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“We Used to Be Brothers”

Self-Defense Group Abuses in Central Mali



“We Used to Be Brothers”

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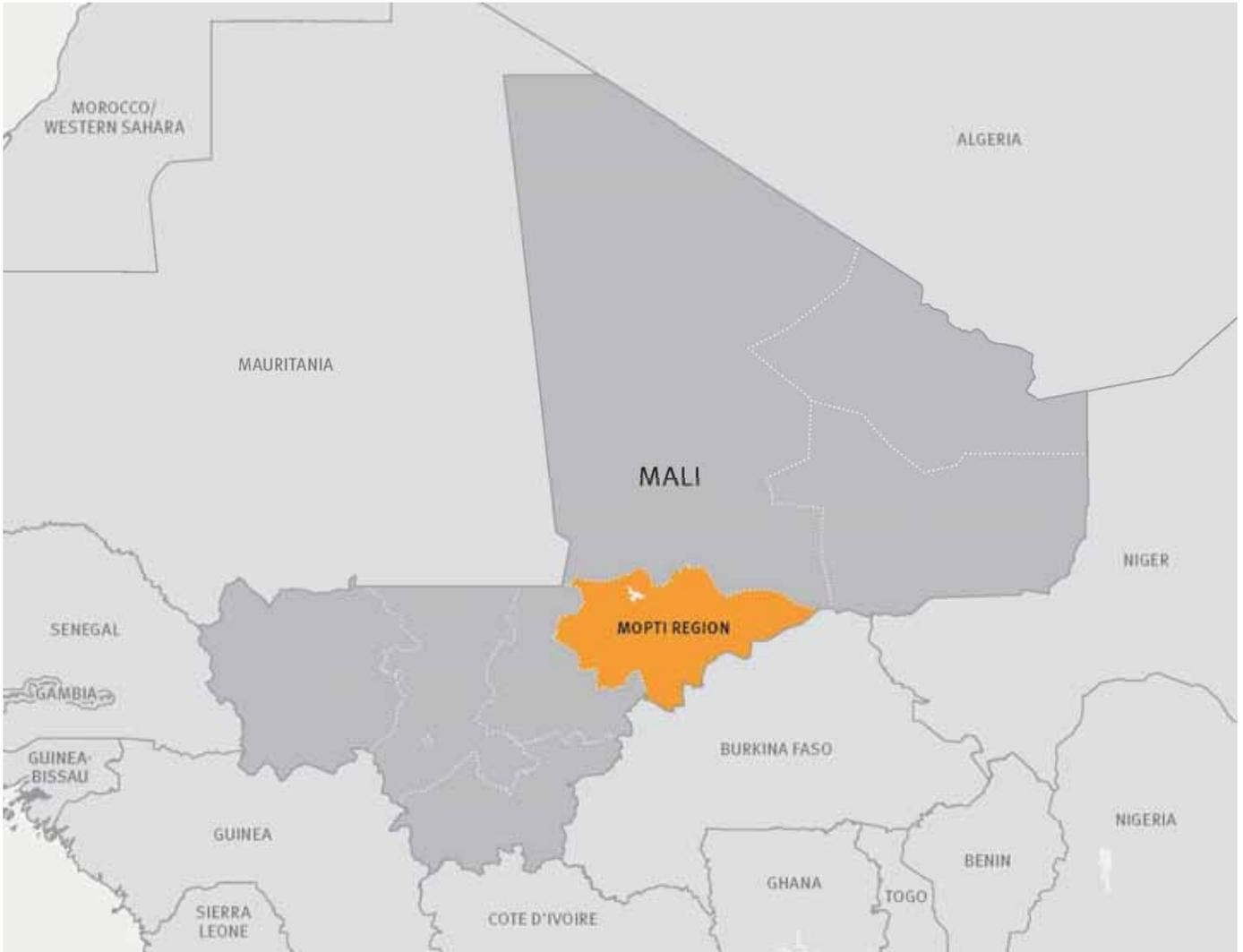
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Map of Mali



Map of Mopti Region *Cercles*



Summary

Amidst the proliferation of Islamist armed groups in Mopti region, central Mali, communal violence has in 2018 killed over 200 civilians, driven thousands from their homes, undermined livelihoods, and led to widespread hunger. The victims are largely ethnic Peuhl targeted by ethnic Dogon and Bambara “self-defense groups” for their alleged support of armed Islamists largely linked to Al-Qaeda.

The agricultural Bambara and Dogon and pastoral Peuhl communities have long had disputes over access to water and land, though they were usually resolved without bloodletting. Since 2015, however, the number of deadly intercommunal incidents, underscored by efforts by the Malian government to combat increased violence by Islamist armed groups, has risen steadily. In 2018, this violence reached alarming levels.

Malian authorities have not adequately investigated these incidents, including several massacres that claimed over a dozen lives. All three communities accuse the Malian security forces of failing to adequately protect their communities.

Since 2015, Islamist armed groups have gradually spread from northern to central Mali, where they have summarily executed dozens of people accused of collaborating with government security forces; indiscriminately planted improvised explosive devices; forced civilians into adhering to their version of Islam; and undermined citizen participation in elections.

Islamist armed groups have concentrated their recruitment efforts on the Peuhl by exploiting the community’s frustrations over rising banditry, government corruption, and competition over land and water. The recruitment of Peuhl has inflamed tensions within the Bambara and Dogon, and, together with the limited presence of Malian security forces, led to the formation of ethnically aligned self-defense groups.

The self-defense groups say they took security into their own hands because the government had failed to adequately protect their villages and property. Easy access to firearms, including military assault weapons, contributed to the growth and militarization

of the self-defense groups, making already existing communal tensions increasingly deadly.

Some Peuhl leaders and others assert that the Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups have used the fight against armed Islamists as a pretext to dislodge the Peuhl from valuable, fertile land and engage in banditry. The violence has driven even more Peuhl men to join the Islamist armed groups.

This report, based on three research trips in February, May, and July 2018 and telephone interviews throughout 2018, documents massacres, attacks on villages, and retaliatory killings of Peuhl, Bambara or Dogon civilians in central Mali in 2018, including abuses that took place in 42 villages and hamlets in Mopti region, particularly near the Burkina Faso border, and near the town of Djenné, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage site. Interviewees include victims of and witnesses to killings and other abuses; leaders from the self-defense groups; Peuhl, Dogon and Bambara community leaders; government officials; diplomats; aid workers; and security analysts. A total of 148 people were interviewed in 2018, with numerous other interviews conducted in Mali between 2015 and 2017 providing background and context to the 2018 abuses.

The report documents the killings of 202 civilians who were the targets of deliberate or indiscriminate attacks by armed groups. The attacks on villages were almost always accompanied by widespread pillage, the destruction or burning of homes, and large-scale livestock theft. Some people died inside houses or mosques that had been set on fire.

The report documents 26 attacks against Peuhl villages allegedly by Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups in which at least 156 Peuhl civilians were killed. This includes 10 villages: Koumaga, Dankoussa, Meou, Bombou, Someni, Doldla Haidara, Gueourou, Komboko, Pirga, and near Sofara--in which between 8 and 23 villagers were killed. Many militia atrocities appear to have been sparked by alleged Islamist armed group killings of Dogon or Bambara community members. The self-defense groups frequently retaliated with attacks against entire hamlets or villages. About 50 Peuhl villagers, including children, who were either detained by the militias or fled the attacks, remain missing at time of writing.

The report also documents the killing of 46 Dogon villagers during 16 attacks allegedly by Islamist armed groups backed by Peuhl self-defense groups. They include the execution-style killing of a *marabout* (Muslim teacher), the killing of several villagers foraging for wood, and other villagers burned alive when their villages came under attack. At least ten Dogon villagers died in 2018 from improvised explosive devices that appear to have been planted by armed Islamists.

Human Rights Watch believes the killings and other serious abuses documented in this report provide only a partial accounting of the total number of people killed and injured in communal violence in central Mali in 2018. Nor does it account for deaths from communal violence in other regions of Mali. For instance, in 2017 and 2018, dozens of civilians were killed in Mali's northern Ménaka region during violence between the Peuhl and Tuareg Imghad and Doussak clans.

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

Other human rights concerns in central Mali include:

Violence and Loss of Livelihoods

Villagers described what they considered to be organized efforts by the opposing community and its militia to undermine their economic livelihoods and ultimately drive them from their villages. Peuhl villagers said that Dogon and Bambara self-defense groups banned them from selling or buying at markets, while Dogon villagers said that armed Peuhl men came to their villages and prohibited them from planting or working their fields.

Some villagers have been killed by armed men while grazing animals or working in the fields, and all community members described the widespread theft of livestock that

resulted in severe economic hardship. The Malian government said dozens of villagers died from acute malnutrition linked to the insecurity in 2018. The violence drove over 10,000 people from their homes.

Malian Government's Inadequate Response

The Malian government has largely failed to fulfil pledges made in early 2018 to conduct criminal investigations into the allegations of serious abuses, to adequately protect communities vulnerable to communal violence, and to disarm abusive self-defense groups. They have also not impartially applied the 2017 and 2018 security force bans on using motorcycles for transportation between villages in Mopti region.

Dozens of witnesses said they saw Dogon and Bambara self-defense members carrying firearms and traveling freely on motorcycles in defiance of government bans. Group members were seen armed with military assault weapons in villages and marketplaces, manning checkpoints, checking identification cards, conducting house-to-house searches, and driving by gendarme, army and police bases with no response from state actors.

Security Forces Failure to Adequately Protect Civilians

Leaders from all communities raised concerns about the slow or lack of response by Malian security forces to attacks on their communities, even when alerted to attacks ahead of time. They also claimed to have communicated the whereabouts of members or bases of abusive armed group as well as their command structure but said scant action was taken. Some Peuhl leaders accused the army of supporting or directly collaborating with the militias, including by providing them arms and logistical support, allegations Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm.

Ministry of Defense officials told Human Rights Watch that they understood the gravity of the problem posed by the rising communal violence, were actively taking measures to stop the violence, but that their response was hampered by inadequate recourses.

Lack of Justice for Communal Violence

There have been few investigations into and no prosecutions of those responsible for the serious abuses documented in this report. The lack of accountability may be emboldening armed groups to commit further abuses and promotes a general climate of impunity.

Justice sector professionals said that several investigations into serious abuses committed by the self-defense groups had officially been opened in 2018, but that the precarious security situation had limited the ability of the gendarmes and local judges to make progress on them.

Human Rights Watch urges the government of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, elected for a second term in August 2018, to urgently address communal violence documented in this report. The government should investigate and prosecute those from all sides responsible for the serious abuses and establish a commission to determine the whereabouts of civilians gone missing during communal attacks. State security forces should respond promptly and impartially to vulnerable populations threatened by self-defense forces or armed Islamist groups, and step up patrols to protect them.

The Malian parliament should, in addition, establish a commission of inquiry into the sources of arms proliferation in the country; allegations of politically-motivated, rather than impartial, responses by security forces; and the underlying causes of communal violence in central Mali. Mali's international partners should press the Malian government to ensure that those responsible for communal violence are appropriately held to account and to support Mali's efforts to better protect civilians and deliver justice for victims.

Recommendations

To the Malian Government

- Adequately equip and staff the Justice Ministry so that local prosecutors and judicial police officers can effectively investigate and fairly prosecute those responsible for serious abuses by all sides.
- Adequately equip and staff the armed forces to ensure it can protect at-risk civilian populations.
- Accelerate deployment of police, gendarmes, and Justice Ministry officials to towns and villages in the areas impacted by communal violence.
- Disarm all abusive self-defense militias and prosecute members implicated in abuses.
- Establish a standing commission to assist civilians whose family members have gone missing during or in the aftermath of communal attacks.
- Ensure the security forces impartially apply the restrictions on motorcycles in central Mali.
- Ensure adequate oversight of the security forces so that they impartially provide protection for all civilians regardless of their ethnicity or religion.
- Cease using or assisting any abusive self-defense group in any capacity including counterterrorism operations.

To the Malian Judiciary

- Adequately resource and support Malian judges and other judicial personnel handling cases of communal violence.
- Work with foreign donors 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, and to ensure the protection of witnesses.
- Increase measures to ensure judicial personnel in central Mali are adequately protected so that they can conduct their work in a secure environment.

To the Malian Security Forces

- Take all necessary measures to protect civilians at risk from communal violence including by increasing patrolling and establishing additional security posts in vulnerable areas.
- Ensure the security forces protect all civilians impartially, regardless of their ethnicity or religion.
- Ensure the security forces impartially apply the restrictions on motorcycles in central Mali.
- Disarm all abusive self-defense groups and refer members credibly implicated in abuses, including those occupying command positions, for prosecution.
- Establish a 24-hour telephone hotline, staffed by relevant Malian authorities, for members of all communities to report threats, and imminent or ongoing attacks.
- Ensure effective and rapid communication between hotline staff, and Malian authorities and UN personnel mandated with civilian protection and UN peacekeepers.

To the Mopti Region Prosecutor

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

To the Malian Parliament

- Establish an independent commission of inquiry into communal violence in central Mali to address and make recommendations regarding:

- Allegations of non-impartial responses to communal violence by the security forces;
- Sources of weapons of both Islamist armed groups and self-defense groups;
- Allegations of government support for self-defense groups;
- Underlying causes of communal tensions in central Mali, including farmer-herder tensions, government corruption, and rampant banditry.
- Consider establishing a compensation program for civilian victims of communal violence; and ensure that compensation is provided in a transparent manner, regardless of their religious or ethnic identity.

To the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court

- Consider investigating the crimes documented in this report as possible war crimes that fall under ICC jurisdiction.

To the United Nations

- Increase patrols in areas vulnerable to communal violence in coordination with the Malian security forces.
- Direct the MINUSMA human rights section to engage in more public reporting on rights violations by all sides.
- The UN secretary-general should consider listing abusive Dogon, Bambara and Peuhl armed groups for the killing and maiming of children in his annual list of perpetrators of grave violations against children.

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

- Consistently and publicly press the Malian government to ensure that all those implicated in communal violence are promptly investigated and appropriately prosecuted.
- Assist the judiciary including by supporting the creation of a case management system, witness protection program, and forensic capability.

- Support the training of judicial personnel in best practices in investigating violent crimes, including collection and preservation of evidence at crime scenes, forensic analysis, and effective and appropriate techniques in interviewing and protecting witnesses and interrogating suspects.
- Assist MINUSMA meet the shortfall in equipment they need to better protect vulnerable populations.

