

Mali's Moura Massacre Instigated by Malian Forces and Foreign Fighters

ECOWAS and African Union Need to Investigate Moura Massacre

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With a population of nearly 20 million people, the Republic of Mali is a landlocked country located on rivers of Senegal and Niger in West Africa. Since its independence from the French colony, it has had not only persistent political and governance problems, but also difficulties in tapping its existing resources and poor economic policies resulting in largely under-development in the country.

As well-known facts, two military coups have taken place in Mali since August 2020. The first one, which occurred on August 18, 2020, ousted President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. Interim President Bah Ndaw was removed from power by the military on May 26, 2021, while Deputy President Assimi Goita became Mali's Transition President based on the Constitutional Court's order.

Col. Assimi Goita and his government have halted relations with France, moved closer to Russia.

Mali is a shady remote country and Moscow is highly interested in exploring natural resources, has mining concession agreements in exchange with military weapons and equipment. The military is keen on fighting what it termed "active terrorist groups" in the country. On the other hand, Moscow is aggressively moving its military-technical cooperation, shows the desire to ensure the country's defense capabilities, especially in the face of the persisting terrorist threat in the region.

According to several reports especially from Associated Press, AFP, Reuters and DW as well as BBC, Mali's authorities have an agreement with the Russian private military company Wagner Group that replaced the French military. Reuters reported that the contract could be worth \$10.8 million a month. Mali has taken delivery of military equipment and a few hundreds of military experts and instructors are operating in the country.

As has been in the past, under the new military leadership harrowing accounts of human

rights abuses have emerged. In addition to the previous abuses, the late March massacre of about 300 people in the village Malian village of Moura became very questionable, called for international condemnation. Most importantly, it must be thorough systematic investigations to ascertain the primary causes, the implications and possibly to take punitive actions.

For the African Union and ECOWAS, the scale and gravity of Mali's military leadership violating human rights, of course, is a strong signal to hold them responsible for this crimes which many have described reports and images of civilian killings as disturbing.

Joseph Siegle, Director of Research and Daniel Eizenga, Research Fellow at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, co-authored an article headlined "Russia's Wagner Play Undermines the Transition in Mali" in which they highlighted Wagner's potential entry into Mali, and it reminds how the group started operating, and later grossly involved in human rights abuses in the Central African Republic.

The two researchers have several times suggested to the Security Council of the African Union and ECOWAS to invoke the [African Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism](#), which went into effect in 1985, prohibiting states from allowing mercenaries into their territories. Declaring Wagner a mercenary force identifies them, appropriately, as an illegal entity, one that should be categorically prohibited from operating in Mali (and other parts of Africa).

Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted that Malian forces and foreign fighters killed 300 civilians in Moura, late March. The report described as "the worst single atrocity reported in Mali's decade-long armed conflict." Several witnesses and other sources identified the foreign soldiers as Russians to HRW.

According to the report, the massacre took place over four days, with the vast majority of the victims being ethnic Fulanis group. Moura is small provincial town, which has a population of around 10,000, has been the epicenter of conflict-related violence. "The soldiers patrolled through town, executing several men as they tried to flee, and detaining hundreds of unarmed men from the market and their homes. The incident is the worst single atrocity reported in Mali's decade-long armed conflict," the HRW report said.

"Abuses by armed Islamist groups is no justification at all for the military's deliberate slaughter of people in custody. The Malian government is responsible for this atrocity — the worst in Mali in a decade — whether carried out by Malian forces or associated foreign soldiers," the report said.

Russia has assigned, what officially described as military instructors to Mali. There are no doubts that neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger are also looking for such deals with Moscow. The United States, France and European Union say the instructors are operatives from the Russian private security firm Wagner.

Russia has blocked a request put forward by France at the UN Security Council for "independent investigations" into the alleged massacre of several hundred civilians in Mali by the Malian army and Russian paramilitaries, diplomatic sources said. That was followed widely shared social media reports of a civilian massacre in the country.

On April 8, Moscow congratulated Mali on an "important victory" against "terrorism" and it described as "disinformation" allegations about the massacre, as well as claims about the

involvement of Russian mercenaries. The statement posted to the official website noted that “such a large-scale liquidation of terrorists became possible as a result of carefully conducted reconnaissance and coordinated actions of the units of the Malian army.”

According to the report, Mali have made significant progress in the liberation of a number of settlements in the central regions of the country, where civilian rule has been restored for the first time in a long time. For obvious reasons, such a development of the situation could not suit individual Western countries and the media controlled by them.

There were wave of disinformation picked up by the official authorities of Western states, as well as NGOs sponsored by them, including Human Rights Watch, who demanded an urgent independent investigation and punishment of the Malian military and the Russian instructors.

Several times, Bamako denies the presence of mercenaries from the Russian group Wagner in Mali, acknowledging only the presence of Russian “instructors” and “trainers” under a bilateral cooperation agreement with Moscow dating from the 1960s.

Richard Mills, the US Deputy Ambassador to the UN, told the Security Council of the United Nations it was “exactly why the United States continues to warn countries against partnering with the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group.”

Britain and France pointed out that Russian mercenaries allegedly involved. Several witnesses and other sources identified the foreign soldiers as Russians. France’s U.N. Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere cited reports of human rights violations in Moura by elements of the Malian armed forces “accompanied by Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group” that could constitute war crimes.

He called for national and international investigations open quickly and for U.N. peacekeeping mission known as MINUSMA to conduct its own unhindered investigation to establish the facts and report to the Security Council.

Deputy U.N. Ambassador James Kariuki said that “the United Kingdom is horrified by a surge of human rights abuses since the deployment of the Wagner group to Mali,” and by the killings during the army’s counterterrorism operations in Moura “with the alleged involvement of the Wagner Group.”

He said the latest reports from Moura “underline the extent of Russia’s malign activity which is damaging efforts to address peace and security beyond Ukraine,” and demanded that MINUSMA carry out its human rights mandate and investigate all allegations.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, while stressing the importance of “transparency and accountability” in security operations, has also called on the Malian army and its “bilateral partners” — widely interpreted as an implicit reference to Russian mercenaries — to respect their international obligations amid growing concerns over human rights violations.

That however, the Republic of Mali, the Central African Republic and Ethiopia were among a number of African countries to vote against the resolution to expel Russia from the Human Rights Council during a special session April 7. The UN documents showed total of 93 votes cast in favor of the resolution, with 24 against, while 58 delegations abstained from the vote.

Many regional and foreign organizations have repeatedly urged further urged the military leaders to take efforts towards resolving outstanding political issues especially those relating transition to constitutional elected government and observe strictly the laid down principles of democracy.

As a developing country, it ranks at the bottom of the United Nations Development Index (2020 report). The Republic of Mali, the former french colony, is under ECOWAS sanctions and has been stripped off the membership of the African Union (AU) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

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Kester Kenn Klomegah, who worked previously with Inter Press Service (IPS), is now a regular and passionate contributor to Global Research. As a versatile researcher, he believes that everyone deserves equal access to quality and trustworthy media reports.

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