch’s research. Key information included: references to military operations, including military unit positioning or involvement in specific attacks, as well as references to the military chain of command, including names, ranks, and roles of members of the military.

Database Graphical User Interface (GUI)

Relevant posts, along with their textual snapshot and associated key information, were then stored in a database. For ease of analysis, Human Rights Watch developed an accompanying Graphical User Interface (GUI) which allowed the user to search for keywords and filter based on dates, location, military branch, military unit, and military officers’ names. Researchers used these features to cross-reference witness accounts—for example, filtering by date and location to find reporting of an attack—and to reconstruct

missing parts of the military chain of command, such as identifying ranks or deployment updates for particular officers.

Report Impacts

Given that the software extracted, transcribed, filtered, and analyzed nearly 40,000 posts from the target sources, it enabled researchers to capture and cross-reference key information about the activities of perpetrators at a scale that would have otherwise been impossible to cover. Moreover, data collection allowed researchers to systematically draw from both state and JNIM sources, ensuring a more comprehensive and balanced coverage of the conflict.

For instance, the database was used to identify the chain of command of the military operation Tchéfari 2, conducted in December 2023 in the Sahel administrative region (see relevant chapter above). The software flagged a news segment covering the operation that included, among others, the names of military units, ranks of military officers, and locations.⁸⁹⁴ Using the GUI, researchers could search by date and location to locate the video, extract information about the military units involved, and corroborate witness accounts.

⁸⁹⁴ “52 sur la RTB : Opération Tchéfari ou le miel des guerriers dans une zone à haut risque de djibo,” video clip, YouTube, *RTB – Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina*, January 19, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vC2EV8l45Ew> (accessed July 29, 2025).

Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Ilaria Allegrozzi, senior Sahel researcher in the Africa division, and Jean Baptiste Gallopin, senior advisor in the Crisis, Conflict and Arms division. Lewis Mudge, associate director in the Africa division, and Anagha Neelakantan, senior editor in the Crisis, Conflict, and Arms division, contributed to the draft.

Open source research and geospatial analysis, writing, and graphics for the report were carried out by Human Rights Watch's Digital Investigations Lab in the Technology, Rights, and Investigations division. Léo Martine, senior geospatial advisor, and Carolina Jordá Álvarez, senior geospatial analyst, carried out open source research and analyzed satellite imagery. Tony Wilson, founder and director of Security Force Monitor, researched and wrote the chain-of-command analysis. Gabi Ivens, head of open source research, also carried out open source research and wrote parts of the chain-of-command analysis. Damir Khairat, research technologist, scaled the open source research on chain-of-command and coordinated data visualization. Brian Root, senior advisor, provided quantitative research, and Sophia Jones, open source researcher, carried out open source research.

Ilaria Allegrozzi, Lewis Mudge, Jean-Baptiste Gallopin, Anagha Neelakantan, and Ida Sawyer, director of the Crisis, Conflict, and Arms division, edited the report. Jim Ross, legal and policy director, provided legal review, and Tom Porteus, former deputy program director, provided programmatic review.

Specialist reviews were provided by Sam Dubberley, director of the Technology, Rights, and Investigations division; Juliana Nnoko, senior advisor in the Women's Rights division; Zama Neff, director of the Children's Rights division; Lauren Seibert, senior researcher in the Refugee and Migrant Rights division; Elizabeth Evenson, director of the International Justice program; Tamara Abduramadan, counsel in the International Justice program; Allan Ngari, Africa advocacy director; Philippe Dam, European Union advocacy director; Bénédicte Jeannerod, France director; Mark Hiznay, senior advisor in the Crisis, Conflict, and Arms Division; Louis Charbonneau, United Nations advocacy director; Lucy McKernan, United Nations Geneva deputy director; and Nicole Widdersheim, deputy Washington director. Kathleen Rose, managing editor, provided communications review.

Carine Kaneza Nantulya, strategic planning advisor, advised on advocacy strategy. Mbong Fokwa Tsafack, associate director in communications, and Léa Pernot, editor, advised on media strategy.

Anna Bruckner, senior coordinator in the Africa division, provided research, drafting, coordination, and translation support. Anna Bruckner and Eunice Njagi, coordinator in the Africa division, assisted with proofreading and formatting. Travis Carr, publications manager, prepared the report for publication. Catherine Dauvergne-Newman and Sarah Leblois translated the report into French, while Peter Huvos, Ilaria Allegrozzi, and Anna Bruckner vetted translations. Casey McCracken, senior producer, Andrés Brenner, producer and editor, Christina Curtis, deputy multimedia director, and Ifé Fatunase, multimedia director, directed and produced the video for the report.

The data visualization was designed and produced by Matteo Bettini, a consultant, Damir Khairat, Travis Carr, as well as Les Lim, senior web developer, and Christina Rutherford, senior web manager.

Vincent Pearce, operational security advisor, provided security support during research trips.

Human Rights Watch would like to thank Héli Nsaibia, senior analyst for West Africa at ACLED; Wassim Nasr, journalist at France 24 and senior research fellow at the Soufan Center; Binta Sidibé-Gascon, president of Observatoire Kisa; Corinne Dufka, consultant; Abdoulaye Dicko, journalist at RFI (Fulfulde and Mandenkan); and Ahmed Newton Barry, journalist and human rights defender and former president of Burkina Faso's independent electoral commission. Human Rights Watch would also like to thank ACLED for their collaboration which has helped to shed light on political violence in the region.

This report would not have been possible without the critical contributions of people whose names must be withheld for security reasons. Government officials, humanitarian workers, civil society activists, community leaders, journalists, and diplomats were generous with their time and insights. The many witnesses and victims who shared their stories and the organizations and individuals who introduced us to them, all at great personal risk, made this report possible. To them—thank you.

“None Can Run Away”

War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in Burkina Faso by All Sides

This report examines the devastating impact of the armed conflict on civilians in Burkina Faso since the current military junta took power in September 2022. The Al-Qaeda-linked armed group Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM), which controls wide swathes of the country, has killed and forcibly displaced tens of thousands of civilians. In response, Burkinabè military and allied militias have led brutal counterinsurgency campaigns, carrying out mass executions of civilians and other grave abuses.

Both JNIM and state forces are responsible for widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity. In addition, government forces have ethnically cleansed the ethnic Fulani population. Authorities have failed to hold perpetrators accountable. International partners should act to break the country’s cycle of abuse and impunity and hold perpetrators to account. The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court should open a preliminary examination into war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by all parties to the conflict.



Clockwise, from top left:

Burkina Faso President Capt. Ibrahim Traoré. © 2025 Stanislav Krasilnikov/RIA Novosti via AP;

Iyad Ag Ghaly, JNIM supreme leader. © 2012 ROMARIC OLLO HIEN/AFP/Getty Images;

JNIM fighters in Barsalogo, Sanmatenga province, Burkina Faso, August 24, 2024. © Private;

Burkinabè military forces in Baraboulé, Sahel region, Burkina Faso, during Operation “Tchefari 2,” December 2023. © 2024 RTB