Methodology

This report documents abuses committed against civilians by various self-defense groups in Mopti region, central Mali between January and November 2018. During three research trips and telephone interviews in 2018, Human Rights Watch conducted 148 interviews, 97 of which were with victims of and witnesses to abuses. The other 51 interviews were with leaders from the self-defense groups; leaders from the ethnic Peuhl, Dogon and Bambara communities; local government, security and justice officials; diplomats; local and international aid workers; members of victims' groups; and security analysts.

Interviews took place in February, May, and July 2018 in Bamako, the capital, and Mopti and Sévaré, in the Mopti region; research by telephone was conducted throughout 2018. The victims and witnesses interviewed are residents of 42 towns and villages in Mopti region, notably within the *cercles*, or administrative areas, of Bandiagara, Bankass, Djenné, Douentza, Mopti and Koro.

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

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

Many of the victims and witnesses interviewed did not know or recall the exact date of the incidents they described. Human Rights Watch sought to determine the approximate date by probing various reference points, such as if the incident occurred before or after major holidays, seasonal events or reported attacks.

Death tolls referred to in this report were derived from witness accounts narrated to Human Rights Watch. When multiple witnesses of the same attack provided differing death tolls, Human Rights Watch has used the account with the lowest death toll.

We have withheld the identify and other identification details of interviewees, to protect them from possible retaliation.

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

Background and Context

The Republic of Mali, the eighth-largest country in Africa, is about twice the size of France. Since gaining independence from France in 1960, Mali has experienced considerable political instability, including three military coups and four armed conflicts.

With vast gold and cotton resources, Mali has one of the fastest growing populations in the world and is ranked a low 182 out of 189 countries on the 2018 United Nations Human Development Index, which measures progress in social and economic development.¹

Mali's population of over 18 million² is comprised of numerous ethnic groups including the Bambara, Sarakole, Malinke, Peuhl, Senufo, Dogon, Bozo, Tuareg and Moor people. Administratively, Mali is divided into regions, communes, and circles, or *cercles*.

Central Mali is largely inhabited by the Peuhl, also known as Fulani, who are found throughout western and central Africa; the Bambara, Mali's largest ethnic group; and the Dogon, found around Mali's border with Burkina Faso.³ Administrative areas in central Mali are not inhabited exclusively by one ethnic group: all communes and *cercles* in central Mali are shared by multiple ethnic groups, some of which have their own villages or hamlets, or neighborhoods within a village that correspond to their particular ethnic group.

The Conflict in Northern Mali

In 2012, separatist ethnic Tuareg and Al-Qaeda-linked armed groups rapidly took over Mali's northern regions. The 2013 French-led military intervention and June 2015 peace agreement between the government and several armed groups sought to eliminate

¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update: Briefing note for countries on the 2018 statistical update," 2018, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/MLI.pdf (accessed October 3, 2018).

² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Human Development Indicators," 2018, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MLI> (accessed November 5, 2018).

³ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Dogon: People," undated, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dogon> (accessed November 5, 2018); Encyclopedia Britannica, "Bambara: People," undated <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bambara> (accessed November 19, 2018); Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Fulani: People," undated <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Fulani> (accessed November 19, 2018).



Villagers attend a busy market day in Djenné, central Mali. Access to markets by traders of different ethnic groups has been undermined by attacks carried out by armed Islamists and self-defense groups.

© Peter Adams Photography Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo.

Islamist armed groups, disarm Tuareg and other fighters, and reestablish state control over the north. Implementation of the agreement has been slow.

Meanwhile, since 2015, Islamist armed group activity and abuses have spread into central Mali and, from 2016, Burkina Faso. Recruitment by Islamist armed groups has targeted the Peuhl, one of several ethnic groups present there.

Since 2012, Human Rights Watch has extensively documented serious violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of human rights committed by all sides in recent armed conflicts including Tuareg separatists, Islamist armed groups, and the Malian Armed Forces (*Forces Armées Maliennes*, FAMA).⁴

The growing insecurity in the Sahel prompted the 2017 creation of a multinational counterterrorism force comprised of troops from Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad. The force, known as the G5 Sahel Joint Force (*Force conjointe du G5 Sahel*), coordinates their operations with the 4,500 French troops and 12,000 United Nations peacekeeping troops already in Mali.⁵

⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Mali,” 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/africa/mali>.

⁵ Second Sahel 'G5' anti-terrorist force mission begins,” Agence France Press, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/africa/second-sahel-g5-anti-terrorist-force-mission-begins-1.695784> (accessed November 4, 2018).

The Conflict in Central Mali

Throughout the Mopti and Segou regions of central Mali, a patchwork of groups linked to Al Qaeda have since 2015 attacked army bases and police and gendarme posts and committed abuses against civilians.⁶ Islamist armed groups linked to the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)⁷ have been present in areas bordering Burkina Faso since 2016 and have similarly attacked Malian security forces and committed abuses against civilians.

The Islamist armed groups do not overtly control territory. However, from their bases in forested areas, they frequently visit villages and preach in local mosques and oblige residents to attend meetings in which they are threatened not to collaborate with the government, French forces, or the UN peacekeeping mission.⁸

Some villagers told Human Rights Watch that since 2015, banditry and criminality have reduced because of the presence of the Islamist armed groups who dispense justice through their version of Sharia (Islamic law). However, Human Rights Watch has documented how these groups have committed execution-style killings of dozens of men, including village chiefs, imams, mayors, and administrators, for their alleged collaboration with the security forces.⁹ Since 2015, these groups have indiscriminately placed

⁶ “Mali: Spate of Killings by Armed Groups: Investigate Abuses, Protect Vulnerable Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 5, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/05/mali-spate-killings-armed-groups>; “Mali: Islamist Armed Group Abuses, Banditry Surge: Killings, Repression, Insecurity Imperil Civilians in North, Central Region,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 18, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/18/mali-islamist-armed-group-abuses-banditry-surge>; Human Rights Watch, “Mali,” 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/africa/mali>.

⁷ In 2015, high-ranking member of al-Mourabitoun, Adnan Abu Walid Sahraoui, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, causing friction with commander, Mokhtar Belmokhtar. Sahraoui and other Islamic State sympathizers defected, founding Islamic State in the Greater Sahara. The group is responsible for notable attacks in regions surrounding the borders Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, including an October 4 attack which killed 4 Nigerien soldiers, 4 American soldiers, and an interpreter. Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Helene Cooper, “U.S. Identifies 3 ISIS Militants who led Deadly Ambush in Niger,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2018, (accessed November 19, 2018) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/29/us/politics/isis-militants-ambush-niger.html>; Jason Warner, “Sub-Saharan Africa’s Three ‘New’ Islamic State Affiliates,” *Combatting Terrorism Center Sentinel* 10 (2017), accessed November 19, 2018 <https://ctc.usma.edu/sub-saharan-africas-three-new-islamic-state-affiliates/>.

⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with victims and witnesses, Bamako, Sévaré and San, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

⁹ “Mali: Spate of Killings by Armed Groups: Investigate Abuses, Protect Vulnerable Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 5, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/05/mali-spate-killings-armed-groups>; “Mali: Islamist Armed Group Abuses, Banditry Surge: Killings, Repression, Insecurity Imperil Civilians in North, Central Region,” Human Rights Watch news release, January 18, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/01/18/mali-islamist-armed-group-abuses-banditry-surgeand>

improvised explosive devices on roads and pathways. In 2018, these devices killed several dozens of people in central Mali.¹⁰

In many villages, the groups forbid villagers from celebrating marriages and baptisms; impose bans on music, sports, alcohol, and certain types of clothing; and forbid girls and women riding on motorcycles with men other than their husbands or male relatives.¹¹ They also undermined citizens' participation in the 2016 local elections and 2018 presidential elections by attacking election officials, pillaging polling stations, and destroying election materials.¹²

They have destroyed communication antennas and burned government vehicles and buildings, including schools, mayor and gendarmerie offices, town halls, and prisons, causing the flight of many civil servants and local government representatives.¹³

Since 2015, the violence by the Islamist armed groups and the often-heavy handed response by the security forces caused thousands of civilians from central Mali to flee their homes. As fear of the groups spreads, village-based civil defense groups, notably those representing the Bambara and Dogon, organized to protect the villagers who remained.¹⁴

The Bambara and Dogon communities provided Human Rights Watch with lists of their respective community members including marabouts, imams, village chiefs, farmers and businessmen who they said had been killed since 2015 by alleged Islamist armed groups supported by the wider Peuhl communities. Leaders of both communities also said they had repeatedly met with government representatives urging for better protection for their communities, but that the authorities had failed to act.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch phone interviews, January 28, 2018; interviews with victims and witnesses, Sévaré, February 10, 2018.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with victims and witnesses, Bamako and Sévaré, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

¹² Human Rights Watch interviews with witnesses and community leaders, Bamako, 2016 and 2018.

¹³ Human Rights Watch interviews with witnesses, community leaders and government representatives, Bamako and Sévaré, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Bambara and Dogon community and self-defense group leaders, Bamako and Sévaré, 2016, 2017, and 2018.

Armed Islamist Recruitment of the Peuhl

Armed Islamist groups have concentrated their recruitment efforts on the Peuhl and, increasingly, established a presence in central Mali. They have done so by exploiting Peuhl community frustrations over poverty, banditry, abusive security services, government corruption, and competition for land and water.¹⁵ Recruitment has been facilitated by the charismatic Peuhl Islamist leader, Hamadou Koufa Diallo,¹⁶ who hails from Mopti region and since at least 2012 has been associated with Al-Qaeda-linked groups in Mali.

Dozens of Peuhl community leaders interviewed by Human Rights Watch since 2015 have expressed concern about the Islamists' infiltration into and successful recruitment within their community, noting that scores of Peuhl men have joined the armed Islamists.¹⁷

Peuhl villagers said that their people were joining these groups for several reasons: in support of the armed Islamists' efforts to address banditry and state corruption; to take advantage of chaos to engage in banditry or settle scores; out of religious conviction; and for protection given their fear of the army and, increasingly, abusive self-defense groups.¹⁸

Several Peuhl leaders said that from 2017, some Peuhl men were being forcefully recruited. One leader noted how villagers in his area were pressured during meetings with villagers to "give their sons" to the Islamists.¹⁹ A village chief from a village near the Burkina Faso border said, "the jihadists are strategic; if your child is inside, that means you can't denounce them to the authorities."²⁰

Few government officials and community leaders from different ethnic groups who spoke to Human Rights Watch disputed the increasing presence of Peuhl villagers within armed

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl villagers and community leaders, Bamako and Sévaré, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl villagers and community leaders, Bamako and Sévaré, 2016, 2017, 2018.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with Peuhl chief, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

Islamist groups, but they generally believed the conflation of the Peuhl with militant Islam was being exaggerated and instrumentalized by different actors for opportunistic ends.²¹

A Malian sociologist said, “The intra-ethnic clashes are being created and exploited by different groups: by the jihadists to get recruits, and by ethnic militias of all sides as a cover to engage in banditry, large scale animal theft, and land misappropriation.”²²

A top military commander said, “I’ve discussed the growing violence with my commanders and with village chiefs from all sides. Yes, sure, there are jihadists in this zone, but the real problem is banditry, animal theft, score settling – people are enriching themselves using the fight against terrorists as a cover.”²³

Many Peuhl leaders said what they described as “collective punishment” of the Peuhl is only serving to drive new recruits into the abusive Islamist groups. As noted by an aid worker, “There is little interest in jihadism among the Fulani [Peuhl], but if the entire community is targeted, and the government fails to act, they will be given no other choice than to turn to the jihadists for protection.”²⁴

Many Peuhl victims and village elders noted that more Peuhl have been killed, kidnapped and abused by the Islamists than any other community in central Mali. “People always forget that we too have suffered because of these people. Our chiefs and imams have been killed, our traditions suppressed, and our children abducted or brainwashed to join them,” an elder said.²⁵

Human Rights Watch documented several alleged killings of Peuhl village leaders by Islamist armed groups in 2017 and 2018. They included a village chief shot in the mouth in a village in Bandiagara *cercle*, another who was decapitated, and a third hanged inside a

²¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with community leaders and government officials Bamako, May 26, 2018.

²² Human Rights Watch Interview with Malian sociologist, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

²³ Human Rights Watch Interview with military commander, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

²⁴ Human Rights Watch email exchange with aid worker, Bandiagara, May 10, 2018.

²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl elder, Bamako, May 25, 2018.

well.²⁶ An aid worker said she knew of 10 Peuhl civilians, including an elderly village chief, killed in Koro *cercle* in recent years for refusing to pay “taxes” to armed Islamists based in the area.²⁷

Several Peuhl community leaders said attacks on civilians by both the self-defense groups and army were complicating the government’s efforts to address the spread of Islamist armed groups. One Peuhl youth leader said:

Now we’re being hit on three fronts -- jihadists, the army and militias. If [the army] and Dogon militias would have targeted the jihadists instead of civilians, we Peuhl would have been behind them 100 percent. But their targeting of innocent [people] is complicating the fight against terrorism. When they created G5-Sahel, all the Peuhl in my village applauded. But if they don’t stop targeting us in the name of counterterrorism, they can create G-10 Sahel, G-15 Sahel and it won’t get rid of all the new jihadists created by the bad things done by the army and militias.²⁸

Many Dogon and Bambara self-defense group leaders said they blamed the Peuhl for the growing presence of armed Islamists. “The jihadists hide in Peuhl hamlets from where they launch attacks and kill us,” said one leader.²⁹ “Our army has proven itself unable to protect us. Our population revolted, saying we can’t continue to accept this. The village chiefs asked the hunters to protect them, and that is what we have done.³⁰”

Some of these declarations portend grave international crimes. “There is the will to kill all Peuhl,” one militia leader said. “They are all complicit - if they aren’t members of jihadists, then they are hiding them...no, you must eliminate them.”³¹

²⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with witnesses, Bamako, July 3-11, 2017 and July 4, 2018.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch email from aid worker, October 25, 2018.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Peuhl community leader, Bamako, July 3, 2018.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with militia leader, Mopti, July 11, 2018.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with militia leader, Sévaré, Feb712, 2018.

³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with militia leader, July 14, 2018 (location withheld.)



Cattle herders from the Peuhl ethnic group graze their animals in central Mali. Douentza cercle, in June 2016. Communal violence between members of the Peuhl, Dogon and Bambara ethnic groups in 2018 has killed over 200 civilians, the majority Peuhl, and has led to widespread displacement, hunger, and looting of livestock. © 2016 Katarina Höije/VOA.

While fewer Bambara and Dogon civilians were killed in communal violence in 2018, leaders from these communities said members of the Peuhl community had, at times, also appeared to blame them for the actions of the Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups. Said a Dogon elder: “Not every Dogon is in a militia group. Our men can’t go to their fields, and in many places, we haven’t even planted this season. Our women are targeted going to market.”³²

Factors Contributing to Communal Tension in Central Mali

The communal violence between Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups, who allege that state security forces have failed to protect them, and the Peuhl community, who are blamed for their perceived harboring of and involvement with the Islamists, is underscored by several other factors that have exacerbated the communal violence, including competition over land and water, and easy access to military firearms.

³² Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon elder, Sévaré, July 15, 2018.

Disputes over Access to Land and Water

The agricultural Bambara and Dogon and pastoral Peuhl communities have long had disputes over access to land and water. However, their disagreements rarely resulted in bloodletting and were usually resolved by village, tribal or religious leaders, and sometimes, with less success, the Malian judicial system.

Community leaders, villagers and academics told Human Rights Watch that competition over natural resources in central Mali – both to cultivate and to graze cattle – had been steadily rising. As an academic noted, “As demography has increased, the bush has diminished.”³³ A political observer who has worked in Dogon and Peuhl areas for decades explained:

The Dogon lived in isolation in the cliffs for hundreds of years but several decades ago, as the population rapidly expanded, they started migrating in search of other areas to farm. The Fulani started losing grazing zones as the Dogon increased their cultivated fields and brought more and more people from other farming areas into the area. Now people cannot move their cattle without destroying crops and this, over the past 10 years, has been the source of growing conflict. Climate change and bad land management have compounded the problem.³⁴

A Malian sociologist noted the changing role economic interdependence played in fomenting tension: “The Dogon and Bambara used to exchange their millet for the Fulani milk, but as the Dogon and Bambara got richer, and started buying their own cattle, many no longer needed the Peuhl. Our dependence on each other used to be an incentive to work things out, but this is less and less the case.”³⁵

The communal tension arising over the competition for resources has now, as noted by an academic, “been confused, conflated and underscored by the wider fight against

³³ Human Rights Watch interview with academic, May 25, 2018, Bamako.

³⁴ Human Rights Watch email from political observer, London, May 4, 2018.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Malian sociologist, Mopti, July 13, 2018.

terrorism.”³⁶ Indeed, several village leaders and security analysts accused the Bambara and Dogon militias of using the government’s fight against terrorism as a pretext to dislodge the Peuhl from fertile and valuable land, including for large-scale farming projects.

Proliferation of Military Firearms and Other Weapons

Community leaders from all ethnic groups and security analysts in the region told Human Rights Watch that the proliferation of semi-automatic assault rifles and other weapons in the possession of self-defense and Islamist armed groups was contributing to the lethality of the communal violence.

Many said Mali’s cycles of armed conflict in the north was an obvious factor leading to arms proliferation, but they questioned how, more recently, the self-defense groups had procured so many weapons and ammunition without the government acting to control the problem. A European security expert said: “The Dogon and Bambara self-defense militias have more and more AK-47s (Kalashnikov assault rifles), and seemingly endless stocks of ammunition. These are very poor communities so how can they afford to buy all this stuff?”³⁷

Villagers said self-defense or hunting societies were traditionally armed with artisanal or single-barrel shotguns and only started seeing “war guns” within the last few years. “The arms they [militias] are using are not the ones our fathers used,” one market woman said. “When they fired, the earth trembled.”³⁸

Dozens of witnesses described Bambara, Dogon and Peuhl self-defense groups use of Kalashnikovs and sometimes other military weapons including machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). Several Peuhl villagers described heavy firing by the militias

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with academic, Sévaré, July 9, 2018.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with French security analyst, Bamako, July 4, 2018.

³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with market woman, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

during their attacks. One villager noted how “the militias fired as if their bullets had no limit.”³⁹

Peuhl from five villages described seeing machine guns “mounted on three feet,” or tripods,⁴⁰ which a few identified as a Russian-designed Kord-12.7 mm heavy machine gun. A few villagers described seeing what appeared to be RPGs: “They fired a long, heavy gun from their shoulders. It sounded like thunder and set our village mosque on fire,” one man said.⁴¹

Dogon and Bambara leaders also expressed grave concern about the proliferation of arms in their zone. A few described the Islamist groups as “armed to the teeth.” Community leaders believed the Islamists were both arming Peuhl villagers and, at times, attacking their communities.

Residents of Douna, Douentza *cercle* described how their village self-defense forces had come under sustained, frequent attacks by heavily armed Peuhl men they believed were members of an Islamist armed group. “The attacks have been like nothing we’ve seen --the Jihadists are using weapons of war including RPGs...they were heavy, bold attacks,” an elder said.⁴²

A Dogon farmer who stumbled upon a bush camp of armed Islamists near Mali’s border with Burkina Faso in mid-2018 said: “Suddenly, they emerged from the bush pointing their weapons at me. ...they had rocket launchers, AK-47s, bandoliers crisscrossing their bodies, bulletproof vests, military boots and uniforms, motorcycles and vehicles. There was about a dozen of them in front of me, and many behind the trees...all heavily laden with arms.”⁴³

³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl villager, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl villagers, Bamako, May 25-27, 2018 and Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

⁴² Human Rights Watch Interview with Douna resident, Bamako, February 15, 2018.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon farmer, Sévaré, July 11, 2018.

Allegations of Self-Defense Groups as Government Proxies

Diplomats, security analysts and others who spoke to Human Rights Watch questioned how Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups were being armed. Some told Human Rights Watch they suspected the Malian government was, informally, sub-contracting some of its defense responsibilities to these groups. They believed the Malian parliament should investigate these allegations.

The Malian government has on a few occasions been credibly accused by academics, civil society members and diplomats of supporting ethnically-allied self-defense groups to help them with military operations, notably against Tuareg separatists, and more recently, armed Islamists.⁴⁴ The allegations of outsourcing defense responsibilities have included the provision of arms, ammunition and logistics.⁴⁵

During Tuareg separatist rebellions in northern Mali in 1962-1964, 1990-1995, 2006-2009 and 2012-2013, the government was alleged to have supported the Ganda Koi, later known as Ganda Izo, a largely ethnic-Songhai self-defense group, to supplement army operations in Gao and Timbuktu regions.⁴⁶ From 2006, the government also allegedly supported a militia, active in Timbuktu region, and a militia composed of Tuaregs from the Imghad clan, as well as some soldiers. From at least 2014, Malian analysts and an American diplomat asserted that the government was supporting GATIA (Groupe d'autodéfense touareg Imghad et alliés),⁴⁷ a militia composed of Tuaregs from the Imghad community active in the northern Kidal region.⁴⁸ From 2017, the GATIA and the MSA (Mouvement pour le salut de l'Azawad), composed of Tuaregs from the Daoussahak community, have sought to flush

⁴⁴ “[Repères] Forces et groupes armés au Mali: qui est qui?” *RFI Afrique*, March 24, 2016, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20160318-echiquier-malien-groupes-armes-azawad-aqmi-fama> (accessed October 1, 2018).

⁴⁵ “Au Mali: Les liaisons dangereuses entre l'état et les milices,” *Le Monde*, July 24, 2017, https://abonnes.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2018/07/24/au-mali-les-liaisons-dangereuses-entre-l-etat-et-les-milices_5335256_3212.html (accessed October 1, 2018);

⁴⁶ International Crisis Group, “Mali: Avoiding Escalation,” Africa Report no. 189, pgs. 3,4, 14 and 37 (2012), <https://d2071andvipowj.cloudfront.net/189-mali-avoiding-escalation.pdf> (accessed October 3, 2018).

⁴⁷ “Pour avoir demandé au gouvernement de rompre tout lien avec le GATIA : l'Ambassadeur des Etats-Unis au Mali s'est attiré la colère des Maliens, » *Bamada*, October 1, 2016, <http://bamada.net/pour-avoir-demande-au-gouvernement-de-rompre-tout-lien-avec-le-gatia-lambassadeur-des-etats-unis-au-mali-sest-attire-la-colere-des-maliens> (accessed November 20, 2018).

⁴⁸ “Le conflit entre Ifoghas et Imghad s'entend dans le nord du Mali” *Voice of Africa*, August 7, 2017, <https://www.voaafrique.com/a/mali-le-conflit-entre-ifoghas-et-imghad-s-etend-dans-le-nord/3975143.html> (accessed October 1, 2018);

out armed Islamists in the Ménaka region.⁴⁹ All these groups have been credibly implicated in serious human rights abuses.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ “Moussa Ag Acharatoumane: au Mali, ‘nous combattons une organisation criminelle’,” April 23, 2018, RFI, <http://www.rfi.fr/emission/20180423-moussa-ag-acharatoumane-porte-parole-msa-mouvement-le-salut-azawad> (accessed October 1, 2018).

⁵⁰ Situation in Mali, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2015/732, September 22, 2015, https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/150928_sg_report_sept_2015_en.pdf (accessed November 20, 2018); Situation in Mali, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2016/498, May 31, 2016, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/n1614458-en.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2018); Situation in Mali, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2017/478, September 28, 2017, https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/170928_sg_report_on_mali_september_eng.pdf (accessed November 20, 2018); Situation in Mali, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2018/273, March 29, 2018, https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/report_of_the_secretary-general_on_the_situation_in_mali_-_29_march_.pdf (accessed November 20, 2018).

Abusive Armed Groups in Central Mali

Victims and witnesses identified several armed groups allegedly responsible for serious abuses documented in this report.

Bambara Self-Defense Groups

The Dozo

The Dozo, or “traditional hunting societies” operating in villages and towns in Djenné *cercle*, were implicated in many serious abuses against Peuhl civilians. A Dozo leader told Human Rights Watch that the Dozos were “created centuries ago,” before Africa’s national borders were drawn and are organized in brotherhoods of men who have gone through a years-long initiation process.⁵¹ These Dozos are comprised mainly of Mande-speaking ethnic groups from Cote d’Ivoire, Mali, and Burkina Faso and in Mali are predominantly Bambara but include Malinke and Bozo, among other ethnic groups.⁵²

The Dozo, whose beliefs are grounded in mysticism, have acted as local village self-defense forces, and typically use single-shot hunting rifles. Bambara self-defense group leaders operational in Segou and Mopti regions said they started responding to the threat from Islamist armed groups since about 2014, and while still largely village-based, responded to security threats in other villages when needed.

Another Dozo leader said the refusal or inability of the Malian government to address the mounting Islamist threat in central Mali had forced them to reinforce and reorganize the longstanding village-based structure, get training, and take on national defense tasks in support of not only their village but the surrounding area. He said:

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dozo traditional leader, Bamako, February 18, 2017; IRIN “Dozos 'savvy political actors'” IRIN News, August 1, 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2011/08/01/dozos-savvy-political-actors> (accessed November 21, 2018).

⁵² Vladimir Arseniev, “Les chasseurs Donso du Mali a l’épreuve du temps,” *Afrique Contemporaine*, vol. 223 (2007), p. 341-361.

So many of our people have been killed – we have reported and denounced to local and Bamako authorities but what we hear are excuses for not investigating the killings, for not protecting us – the rain, the danger, insufficient guns or weapons. In the end we decided we had to protect ourselves. We know all Peuhl are not jihadists – but some are.⁵³

A Bambara mayor from a town in Mopti region said that:

Until around 2015, the Dozo was for hunting and village protection only. But because of the jihadists, it is now organized into a true, more regional, self-defense group. They got more organized: they meet every 15 days to discuss problems, man checkpoints, and even go on operations to flush jihadists out.⁵⁴

The Dozo’s organizational structure in central Mali is opaque. Small groups of village-based Dozos appear to form part of larger units linked to the Dozo units in the closest town. However, intercommunal relationships vary considerably from area to area. For example, after previous periods of communal tension between the Bambara and Peuhl in 2016 and 2017, Dozo groups in a few areas in Segou and Mopti regions signed informal “accords” with their Peuhl neighbors, and even with Islamist armed groups.⁵⁵

Dogon Self-Defense Groups

Dan Na Ambassagou

Dan Na Ambassagou (“hunters who trust in God,” in Dogon⁵⁶) is an umbrella group of Dogon village-based self-defense groups, or traditional hunting societies, from Koro, Bandiagara, Bankass and, to a lesser extent, Mopti *cercles*, all areas near Mali’s border

⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Bambara Dozo leader, Bamako, February 19, 2017.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with the mayor of a town in Mopti Region, Bamako, February 16, 2017.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl and Bambara village leaders, Bamako and Sévaré, 2016, 2017, 2018.

⁵⁶ “Mouvement « Dana Ambassagou » ou chasseurs se confiant à Dieu au pays Dogon : Vers l’autodéfense des populations et des valeurs sociétales,” *Bamada*, August 24, 2017, <http://bamada.net/mouvement-dana-ambassagou-ou-chasseurs-se-confiant-a-dieu-au-pays-dogon-vers-lauto-defense-des-populations-et-des-valeurs-societales> (accessed November 5, 2018).



Membership card of a Dan Na Ambassagou member. © 2017 Private

with Burkina Faso.⁵⁷ Dan Na Ambassagou leaders told Human Rights Watch that their armed group was formally launched in 2016 “to protect the Dogon country” after the October 2016 killing of Théodore Soumbounou, the then-leader of the Dogon hunting society. “Before his death, Theodore had asked the hunters to organize, so as to defend our community,” a member said. “He knew he would die but he sacrificed himself for us.”⁵⁸

A Dogon militia leader said that, “the jihadists hide in Peuhl hamlets from where they launch attacks and kill us. Our army has proven itself unable to protect our villages. Our population revolted, saying we can’t continue to accept this.”⁵⁹ An elder said, “all the

⁵⁷ The group was reportedly formed in 2012 but became active in 2016. “C’est pour sécuriser la zone du plateau dogon et dissuader d’éventuels assaillants, que des chasseurs dogons ont pris les armes pour former la milice Dan Na Amba Sagou (confier le territoire aux chasseurs)” *Bamada*, January 5, 2017, <http://bamada.net/dan-na-amba-sagou-le-rempart-dogon>. (accessed November 5, 2018).

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dan Na Ambassagou, Mopti region, July 15, 2018.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou leader, Bamako, July 10, 2017.

Peuhl are inside this thing -- all of them. We're vulnerable but we are organized. And we will not be chased away.”⁶⁰

In 2017, a Dan Na Ambassagou leader told Human Rights Watch that they had one main base, a few hundred members, and that the group's leader, Youssouf Toloba, “travels far and wide, giving special ‘medicine’ for protection. We are starting recruitment throughout Dogon land. We have sent out a call - anyone that is ready should join us.”⁶¹

In 2018, they claimed their movement had hundreds of fighters and operated out of numerous bases, most in the Koro region.⁶² On November 1, 2018, a Malian press report described a meeting in Bandiagara of representatives of 36 Dan Na Ambassagou militia camps and presided over by Youssouf Toloba.⁶³

Dan Na Ambassagou has a military-like hierarchy. Human Rights Watch has seen a list of those in command positions and several fighters showed us their Dan Na Ambassagou “*Carte De Combatants*,” all of which were signed by their chef d'état mayor general, Youssouf Toloba, and stamped with an official seal. Printed on one card seen is, “in case the card is lost, the bearer must notify his unit commander.”

The group split in July 2018 after the faction led by David Tembine signed a unilateral pact of non-aggression with Peuhl armed groups. The more militant faction is led by Youssouf Toloba.

Dogon self-defense groups in Douentza cercle

Dogon self-defense groups in Douentza said they have not joined Dan Na Ambassagou nor do they receive any support from it. They said that since at least August 2018, several village self-defense groups – from Yangassadiou, Douna, Toikana, Banai and Tiguila – have informally banded together under one umbrella group that reinforce each other on an

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon militia member, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou leader, Sévaré, July 10, 2017.

⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou leader, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

⁶³ “Pays Dogon : Rencontre des 36 Camp de Dan Na Ambassagou,” Bamada.net, November 2, 2018, <http://bamada.net/pays-dogon-rencontre-des-36-camps-de-dan-nan-ambassagou> (accessed November 4, 2018).

“as-needed” basis and receive some financial support from family members living in Bamako and the diaspora.⁶⁴

The level of coordination between the Bambara self-defense groups and Dogon self-defense groups remains unclear and group leaders declined to provide details about any joint operations. As discussed below, Bambara and Dogon self-defense group leaders denied receiving any support from or coordinating operations with the Malian government or committing abuses against civilians.

Islamist armed groups

A patchwork of Islamist armed groups with shifting and overlapping allegiances are active in central Mali. These groups are heavily represented by Peuhl men from Mali, and to a lesser extent from Niger and Burkina Faso. They typically refer to themselves as “jihadists.”

Macina Liberation Front

The Macina Liberation Front (MLF or *Katibat Macina*) emerged in 2015 after claiming responsibility for attacks in central Mali. It is led by Malian preacher Amadou Kouffa who was allied with Al-Qaeda-linked groups since at least 2012. Since 2017, the MLF has been one of five Malian Al-Qaeda-linked groups merged under the name Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) meaning “Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims,” which is led by veteran Tuareg jihadist and leader of the group Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly.⁶⁵

Ansaroul Islam

Ansaroul Islam, a Burkinabe Islamist armed group, was founded in late 2016 by Malam Ibrahim Dicko.⁶⁶ It has received training and logistical support from both Al-Qaeda-linked

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon group members, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

⁶⁵ “Analysis: Al Qaeda groups regroup in West Africa,” *Long War Journal*, March 13, 2017, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/analysis-al-qaeda-groups-reorganize-in-west-africa.php> (accessed October 5, 2018).

⁶⁶ “Ansaroul Islam and the Growing Terrorist Insurgency in Burkina Faso,” *CTC Sentinel*, March 2018, Volume 11, Issue 3, Caleb Weiss and Heni Nsaibia, <https://ctc.usma.edu/ansaroul-islam-growing-terrorist-insurgency-burkina-faso> (accessed November 4, 2018.)

groups and the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara (ISGS.)⁶⁷ Malam Dicko died during an attack by French forces in 2017, and was replaced by his brother Jafar.⁶⁸ Ansarul Islam fighters, many of whom are from Niger and Mali, operate in Burkina Faso and in Mali, largely within the Mondoro commune of Douentza *cercle*, and Dioungani commune of Koro *cercle*.⁶⁹

Peuhl Self-Defense Groups

Peuhl Alliance pour le Salut du Sahel

The Peuhl Alliance pour le Salut du Sahel (“Alliance for the Salvation of the Sahel” or ASS) was formed in May 2018 with the purpose of protecting the Peuhl community in Mali and Burkina Faso from attack from Dozos operating in the region and other armed groups.⁷⁰ Initially, the movement intended to organize the existing village-based Peuhl self-defense groups under one umbrella. However, Peuhl leaders said the group has no funding and failed to bring existing village-based groups into its fold much less garner new recruits.⁷¹ Dogon militia groups readily conflate the alliance with Islamist armed groups, but alliance statements firmly deny this relationship. An October 2018 statement said that, “the ASS is not affiliated militarily or ideologically or politically to any other organization in the theater of operations.”⁷²

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl community leaders and sources close to Ansarul Islam, Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Sévaré, 2017, 2018.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with community leaders, security analysts, Bamako, Sévaré and Ouagadougou, 2018.

⁷⁰ “Mali: création de deux groupes armés communautaires dans le centre du Mali,” *MaliActu*, May 24, 2018, <https://maliactu.net/mali-creation-de-deux-groupes-armes-communautaires-dans-le-centre-du-mali> (accessed November 4, 2018).

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with three Peuhl youth leaders, Bamako, July 9 and 14, 2018.

⁷² Communiqué No. 095 / ASS / 18, received by Whatsapp from Peuhl source on October 4, 2018.



Members of the Peuhl Alliance pour le Salut du Sahel (Alliance for the Salvation of the Sahel, or ASS), a militia founded in May 2018 to defend Peuhl communities from attacks by ethnic militias and other armed groups, in central Mali. ASS has been implicated in alleged abuses against the Bambara and Dogon communities, at times reportedly alongside Islamist armed groups. © 2018 Private.

Peuhl village self-defense forces

Many Peuhl villages throughout central Mali contain self-defense groups. These groups consistently deny being affiliated with any Islamist armed group or the ASS, contending that their members are comprised entirely of local residents.⁷³ Dogon villagers contest this assertion, saying they have on numerous occasions identified Peuhl from the local village defense forces working alongside Islamist armed groups.⁷⁴

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl villagers and leaders, Bamako, May 23-25, Sévaré, July 9-13, 2018.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Dogon villagers and militia leaders, Sévaré, July 9-13, 2018 and Bamako, July 14-15, 2018.

Past Communal Violence in Central Mali

Incidents of communal violence in central Mali involving primarily the Bambara, Dogon and Peuhl have been rising since 2015. The violence has included dozens of individual killings including of community leaders, as well as several large-scale massacres.

The episodes have followed a similar pattern in which the killing of a Bambara or Dogon civilian credibly blamed on Islamist armed groups is followed by a wave of heavy-handed retaliatory attacks on entire Peuhl hamlets and villagers. Leaders from all three communities decried the lack of justice for the killings and other abuses suffered by their respective communities. Only one of these incidents – the killing of over 30 Peuhl villagers in 2016 - has resulted in an in-depth judicial investigation and conviction.

Key incidents

On July 18, 2015, armed Islamists including many from Niger, executed six Dogon villagers in three hamlets near the town of Niangassadiou, near Mali’s border with Burkina Faso, in Douentza *cercle*. The incident occurred on the Muslim holiday of Eid al Fitr (*Tabaski*) and was accompanied by looting of the community.⁷⁵

In late April 2016, two Bambara men suspected of being informants for the Malian armed forces were killed by alleged Peuhl armed Islamists in Maleimana, in Ténenkou *cercle*, Mopti region. In response, four Peuhl were killed by the Bambara, triggering retaliation from Peuhl assailants, who killed a Bambara deputy mayor. The following day, the Bambara Dozos opened fire on Peuhl hamlets. The confrontations, spanning several days, left some 30 people dead. In 2017 several Bambara men were convicted of killings during this period.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Mali: Abuses Spread South: Islamist Armed Groups’ Atrocities, Army Responses Generate Fear” Human Rights Watch news release, February 19, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/19/mali-abuses-spread-south>.

⁷⁶ “Affrontements sanglants entre peuls et bambaras: Bilan: Entre 38 et 50 morts,” Malijet, May 5, 2016, http://malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/154849-affrontements-sanglants-entre-peuls-et-bambaras-bilan-entre-38-e.html (accessed September 13, 2018).

On February 11, 2017, alleged Peuhl assailants killed a Bambara shopkeeper near the town of Ke-Macina in Ségou region. The killing sparked retaliatory attacks against seven Peuhl hamlets by the Bambara Dozos, which left at least 21 people dead, including children. Many victims were burned inside their houses. In retaliation, alleged armed Islamists summarily executed nine traders – from the Bozo and Bambara ethnic groups – on their way back from a market in Ségou region. While a commission of inquiry was established, and identified several suspected perpetrators, no one was held to account for the violence during this period.⁷⁷

In June 16, 2017, alleged Peuhl armed assailants killed Souleymane Guindo, a prominent Dogon member of the traditional hunting society, on his way back from a market, in Dioungani commune, Koro *cercle*. The killing sparked retaliatory killings by armed Dogon villagers, including relatives of the victim, against two Peuhl hamlets, Nawodie and Tanfadala, leaving at least 35 dead and forcing the evacuation of several thousand civilians.⁷⁸

As described in the next section, the episodes of communal violence, and numbers of killings and massacres in central Mali, has surged in 2018.

⁷⁷ “Mali: Spate of Killings by Armed Groups: Investigate Abuses, Protect Vulnerable Civilians,” Human Rights Watch news release, April 5, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/05/mali-spate-killings-armed-groups>.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with seven witnesses, Sévaré, July 7-8, 2017. List of victims on file with Human Rights Watch.

Communal Violence in Mopti Region

Confusion and suspicion rules the day and ordinary people from all groups are caught in the middle. The Dogon and Bambara accuse all Peuhl of being jihadists, and the Peuhl say all Dogon and Bambara are supporting the abusive militias. We used to be brothers. What has happened to us?

--Bambara youth leader, July 2018

Human Rights Watch documented 42 incidents of communal violence involving armed groups in the Mopti Region in 2018 in which a total of 202 civilians were killed, scores wounded, and dozens of villages destroyed. The abuses documented below occurred between January and November 2018. Most took place in the administrative *cercles* of Douentza, Djenné, Koro, while several occurred in the *cercles* of Bandiagara, Bankass and Mopti.

Twenty-six of the incidents were allegedly committed by Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups against Peuhl communities and left 156 Peuhl civilians dead. In 10 incidents – in Koumaga, Komboko, Dankoussa, Meou, Bombou, Someni, Pirga, Doldla Haidara, Gueourou and near Sofara – at least 8 civilians and as many as 23 were killed on the same day. Around 50 Peuhl villagers, including children, who were either detained by the militias or fled the attacks, remain unaccounted for.

Sixteen documented attacks were allegedly committed by Islamist armed groups, sometimes allegedly alongside Peuhl self-defense groups, leaving 46 Dogon and Bambara civilians dead.

Witnesses to attacks by all forces said most civilians harmed were deliberately fired upon, while others were shot in indiscriminate gunfire as militiamen fired randomly and recklessly into villages. Others died after being caught inside a structure that had been set on fire. The attacks by all forces were almost always accompanied by widespread pillage, the destruction or burning of villages, and large-scale livestock theft. The violence has resulted in thousands of villagers being displaced.

Many of the attacks particularly by Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups appeared to be in retaliation for killings by Islamist armed groups of prominent community members, such as village chiefs or elders, local government leaders, or marabouts.

Some Peuhl villages had small local self-defense forces that were easily overpowered; in other cases, a longer exchange of gunfire ensued. The militias frequently carried out retaliatory killings against the Peuhl village that was accused of harboring the armed Islamists. In several cases, Dogon and Bambara militia members told Human Rights Watch they had identified local Peuhl villagers as among the fighters taking part in an earlier attack.⁷⁹

Human Rights Watch documented several “tit for tat” killings in which one or several Peuhl, Bambara or Dogon civilians were gunned down or hacked to death as they tended cattle, worked the fields, took goods to or from market, or after being dragged off public transportation by armed men at informal checkpoints. Several relatives described retrieving the bodies of their loved one whose death they blamed on self-defense groups.⁸⁰

Human Rights Watch also learned of over 30 other apparent retaliatory killings of Bambara, Dogon and Bambara villagers that merit further investigation. While some of these killings could have been a result of banditry or a settling of personal scores, they fuel an increasingly deadly, and almost-daily cycle of violence in the region.

In addition to the cases documented in this report, Human Rights Watch believes that the actual number of people killed in communal violence in central Mali in the past year is significantly greater. In addition, since 2017 there have been dozens of civilians killed in Mali’s northern Ménaka region in communal violence between the Peuhl and Tuareg Imghad and Doussak clans.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Dogon and Bambara villagers and militia leaders, Sévaré, July 9-13, 2018 and Bamako, July 14-15, 2018.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with witness, Bamako, February 6-15; Bamako, May 25-27, 2018; Sévaré, July 9-13, 2018, Bamako, July 14-16, 2018.

⁸¹ MINUSMA, “Human Rights and the Peace Process in Mali (January 2016-June 2017),” February 2018, https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/executive_summary_english.pdf (accessed November 5, 2018); United Nations Security Council, Report 541 (2018), S/2018/541, https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/180606_sg_report_on_mali_english_.pdf (accessed November 5, 2018); United Nations Security Council, Report 866 (2018), S/2018/866, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/n1829038.pdf> (accessed November 5, 2018).

In July 2018, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern about the “surge in violence perpetrated across communal lines” in central Mali, noting that 289 civilians had been killed in 99 incidents of communal violence, the majority of which -- 76 incidents - occurred in the Mopti region. The statement noted particular concern for attacks allegedly committed by Bambara and Dogon militias against the Peuhl community: “While these attacks are said to be motivated by a desire to root out individuals linked to the violent extremist group, *Jama’at nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen* (JNIM), in reality, they have increasingly been indiscriminately targeting members of the Fulani (Peuhl) community.”⁸²

⁸²“Press briefing notes on Nicaragua, Mali and Kashmir,” July 17, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23383&LangID=E> (accessed October 9, 2018).

Abuses Against Peuhl Communities

What started as a struggle for self-defense against jihadists has degenerated into a war against the Peuhl.

– Peuhl youth leader, Sévaré, March 2018

Abuses by Bambara Self-Defense Groups

All the incidents of abuse implicating Bambara self-defense groups, or Dozos, documented by Human Rights Watch in this section occurred in the Djenné administrative *cercle*. The town of Djenné, designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site, is 400 kilometers from Bamako and 80 kilometers from Mopti.⁸³

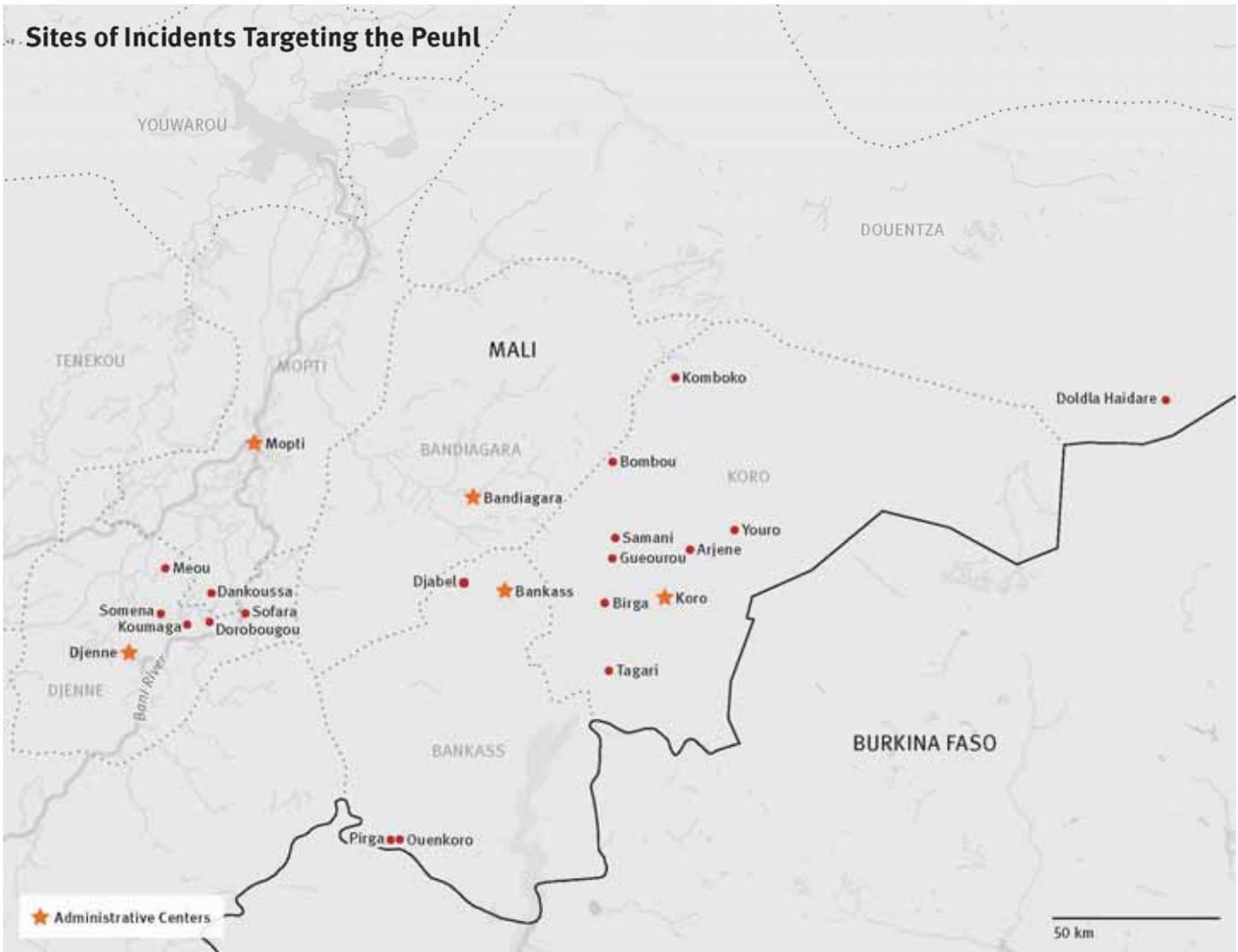
Security analysts told Human Rights Watch that Islamist armed groups began infiltrating the Djenné *cercle* in late 2016.⁸⁴ Prior to 2018, the armed Islamists had carried out very few attacks on Malian government or military targets, nor had they taken part in communal violence. One security analyst said he had registered about 20 incidents of communal violence in 2018, compared to 2016 and 2017, during which only one such incident had occurred.⁸⁵

Dozo attacks typically took place in villages that had a small or recent presence of Islamists, or after they had recently attacked Dozo in the vicinity. The Dozo attacks documented were accompanied by significant pillage and livestock theft and caused several thousand Peuhl to flee their villages. A few of the attacks were followed by retaliatory attacks by armed Islamists against Bambara civilians, fueling the cycle of violence.

⁸³ Djenné is famous for its adobe architecture, including its Great Mosque, and is one of the oldest towns in sub-Saharan Africa. The mosque and the old town were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1988. “Old Towns of Djenne,” UNESCO World Heritage Convention, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/116> (accessed October 9, 2018).

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with security analysts, Bamako, July 4 and 6, 2018.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with security analyst, Bamako, July 4, 2018.



Koumaga

On June 23 and 24, Dozos reportedly killed 25 Peuhl civilians in and around Koumaga, a village of approximately 2,500 residents located 18 kilometers north of Djenné.⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interviewed 10 witnesses to the killings and received a list of names and images of the dead.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ A UN spokesperson said in July a MINUSMA human rights investigation found that the June 23 attack by Dozos on Koumaga killed 24 civilians, including six boys. “Press briefing notes on Nicaragua, Mali and Kashmir,” July 17, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23383&LangID=E> (accessed October 9, 2018).

⁸⁷ List of names of victims on file with Human Rights Watch.



Peuhl villagers bury people in a common grave after they were killed in Koumaga village, near Djenné, in central Mali on June 23, 2018 during an attack by alleged Dozo militia. © 2018 Private

Witnesses said that between 8 and 9 a.m. on June 23, dozens of Dozos armed with Kalashnikov assault weapons and hunting rifles and travelling on about 30 motorcycles, surrounded the Peuhl neighborhood, and proceeded to kill residents both inside their houses and as they tried to flee. After the attack, the Dozos pillaged the village, stealing jewelry, money, cellphones and food stocks.

Twenty-one civilians were killed in Koumaga on June 23, and two villagers who had left earlier in the morning to graze their livestock were later found dead outside the town. The next day, the Dozos returned and killed two more villagers, including a 13-year-old boy. Three men abducted on June 23 by the Dozos remain unaccounted for.⁸⁸

Several witnesses said they identified many of the perpetrators as residents of a few neighboring villages, notably Pertakou, two kilometers away. The witnesses provided Human Rights Watch with a list of Dozo leaders or “commanders” from their area whom they believed were responsible for the killings.

Several witnesses said they believed the Dozo attack was in retaliation for both the increasing presence of armed Islamists in Djenné *cercle* – including in a forested area not far from Koumaga – and an ambush days earlier by armed men that had killed several Dozo from the nearby village of Dorobougou.⁸⁹ Two villagers said that after the Koumaga attack, Peuhl militia and Islamists engaged the Dozo near the village, resulting in “a serious battle.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Names on file with Human Rights Watch.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses, Sévaré, July 9 and 12, 2018.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Sévaré, July 9, 2018.

A witness described the events of June 23:

I was in my house and started hearing motorcycles...then gunfire and the sound of women screaming. I hid with my family but could see from a window that the Dozos had come. I heard them yelling “Stop! Stop!” in Bambara. I saw them entering houses, one by one, and then shooting people as they ran away, and later stealing – bracelets and the jewelry that every Peuhl family has, as well as mattresses, rice, and phones. I heard one of them saying in Bambara, “Kill all the Peuhl...don’t let anyone escape.”

Only after they left - at about 4 p.m. – could I see who had survived and who hadn’t. The dead ranged in age from 65 to around 10, a boy, Housseni. I saw Alhadji Sidibe, who’d been shot in the mouth in his bed; Bori shot in the neck in his house; Hamadoun Sidbe shot in the back near the toilet; Boucari Sankare and his brother Saidu, dead in their house, and Oumarou Barrie and his two children. We buried 21 people in a common grave on Sunday morning after the army arrived; two others were not given a burial as they were killed in the bush.

I think we were attacked because the jihadists are not far away from our village – I started seeing them come and go about a year ago. But is this our fault? Do they have to punish every single Peuhl in the village? And where was the army? They were not far but didn’t come and haven’t arrested anyone even though we know who did this.⁹¹

An elderly woman described seeing her husband shot in the mouth:

During the attack, my husband, sister-in-law and I hid in the house, when suddenly three Dozos stormed in, immediately focusing on my husband who was in his bed. I recognized one from a village a few kilometers away. I begged, saying, “leave him in the name of God.” But they said, “if you intervene, we’ll kill you as well.” Then one Dozo, who had two guns, put one

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Peuhl villager, Mopti region, July 15, 2018.

of them – a long gun – into my husband’s mouth and fired. They said, “Voila, we have come to kill you, jihadists, the Peuhl.” Then they stole things, including money my husband had in his pockets.⁹²

A woman described how her 15-year-old son was gunned down while fleeing:

Suddenly people shouted, “the Dozos, they’re killing the Peuhl!” I ran to my house with my grandchildren; my boy had just come back from work and ran towards the neighbor’s house, but they shot at him as he fled...he was shot on the left side. The bullets came out on the right. I hid with my 5 and 7-year-old girls. I could hear them going from house to house. Then it was mine. They entered with force – saying “We won’t kill women but the Peuhl men we will kill them all.” Then one of them grabbed my arm and ripped off my bracelet. I begged him not to plunder my house, but they did it anyway. When they left, I fled with my girls – it was night, there was total panic...we fled in the rain to Dankoussa village.⁹³

Witnesses said the Malian army arrived after the June 23 killings, and had assisted with the burial. At about 4 p.m. the next day, after the villagers had buried the dead and the army had left, the Dozos returned. According to two witnesses, a group of some 15 heavily armed Dozos aboard eight motorcycles detained and later opened fire on eight civilians, killing an elderly man and an adolescent boy and wounding four others. A man wounded in the incident said:

On Sunday as we were mourning our dead, the Dozo returned. A few of them approached a group of us, saying, “If you’re not a jihadist, and don’t run away, you have nothing to fear.” They were armed with AK’s. We said, ‘Ok, we aren’t jihadists,’ and they left. But five minutes later, two different Dozos, who none of us recognized, told all eight of us to get up and start walking. One of us was around 80-years-old – and we said, ‘this man can’t walk!’ to which they said, “this isn’t our problem.’ We walked, at gunpoint

⁹² Human Rights Watch Interview with Peuhl woman, Mopti region, July 15, 2018.

⁹³ Human Rights Watch Interview with Peuhl woman, Mopti region, September 9, 2018.

for a few minutes, terrified. Then, near the mosque, a few of us bolted, and one of them opened fire. Then the other one ordered us to stop, quickly took up position, and opened fire from some meters away. I felt the heat of the bullet as it grazed me. Boakarie Sidibe, only 12 or 13, died on the spot -- he'd been shot in the chest --while another man died in the hospital. We never found the boy's body, the Dozo removed it before we could bury him. They didn't want the politicians who visited Koumaga the following day to see it. Bockarie's dad managed to run away and later told me, "I felt my son fall at my feet, but I just couldn't go for him."⁹⁴

Four witnesses described the September 1 attack by Dozo militia on Dankoussa village, 30 kilometers from Djenné, in which the Dozo led away 12 Peuhl men detained inside the village mosque and executed eleven of them. Another victim was shot outside the mosque. A village elder provided Human Rights Watch with a list of the dead. Villagers reported that many of the Dozo were killed later that day in an ambush by armed Peuhl men whom the witnesses from Dankoussa did not identify.⁹⁵ One witness said:

I was performing ablution with the other faithful, when suddenly dozens of Dozos on horse-drawn carts armed with AK-47s and shotguns entered the village. We rushed into the mosque; they surrounded us, started shooting, then ordered all of us out in a single line saying they were going to kill us because we supported the jihadists. One of them opened fire, killing Allaye Cisse, 73, on the spot, the bursts [from shotgun pellets] wounded my neck. Then they shot another man who shouted, "Why are you shooting at us? We are innocent." They walked about a dozen of us to the village chief, and back to the mosque where two of us were freed; they said we were old men and should go home. But they took the remaining men, including the son of the village chief, just outside the village where we later found their bodies.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with victim, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with victim, Mopti region, September 9, 2018.

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Mopti region, September 9, 2018.



Members of the Dozo, a traditional hunters' society present in Mali, Cote d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, in Abobo, near Abidjan. The Dozo in Mali have been implicated in numerous serious abuses against Peuhl civilians, particularly near Djenné in central Mali. © 2011 Luc Gnago/Reuters

Another witness described the execution of 11 of the Peuhl men and the subsequent pillage of the village:

As soon as I saw the Dozos coming I ran and from a hiding place saw the killings. The Dozos walked the men just outside the village, then ordered them to sit down. They were surrounded by so many Dozos making it impossible for them to escape. They made them sit down, side by side. Then one of the Dozos was called to do the killing. This one person killed all of them with a hunting rifle. This Dozo fired at their sides, until the pellets tore at their bodies, leaving a big whole. I saw this later when we buried them. Two of them were shot in the head but all the others on the side. Later, the Dozos looted the entire village. They entered into houses and shops and stole rice, sugar, medicine, money, jewelry, and even solar

panels. Maybe that's why they'd come on carts. After the Dozo left, it started raining and we buried our people in one common grave.⁹⁷

Around August 30, Dozo militia killed at least nine civilians in the Peuhl village of Meou, 30 kilometers north of Djenné, including a 12-year-old boy. A witness described how dozens of Dozo surrounded the village and began shooting at panicked villagers. “Four villagers fled into the river. The Dozos pursued them, shooting hails of bullets toward the water. Twelve-year-old Allaye Bah was in the water with his father but they hunted them like fish. After killing his father, Allaye’s head came up for air. They shot four times into the water. It was when his head came up for air again, that the bullet hit him.” The witness further described how the Dozos looted the village, “from me, they stole my solar panel and 100,000 CFA [US\$172] I’d hidden in my dresser.”⁹⁸

On August 7, some Dozo allegedly stopped to question a group of 12 Peuhl traders taking their animals to sell at Sofara market, 57 kilometers from Djenné. The traders were from several nearby villages and were detained as they waited to cross the Bani River, near Sofara. The Dozos allegedly killed 11 of the men several hours later. Human Rights Watch spoke with one witness to the killings and two villagers who did not witness the killings but had knowledge of the incident and buried the dead. The witness to the killings said:

I was one of several traders waiting to cross the river to go to the Sofara market when a group of Dozos started detaining Peuhl animal traders. After detaining a dozen of them, one of the Dozo made a phone call. I heard him saying, “come, come and kill these dogs.” Sometime later – at around 11 a.m. another group of Dozo arrived on motorcycles. They ordered the detained men, who had been blindfolded, to walk some distance....as they went I heard them saying, “we’re going to send you to hell, right now.” Some minutes later, they separated the men in groups of two and three, ordering them to lie down. And then they opened fire on them with their hunting rifles, at very close range.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch phone Interview with witness, Mopti region, November 5, 2018.

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Mopti region, August 30, 2018.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Sévaré, November 1, 2018.

A witness who participated in their burial said:

The men always used to go to market in Sofara, everyone knows them. At 4 p.m. the locals told me they heard gunshots. The next morning, we went to investigate and found them –some on their backs, others on the side, some were blindfolded...they had bullets in their head, chest, neck. Eleven bodies in total. The gendarmerie of Sévaré went to investigate a day later and authorized the burial. Their money and phones were stolen by the attackers.¹⁰⁰

On July 25, Dozo militiamen attacked the town of Somena, 15 kilometers north of Djenné, killing at least 17 Peuhl men, ages 30 to 70, whose bodies they threw in the village well. The leader of the Peuhl cultural association Tabutal Pulaako, Abdoul Aziz Diallo, told the media that he believed the killings were in retaliation for a landmine explosion in the area some days earlier.¹⁰¹

Human Rights Watch received a list of names and images of the dead, and spoke with two witnesses from Somena, both of whom said they identified several of the attackers as Dozo from neighboring villages.¹⁰² One said:

Around 50 Dozos invaded the town just after prayer, about 3 p.m. Panic set in as we ran for our lives, into houses, into the bush, just trying to survive. They were armed mostly with hunting rifles; I knew several from two nearby villages. We heard gunfire sometime later, and after the Dozos had fled, we saw that they had killed and threw our people – 17 of them – into the village well about

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Djenné, September 20, 2018.

¹⁰¹“Malian civilians die in ethnic clashes before presidential vote,” *Reuters*, July 28, 2018, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2018/07/28/malian-civilians-die-in-ethnic-clashes-before-presidential-vote> (accessed November 4, 2018.)

¹⁰² List of names of victims on file with Human Rights Watch.



A well in the village of Somena, 14 kilometers north of Djenné, central Mali, into which at least 17 Peuhl men were thrown after being killed by alleged Dozo militia on July 25, 2018. © 2018 Private.

100 meters from the village. There was blood everywhere; a trail of blood leading to the well. The next day we alerted the gendarmes and they sent the fire brigade to help retrieve the bodies for burial. We fled to and now live in Djenné, but every Thursday market day, we see the men who killed our people promenading around with their guns.¹⁰³

Abuses by Dogon Self-defense Groups

Witnesses from numerous villages and hamlets in Bandiagara, Bankass, Douentza, Koro and Mopti *cercles* described attacks on Peuhl villages by Dogon self-defense groups, notably Dan Na Ambassagou, that led to dozens of civilian deaths and injuries. The witness accounts below are from Bombou, Gueourou, Komboko, Arjene, Samani, Pirga, and Amba among others. The attacks were usually preceded by apparent organized efforts to undermine the economic livelihood of the Peuhl community and were accompanied by the burning and destruction of villages and hamlets.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Djenné, September 20, 2018.



Members of the Dogon militia, Dan Na Ambassagou, which was founded to defend the Dogon community from attacks by Islamist armed groups. Dan Na Ambassagou has been implicated in numerous serious abuses against Peuhl civilians. © MALIJET.

Four villagers from Gueourou, Koro *cercle*, described how Dan Na Ambassagou militia opened fire on dozens of villagers gathered in the village chief's house for a baptism on the morning of June 4, killing at least eight civilians, including a week-old boy and his grandfather. One of the witnesses lost his elderly father, while another her brother. They said Gueourou is known for its abundance of livestock, and that after the attack, the militiamen pillaged several thousand animals, as well as food stocks and jewelry.

The death toll from the Gueourou attack remains unclear: One witness saw 10 bodies in and around the town, another saw 14 bodies, while another said he participated in the burial of eight: "When we started to flee I saw them blocking the road with their motorcycles and firing. After the army came, we buried eight dead including Adama, Hamadou, Ali, Almadou, Moussa...and the child." A woman who attended the baptism said:

About 50 of us were in the baptism, mostly seated, talking, as the family prepared food. Suddenly, about 30 hunters on motorcycles came into the village, stopped in front of the gathering and from about 15 meters away,

opened fire in the direction of the chief's house, killing the grandfather, who was shot in the chest. They shot at people as they tried to run, as they were trying to flee with their livestock. In the end seven who'd been at the baptism, including the baby, were killed. Others died as they ran away. The mother was preparing food inside the house, and because the hut caught fire so quickly, she was unable to save her baby, who was burned alive. We were not armed...it was a baptism! We hadn't even had the benediction or given the baby a name.¹⁰⁴

Two witnesses said that on September 8, 14 villagers died when Dan Na Ambassagou attacked the Peuhl village of Komboko in Koro *cercle*. They said seven villagers, including elderly women and children, were burned alive in their homes.¹⁰⁵ A security analyst speculated this attack was in retaliation for a late August attack by armed Peuhl on nearby Gourty-Dogon village, during which one Dogon resident was killed.¹⁰⁶ A witness said:

The Dozos came on foot from the south side of the village which is on a hill and surrounded by fields of millet, so it is difficult to see a person coming. It started around 5:40 am as the village was waking up. Some were preparing to pray, and I was with my cows in the pen, when I saw a band of Dozos, heavily armed with rifles and Kalashnikovs. They entered firing everywhere. I gathered my family and we fled with everyone who could. But unfortunately, several older people and some children could not run, and as the fire took force, it burned them inside. It was horrible for us when we came back to see their bodies burned in the fire. We did not have a village self-defense force; we didn't expect this attack. We didn't bring the jihadists to Mali, we are not with them, but now our village has been completely burned and abandoned.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Mopti region, September 9, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with witnesses, Mopti region, October 30 and November 2, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch phone interview with security analyst, Bamako, October 30, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti region, October 30, 2018.



Peuhl villagers observe the bodies of people killed during an attack by alleged Dan Na Ambassagou militia on July 1, 2018, in Bombou, Koro cercle, in central Mali. ©2018 Private.

On July 1, at least 10 civilians died when Dogon self-defense group Dan Na Ambassagou attacked the Peuhl village of Bombou in Koro *cercle*. Three witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the victims, including eight from 61 to 94-years-old, and a 13-year-old boy, died after the village self-defense force was overwhelmed by hundreds of heavily armed Dogon militiamen. While most residents were safely evacuated during the fighting, those who were either unable or refused to leave were either executed or burned alive in their homes and in the mosque. The witnesses also alleged that at least two wounded Peuhl self-defense group members were executed by the Dogon militiamen. A witness said:

The Dogon militia came in waves –hundreds of them – armed with AKs and machine guns. Our men tried to defend our village but were overwhelmed. They took the women and children to safety, but some refused to leave...others couldn't travel. There was total panic as people fled for their lives. When we returned the next morning, I found the village completely burned with bodies of our people in the street, and inside houses and the

mosque. An elderly woman who couldn't walk had been burned inside her home.¹⁰⁸

Another witness said:

As the Dogon took over the village they started burning it street by street. When my uncle tried to flee he was shot in the foot and couldn't walk. I dragged him inside, thinking he'd be safe, and left him with three elderly men who'd fled to our house because it had concrete walls. But when I returned the next day I saw my uncle and a few of the others had been shot in the head. I saw four burned bodies in the mosque...and one by the door of the mosque, like he was trying to get in. All our valuables were gone – they'd gone house by house, to take gold, money and then burned our food stocks, clothing, houses, and took all our animals – I had 37 sheep, 3 donkeys, 12 cows. No one is in the village now.¹⁰⁹

Three witnesses from Samani village, Koro *cercle*, described the April 28 attack by some 20 Dogon militiamen who allegedly killed three civilians, burned over 100 structures, and looted hundreds of animals and other goods. One witness said:

They fired their AKs and a few machine guns randomly as they advanced through our village. The first to be hit was my 22-year-old nephew, shot in the ribs while rounding up his animals.... I ran out and dragged him into the house; it was only God who saved me from the bullets whizzing by my head. He whispered... "I'm sorry father, I can't survive this...." He only lasted 10 minutes. Then Bockarie Barrie, 66, shot just meters away. Then Boureima, 39, ... I saw him fall down as he fled. I heard the militia saying, "We will chase you, jihadists, from our zone." They fired into our huts ...and the entire village caught on fire. I yelled at my people, "We need to go now;

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

there is no one to protect us!” They stole everything – I lost sacks of millet, and rice, and 100 animals.¹¹⁰

A few days after the Samani attack, Dogon militia threatened to kill civilians from nearby Yidiji. A witness said:

This war with our Dogon in the name of jihad started three months ago --- After burning and killing in Samani it was our turn. Thirty of them fired in the air and drove through saying, “Leave or we’ll kill all the Peuhl.” We loaded up our donkey carts. Chief Momodou and his family left first but then we heard he’d been killed on the way.¹¹¹

A witness who was with the Yidiji village chief added:

As we fled our village, we were stopped by three Dogon men dressed in traditional hunter’s clothing. They demanded money. We gave them what little we had. The chief told us to continue walking, which we did reluctantly. As we continued down the path we heard the Dogon demanding more money. And then we heard the shots. He was the only one they killed from our village. The FAMA [army] helped us evacuate the body the next day.¹¹²

At least 12 Peuhl villagers from hamlets around Ouenkoro village, in Bankass *cercle*, were killed by militiamen in three attacks on November 16, 20 and 21. Two of the attacks were denounced by the mayor of Ouenkoro, Cheick Harouna Sankare, in an interview to *Agence France Press*.¹¹³ A villager from Pirga hamlet, who survived the November 21 attack during which nine villagers died, told Human Rights Watch:

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, May 27, 2018.

¹¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

¹¹³ “Une dizaine de Peuls tués en trois jours dans le centre du Mali,” Agence France Press, <https://www.voaafrrique.com/a/une-dizaine-de-peuls-tu%C3%A9s-en-trois-jours-dans-le-centre-du-mali/4669879.html>, (accessed November 27, 2018.)

At around 5 p.m. the Dozo (from Dan Na Ambassagou) came on over 20 motorcycles, entering from the west. They sprayed bullets from the moment they entered. I recognized a few from the neighboring village (name withheld). After it calmed down, we returned to bury our family members – some had been shot in the head others in the chest; we found a father and his son burned in their house.”¹¹⁴

Several witnesses described how civilians were killed as the militiamen fired reckless and randomly into a village. For example, a 70-year-old man described the May attack on Arjene village, 30 kilometers from Koro, by men they believed to be Dan Na Ambassagou, saying “I saw them firing without distinguishing who was a child or woman. I ran with my granddaughter and returned a few days later to find the village burned and four villagers dead – including one in his house, and one near his front door.”¹¹⁵ A local chief told Human Rights Watch that he knew six civilians who had been killed and eight wounded in this attack.¹¹⁶

At least two civilians died during in similar circumstances during the June 19 attack allegedly by Dan Na Ambassagou on Youro, in Koro *cercle*. A witness said:

I saw 40 motorcycles with two armed Dogon on each...they started with the Peuhl slave [Rimaïbé clan] section.¹¹⁷ The Rimaïbé women started to run toward our side of the village as the men were shooting all over. Later, I saw two women dead, where they fell – a pregnant woman killed near her house, and another about 80-years-old nearby. I also saw three militiamen surround a wounded Peuhl youth, who was defending our village. They shot him dead, point-blank.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Bankass *cercle*, November 27, 2018. List of victims on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with villager, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

¹¹⁶ Human Rights Watch Interview with local chief, Bamako, July 8, 2018.

¹¹⁷ The Rimaïbé were the slave caste in Peuhl society, and in modern times may retain some ancestral ties to Peuhl families of other castes and occupy the same villages as non- Rimaïbé Peuhl, or have their own designated region within a Peuhl village. Jean Gallais, “Signification du groupe ethnique au Mali,” *L’Homme*, vol. 2 (1962), p. 106-129.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with local chief, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

Some victims in smaller-scale attacks had, according to those with knowledge of the events, been specifically targeted by the militia. A herder, who did not witness the attack firsthand, described going to the funeral of an 18-year-old allegedly killed by Dogon militia for not heeding their “order” to abandon their hamlet, near Pique, in Koro *cercle*:

The distraught father told me that in April the Dogon had ordered the Peuhl to leave the hamlet [name withheld]....we are close to the Burkina border and they said jihadists are infiltrating this place. One day in May, the militia came to the hamlet and found the father and son making rope for their animals. They got angry and started arguing with the father over why they’d not heeded the order. At that moment, the son was coming out of the bathroom, and they just shot him to hurt his family. ¹¹⁹

In another case, in Bandiagara *cercle*, two Peuhl witnesses described the June killing of a man and his 8 and 14-year-old sons by armed Dogon men. A Dogon elder from the area said he suspected the attack was in response to a growing armed Islamist presence in their area. The killings provoked the flight of Peuhl families from the area and a rise in ethnic tension after over 150 head of cattle owned by the Dogon were stolen, allegedly by Peuhl residents fleeing the zone. A witness said:

At about 8 p.m., the father was looking for his teapot, and the mother for blankets to cover the children bedding down outside, when suddenly shots rang out and two armed men burst into the house. They went directly to the husband, and soon after shot him at close range. The wife begged, “in the name of God, leave my family.” One of the assailants beat her with a machete, and started to slit her throat, but he got distracted and she was able to get free. They caught her again, but she lived by giving up her jewelry. Two other assailants attacked the children outside, slitting the throats of the 8 and 14-year-olds, and leaving the 17-year-old for dead. We couldn’t see how they [the assailants] were dressed, but they were speaking Dogon. We had heard about the Peuhl being chased away from

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with victims, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

other villages, but never thought it would happen here. Many of the Dogon who live here tried to help us, but in the end, we all left.¹²⁰

Villagers from the Peuhl hamlets of Plogro and Doulda Haidare in Douentza *cercle* said armed Dogon from the nearby village of Douna killed at least 10 civilians, including women and children, and burned the hamlet in retaliation for the January 6 killing of a Dogon marabout. The marabout had been abducted from Douna by armed Islamists in late December 2017.

A witness said, “They came on motorcycles, on foot, and encircled our hamlet of six Peuhl families. They screamed at us to leave and opened fire. We took off running...when we came back, we saw many dead.”¹²¹ Another witness said, “I was making tea. I heard the cries of children and women saying, ‘We are finished!’ I put on shoes, gathered my wife and two children and started to run. They killed those who couldn’t run or didn’t think they had to run, because they have nothing to do with Jihadism. We can’t prevent them from passing through our village to attack the Dogon, but we have never plotted against our neighbors.”¹²²

A local human rights investigator said she documented several killings of Peuhl civilians after they had been stopped at improvised checkpoints manned by members of Dan Na Ambassagou.¹²³ A Dogon tourist guide said, “I’ve seen the militias taking Peuhl off of buses, several times. We drive off and God knows what happens to them. I fear for them because in town, I hear the militia saying they have eliminated people at checkpoints. This isn’t normal.”¹²⁴ A village chief from Koro provided Human Rights Watch with a second-hand account of one such killing:

The driver, a close friend of mine, told me how he was stopped by Dan Na Ambassagou near Dioungani. He said they asked all the Peuhl to get off and

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, name of village withheld, September 20, 2018.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Tigoula, February 2, 2018.

¹²² Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Mopti region, October 20, 2018.

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interviewed with local human rights investigator, Mopti, July 12, 2018.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch email with Dogon tourist guide, Bandiagara, June 3, 2018.

later let the women and children back on. But they kept two men. The driver wanted to wait, but the militia yelled, “Move, now or we’ll shoot your tires.” As the driver turned around, he saw the two men shot dead. He was really upset when he talked about it.¹²⁵

Some Malian human rights groups characterized the increasingly frequent attacks against the Peuhl, as described above, as a form of collective punishment.¹²⁶¹²⁷ Peuhl leaders believed they were being blamed, as one human rights defender said, “for opening the door to insecurity and armed Islamist expansion into central Mali.”¹²⁸

Bambara and Dogon Response to Allegations of Abuses

Human Rights Watch interviewed 10 leaders and other members of Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups. Those interviewed included five men from the Dogon Dan Na Ambassagou, two Dogon men from village self-defense groups, and two men from Bambara self-defense groups.

Bambara and Dogon leaders denied having committed any abuses against civilians and insisted all of those killed in the course of their operations were members of Peuhl armed groups. They said their respect of civilians is grounded in the hunting societies’ sacred rules and honor code.

One high-level Dan Na Ambassagou leader said, “We as hunters have internal rules, sacred rules...we don’t behave like jihadists or criminals, our position is clear: we do not attack, we only defend.” Said another member: “It is strictly forbidden to ever attack women and children; our internal code forbids it.”

¹²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with village chief, Bamako, May 27, 2018.

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with human rights groups, Bamako, July 8, 2018 and Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

¹²⁷ Collective punishment is a term used in international law to describe any form of punitive sanction that is imposed on individuals or groups for actions that they did not personally commit. Under international humanitarian law, imposing collective punishment is a war crime.

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Malian human rights activist, July 14, 2018.

A Dozo leader said: “Dozo leaders are grounded in mysticism and honor and are expected to be the village guardians of morality, truth, integrity and respectful conduct. We do not harm women and children.”¹²⁹

Several Dan Na Ambassagou and Bambara leaders acknowledged having taken part in a number of the attacks on Peuhl villages documented in this report. However, they insisted all of those killed were armed Islamists: “Sure, we have at times attacked their hamlets and burned their village, but never unprovoked. We never kill anyone unarmed and did not and will never kill women or children.”¹³⁰

Three high-level Dan Na Ambassagou leaders nonetheless appeared to justify killing civilians during their operations. A political leader said: “When someone kills or has the intention to kill your family – your heart is going to be burning – you will have no control. The jihadists have killed entire families, burned villages.... What do you expect?”¹³¹

The leaders also made concerning remarks about the treatment of prisoners. They complained that several alleged members of Islamist armed groups who were handed over to the Malian security services were later released by the courts. Dan Na Ambassagou leaders interviewed by Human Rights Watch appeared to justify the killing of people they had detained during their operations.¹³² Said a high-level commander: “We used to give the assailants to FAMA but we started noticing that some – who’d burned our villages and killed our people – were let go. As a result, we no longer keep prisoners. They are eliminated.”¹³³

A Dozo commander noted, “Our hunters arrested two suspicious youth. We called the gendarmes, but two days later, they’d been freed. The gendarmes tell us, ‘Do not kill the

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dozo traditional leader, Bamako, February 18, 2017.

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon militia leader, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with political leaders, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

¹³² Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon militia leaders, Sévaré, Bamako, July 15, 2018

¹³³ Ibid.

Peuhl...give suspects to us!' But honestly, if they keep letting the jihadists, the bad people go – then, we are obliged to act.”¹³⁴

Three high-level representatives and two militiamen accused the armed Islamists of using Peuhl villagers as human shields as they fired at the Dogon militias. One Dogon leader said, “If the Peuhl jihadists are willing to use their own people as shields, to fire at us from their huts that have no walls, it’s not our responsibility if civilians are killed.”¹³⁵ Another said, “They fire at us from inside flimsy huts and use their wives and children as human shields. If they die in the process, is it our fault?”¹³⁶

Said another, “Women and children are not targeted, but if you allow jihadists to stay in your villages, that’s what happens. Instead of blaming us for killing Peuhl civilians, they should tell us where the jihadists are hiding.”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Dozo leader, Mopti region, July 10, 2017.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon political leader, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch Interview with representatives and two militiamen, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

¹³⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon militia leader, Bamako, July 14, 2018.

Abuses Against Dogon and Bambara Civilians

When did we start hating each other? We used to be brothers. Please do something before more blood is shed.

–Dogon village chief, July 2018

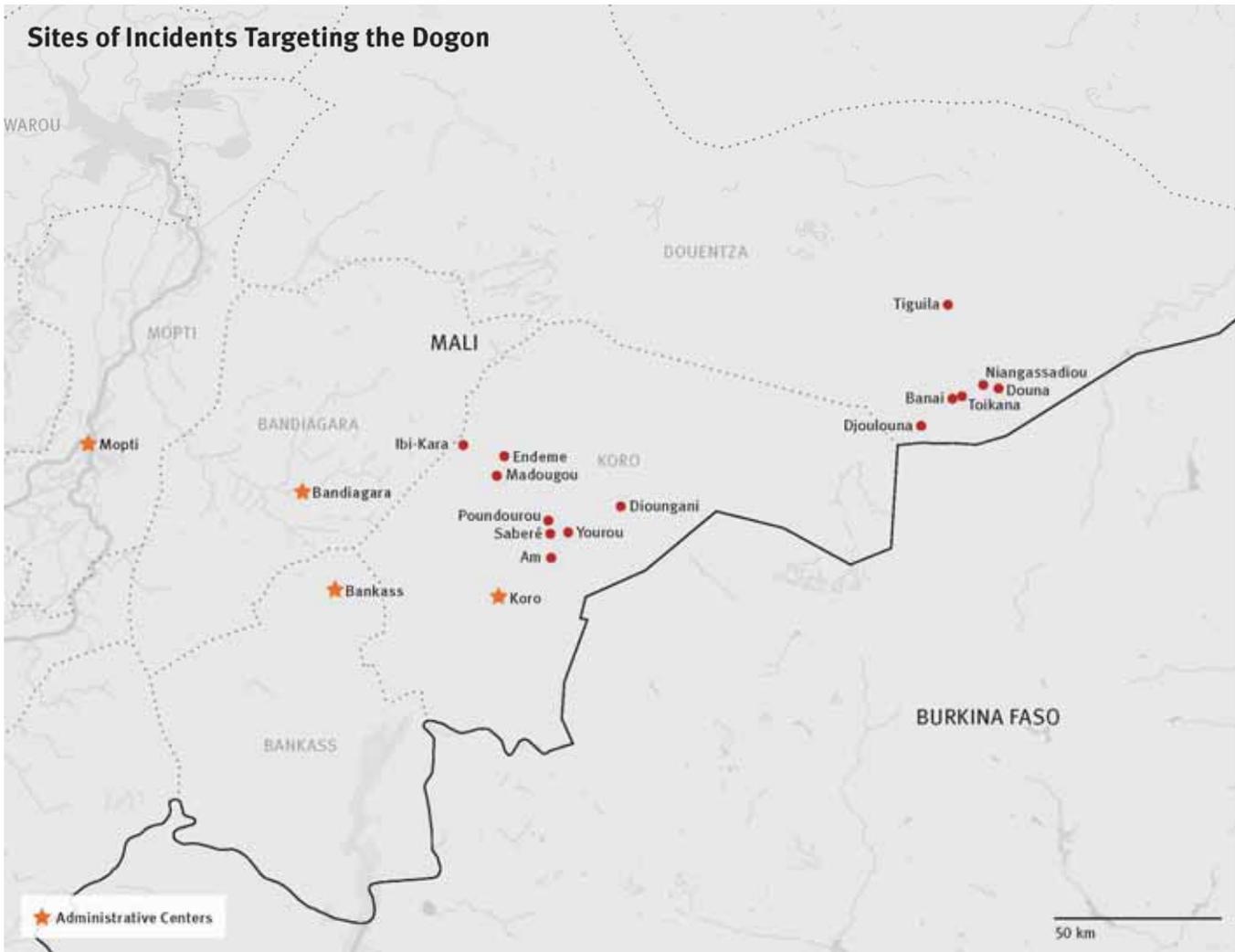
Human Rights Watch documented 16 attacks in 2018 by armed Peuhl men that killed 46 Dogon civilians, the majority within Koro or Douentza *cercles*. The assailants also destroyed and looted villages and stole livestock. Killings included the execution of a marabout, and the killing of villagers as they were collecting wood, tending the fields and bringing food aid to their villages. Several Dogon villagers were burned alive when armed Peuhl men set alight their villages during attacks, and about 10 Dogon civilians were killed by improvised explosive devices.

Witnesses interviewed alleged that the perpetrators were members of Islamist armed groups operating in coordination with Peuhl village self-defense members, including those from the Alliance for the Salvation of the Sahel, (ASS). Several of the killings documented below spurred deadly retaliatory attacks against neighboring Peuhl communities described previously.

One Dogon leader said several village leaders had been killed by armed Islamists since 2016, including mayors, village chiefs and communal counselors. “It was always the same M.O. (modus operandi): assassination-style killings by armed Peuhl men on motorcycles,” he said.

Dogon leaders provided Human Rights Watch with lists of a total of 41 Dogon hamlets and villages which had been abandoned by their residents due to the violence.¹³⁸ A Dogon community leader told Human Rights Watch his group had documented the killing by armed Peuhl men of 35 civilians in Koro *cercle* in 2018, 74 civilians between 2012 and 2018 in Douentza *cercle*, and several others in Bankass and Bandiagara *cercles*. A member of a

¹³⁸ Lists on record with Human Rights Watch.



Dogon humanitarian organization provided a list of 27 Dogon people killed during armed attacks since 2015, but which included several who were members of Dogon self-defense groups.¹³⁹

Villagers and Dogon community leaders said armed Islamists had transited through their villages since the 2012-2013 occupation of northern Mali by Tuareg separatists and Islamist armed groups, but only started to commit abuses against the Dogon from around 2015. They cited the July 2015 killing of six Dogon villagers near Niangassadiou, village 15

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch email exchange with Dogon community leader, November 30, 2018 and December 2, 2018.

kilometers from the Burkina Faso border, an incident previously documented by Human Rights Watch,¹⁴⁰ as a turning point in their community relationship with the Peuhl.

Many said the abuses and increase in banditry by Peuhl armed groups since 2015 had provoked a “total rupture” of community relationships with “our Peuhl” and led to a worsening cycle of violence. They said the presence of Islamists from Burkina Faso and Niger, who had little incentive to maintain good community relations, had contributed to the abuses. “We were used to them - in groups of six or eight – praying in our mosques, but now they’re killing us,” a Dogon elder said. “We think the moderate jihadists have lost control. Many of their boys aren’t even from Mali.”¹⁴¹

A Dogon youth leader said:

Jihadists have been among us since 2012 –but back then they had a benevolent presence. They tried to recruit us, but we said, “No, we’re good. We’re already Muslim.” But from 2015, some of our Peuhl started to join. The Islamists became more aggressive, more criminal. They’ve threatened Dogon imams to change their ways; to stop celebrating marriages, baptisms, to stop smoking, to reject the state and anything coming from whites, and then they started to kill us.¹⁴²

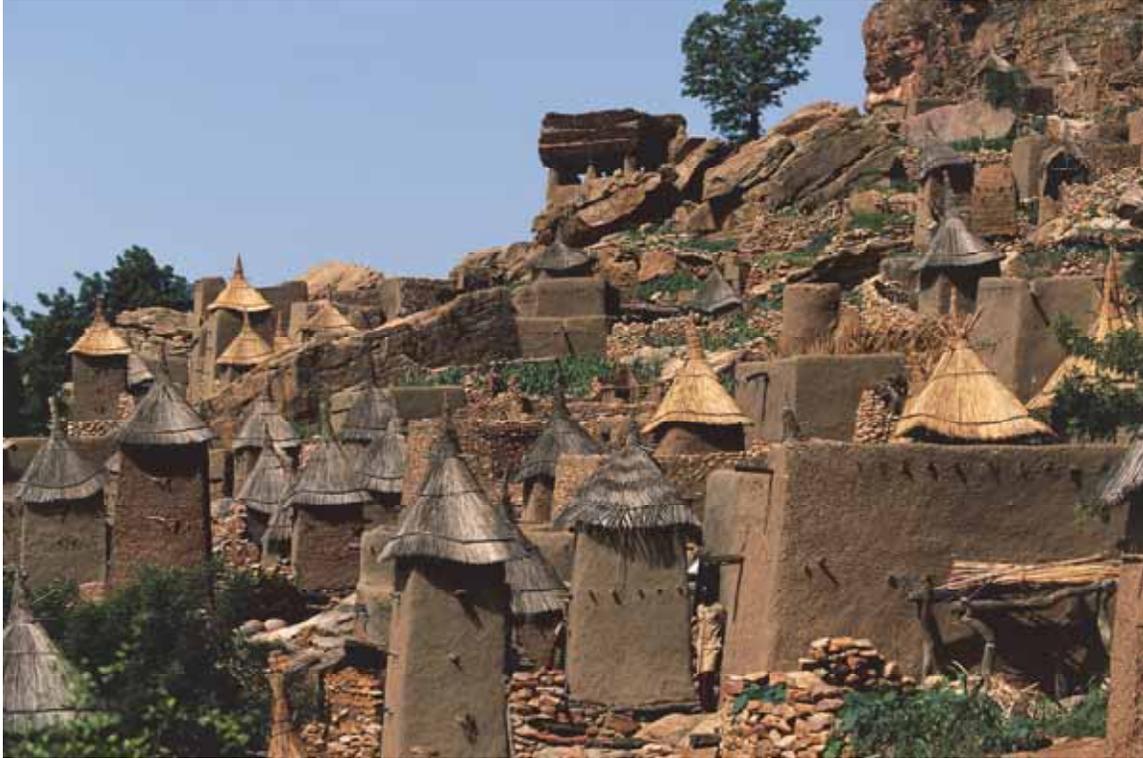
The UN documented attacks against Dogon and Bambara communities by “JNIM and Fulani (Peuhl) militias.” The July 17, 2018 communique from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights noted that, “Between 7 and 10 July alone, MINUSMA documented five attacks on civilians from these communities in the Djenné and Koro areas, resulting in at least seven deaths. In most cases, the victims were killed while out farming.”¹⁴³ The September 25, 2018, UN Secretary General report on the situation in Mali, noted a July 8,

¹⁴⁰ “Mali: Abuses Spread South: Islamist Armed Groups’ Atrocities, Army Responses generate Fear,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 19, 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/19/mali-abuses-spread-south>.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder, Mopti, July 13, 2018.

¹⁴² Human Rights Watch Interview with student, Sévaré, February 15, 2018.

¹⁴³ “Press briefing notes on Nicaragua, Mali and Kashmir,” July 17, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23383&LangID=E> (accessed October 9, 2018).



Ireli, Dogon village in Bandiagara Cercle. During 2018, over 200 civilians have been killed and numerous villages destroyed in communal violence between the Peuhl and Dogon ethnic groups in Mopti region.

© 2014 DeAgostini/Getty Images.

2018, attack by the ASS on Dioungani village in Koro circle, which left four Dogon civilians dead.¹⁴⁴

Killings in Douna, Saberé and Other Villages

A few incidents in which Dogon civilians were killed sparked heavy-handed retaliation by Dogon militia against the Peuhl community, and also a deadly cycle of tit-for-tat killings of civilians by armed men representing both communities that, in some cases, lasted for months. The January 2018 killing of a marabout from Douna village, Douentza *cercle* and the March 2018 attack on Sebaré, in Koro *cercle* were two such incidents.

¹⁴⁴ Situation in Mali, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2018/866, September 25, 2018; <https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/n1829038.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2018).

Four witnesses from Douna village described events surrounding the execution-style killing in early January 2018 of Moussa Onguiba, a 23-year-old marabout who had been abducted by armed Islamists in late December 2017. A witness said:

The jihadists came around sundown. Some remained outside the village and others entered...their faces were covered with turbans and they had big guns and belts of bullets across their chests and in vests. They headed to the marabout's house – young Moussa was the son of a well-respected marabout. They fired in the air, and told Moussa, “We need you, and ordered him on the motorcycle.” His family and wife started crying. We all thought they were only going to lecture him about his use of [animist] talismans...We thought they'd bring him back.¹⁴⁵

Another witness added: “About a week later, women looking for wood some kilometers from the village found his body near a baobab tree. The elders brought his body. I went to his burial. His hands had been bound and he'd been shot in the head.”¹⁴⁶

During the late December 2017 abduction, Dogon villagers detained, questioned and then killed two armed Islamists who had become separated from the others. Said one Dogon man,

After taking off their turbans, we recognized them as our Peuhl from the nearby hamlet of Plogro with whom we've eaten, slept and lived for generations. They were interrogated to find out whom they worked with and where they were based -- then they were dealt with. Later, we flushed the Peuhl from their hamlet, so they couldn't attack us again.¹⁴⁷

In March 2018, at least 12 Dogon civilians, including several women and children, died in two attacks the Dogon blamed on armed Peuhl men affiliated with Islamist armed groups around Saberé village, Koro *cercle*. Both Dogon and Peuhl leaders cited the incidents as

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Bamako, February 15, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, July 6, 2018.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Bamako, July 6, 2018.

having greatly contributed to the cascade of attacks throughout 2018. During the attacks, the village was burned, looted and livestock pillaged. Human Rights Watch spoke with two witnesses to the attacks, including, one who lost his wife and child. At least four civilians were reportedly killed during the first attack, on March 8.

A witness said:

The attack was at night and all those who could escape did. They burned the granaries, stole all the cows, camels, goats. I saw the burned bodies of several people. In one house a woman and a child of about 5 years – they’d gone in the house to save their lives and couldn’t get out again. In another

house, we found two other bodies. For us, all of our Peuhl neighbors have transformed into jihadists. Our problems with the Peuhl started from Saberè.¹⁴⁸

Three villagers told Human Rights Watch that during the second attack on March 18, armed Peuhl returned to attack Saberé and three neighboring villages, Yourou, Am, and Poundourou. They said eight civilians were reported killed during these attacks including a few who perished in their houses and two elderly men in Saberé who were shot trying to flee the fighting. “They came with force this time,” a witness said. “Over 50 motorcycles and two pickups full of men and arms, to burn what they hadn’t burned during the first attack,”¹⁴⁹

In early February, armed Islamists allegedly fired on villagers from Niangassadiou, Douentza *cercle* as they were foraging for grass for their animals, killing five including three children aged 12 to 15. Human Rights Watch spoke with two witnesses, including one who was wounded in the incident. A witness said:

The jihadists attacked us whenever we went in the bush. But our animals desperately needed something to eat, so we set off - a big group of 100 of

¹⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch phone Interview with witness, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

us - to look for grass. At around 9 a.m., we came to a place with grass, and started to cut it. Suddenly, we heard commotion, and I saw a group of armed men with rifles and dressed in combination military clothing and *boubous* [long, loose-fitting garment] - I heard them say, “Who are you?” in Pulaar [Peuhl language]. Our people were surrounded, north, west, south and east. Our kids took off running and it was then the men opened fire - killing five...the children were from the same extended family. A few of us had traditional rifles but we did not fire first – we had so many children with us! I saw the deadone shot in the chest, one in the head, one had a bullet near his eye. Later, the armed people burned many donkey carts.¹⁵⁰

In June, armed Peuhl men believed to be Islamists abducted and two days later killed a farmer living in a hamlet near Toikana, Douentza *cercle*. The killing was retaliatory: two family members of the victim said the killing occurred just days after an armed confrontation between the Dogon and Peuhl and preceded a retaliatory killing of a Peuhl farmer by a Dogon man. A witness said:

About 5 a.m. after morning prayer, four armed men on motorcycles came. We don't have doors, so they easily gained entry. They said, “Come, we need you, we're taking you away.” He begged, “Please don't kill me in my house.” The wife begged, saying he had been good to everyone. They told her to shut her mouth. This happened just after a battle between the Peuhl and Dogon in Gassel. We recognized the voices of a few of the assailants. We know them well: they are the Peuhl who've joined up with the jihadists who did this.¹⁵¹

A Dogon teacher described the killing in November 2017 of 70-year-old farmer, Ousman Onguiba, in a village near the Burkina Faso border:

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch phone Interview with witness, Bamako, February 15, 2018.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Sévaré, July 11, 2018.

I don't know why he was targeted. We know him as a simple man who made his living making cords and rope. They came on three motorcycles at 6 p.m., ordered him to "Lie down. Lie down now. One shot at him and the other in the air – wounding a few village youths. Then they sped off."¹⁵²

On May 17, Kadiry Onguiba, a 34-year-old Dogon farmer, went missing while looking for wood a few kilometers from Tiguila, a village surrounded by Peuhl hamlets in Douentza *cercle*. The next day, the villagers organized a search party of about 20 men, two of whom were killed when the group stumbled into an apparent Islamist armed camp. Kadiry Onguiba remains missing. A witness said:

As we got deeper into the bush, we left most of the group, a few of whom had hunting rifles, and delegated a small group of elders to advance, hoping to plead for Kadiry's freedom. A big group of heavily armed jihadists emerged from the bush - it was clear it was a rebel camp. They pointed their arms at us, forced us to sit. They said the Dogon had no right to be there and that we were all going to die. Fifteen minutes later, we started hearing the sound of gunfire – they had detected the group that we'd left behind – and in that moment, they opened fire, killing two of us. We never found Kadiry but saw his cart...it is certain he'd fallen into the same jihadist camp, just as we did, and was killed."¹⁵³

In May, armed Islamists attacked, burned and looted the hamlet of Ibi-Kara, in Koro *cercle*. A witness said:

In the late afternoon, a big group came on motorcycles, firing in the air with heavy weapons – we don't have those kinds of guns...We ran for our lives. Thank God no one died, but they stole nine motorcycles, carts, donkeys, 46 cows, and 370 sheep and goats – everything they could get their hands on. I was running, but I saw them setting the village on fire with petrol. All the

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Sévaré, February 15, 2018.

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Sévaré, July 11, 2018.

houses, the granaries, the shops were burned. We know them...they were from the nearby village. They're bandits but trained by the jihadists.¹⁵⁴

Three witnesses said a convoy of villagers returning with food stocks and donated food to relieve a severe hunger crisis in their village of Tiguila was ambushed on August 14, 2018 by armed Islamists. Six villagers were killed. They said the convoy was being escorted by several members of the village self-defense group. A villager wounded in the incident said:

On August 13, we went from Tiguila to Niangassadiou due to the lack of food stocks in our village. The famine has led to deaths and an outbreak of illness. We'd been informed of a food distribution by NGOs and the government taking place in Niangassadiou the next day, which was market day. Everything started at 1:45 p.m. on our way back home, about two kilometers from Tiguila, when the motorized tricycle carts carrying our goods were ambushed by the jihadists with heavy military weapons, hunting rifles and even some with machetes. The defenders with us responded and there was a big fight. In the end, they stole all the donated goods, plus everything else we'd bought – sugar, oil, petrol for our motorcycles, everything. They killed six people and wounded eight...we weren't going to a war, we were bringing food back to our village.¹⁵⁵

On October 5, at least four Dogon villagers were killed and five more wounded when their convoy of donkey carts was fired upon by armed Peuhl men affiliated with Islamist armed groups as they returned from Djoulouna, Douentza *cercle*. Among the dead were at least two sick children who had gone for medical care. The convoy was being escorted by several local village self-defense members, who rode on motorcycles behind the convoy. Human Rights watch spoke with three witnesses including a family member of a 2-year-old child who was wounded in the stomach. One witness said, "We'd gone from Banai and Toikana for supplies and medical care. At around 3 p.m., on our way back, we were fired upon by the assailants as we passed through a forested area...two children of about 13

¹⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Koro, October 4, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Human rights Watch interview with victim, Sévaré, September 21, 2018.

died...these children were sick, two were murdered and the 2-year-old was shot in his stomach.”¹⁵⁶

Local residents said two Dogon traders, Ali Aldo Niangaly, 53-years-old and Allaye Diadio Tolo, 36-years old, from Endeme village were killed and a third, a woman, wounded, when they were ambushed by armed Peuhl men on their way home from a local market in Madougou, Koro *cercle* on November 19, 2018.¹⁵⁷ A Dogon community leader said four other civilians were killed in Koro *cercle* in a similar ambush on their motorized tricycles on November 10, 2018.¹⁵⁸

Several villagers described incidents in which seven local farmers and traders were killed by people they believed were armed Islamists. The villagers had not witnessed the killings but believed the perpetrators were Islamists because the victims had not been robbed, suggesting another motive; the killings had taken place in the context of periods of high communal tensions between Dogon and armed Islamists; in some cases other villagers had seen the victims detained by men they believed to be armed Islamists; and in one case, the Islamists had admitted the killing was an act of indiscipline by one of their fighters.

One man described the events surrounding the mid-May 2018 killing in Douentza of his 60-year-old father:

My dad went in search of his brother who was late in returning to the village with his camels. Some hours later, some women on their way back from market told me, “I just saw jihadists trying to force your father onto their motorcycle.” They said they recognized the jihadists by how they dressed. Later, we found his body a few kilometers from the village. He had a gunshot wound to his hand like he was praying to live, and another in his neck. His eyes had been blindfolded with his turban. They hadn’t stolen anything. He wasn’t armed. Why was he targeted?¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with villager, Sévaré, October 10, 2018.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon community members, Mopti region and Bamako, November 28, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch email exchange with Dogon community leader, December 2, 2018.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

Dogon Civilians Killed by IEDs

Dogon community leaders from Douentza *cercle* said about 10 Dogon villagers had been killed by improvised explosive devices (IED) that they believed had been deliberately planted by armed Islamists to drive them from their communities. Human Rights Watch spoke with people who had recovered the bodies of eight of these villagers killed in four separate incidents involving IED explosions.

Dogon villagers cited the rarity of government security services on the roads and the timing of the attacks - on or near market days – to support their claim that armed Islamists were responsible. “The army is rarely if ever on these roads!” a civil society leader said. “The villages are out of the way and they don’t patrol from their base in Mondoro.”¹⁶⁰

A Dogon elder said, “No question, these mines are designed to punish us. The FAMA hardly if ever use this route. The explosions happened on roads heavily travelled by us as we go back and forth to market, on roads that connect our villages. The Peuhl are not dying by mines or hunger – we are. What conclusion are we to reach?”¹⁶¹

As discussed below, the IEDs have severely undermined commerce and contributed to the food crisis in Douentza *cercle*. Dogon leaders complained that the IED attacks had made villagers extremely fearful of going to local markets.

A marabout who helped evacuate the dead and wounded from two IED explosions in June 2018 said:

It was a terrible scene. The [motorized] tricycle left Banai to deposit petrol in Niangassadiou and was on its way back. The driver...everything below the chest was mangled. The head of the man who’d been seated next to the driver was destroyed. The third lost his left arm. And just a few weeks later, not far from the first, another mine hit a cart bringing millet to the village killed two more villagers.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch phone interview with Dogon civil society leader, Bamako, September 29, 2018

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with marabout, Mopti, July 10, 2018.



A cart that was destroyed in an attack by alleged armed Islamists on Dogon traders returning from the market in Djoulouna, Douentza cercle, central Mali on September 21, 2018. © 2018 Private.

A villager from Banai said he saw the mangled remains of a mule cart that hit a mine on August 2 near his village, killing one trader. A villager from Dioulouna said two men had been killed on September 21 by an IED near his village, once again, in Douentza *cercle*: “Every Friday, as everyone knows, is Djoulouna’s weekly market. On September 21, at around 10 a.m. we heard an explosion between Banai and Djoulouna. ...We went to see what happened, and there I saw two

young men, mangled and dead. The motorcycle had hit a mine.”¹⁶³

Attacks Against Bambara Civilians in Djenné *Cercle*

Since early 2018 Human Rights Watch has documented several attacks by alleged Islamist armed groups against Bambara and other civilians in the Mopti region. However, as discussed in the background section above, most of these attacks targeted alleged government collaborators from all ethnic groups and thus appeared unrelated to underlying communal tensions.

During 2018, there appeared to be few Bambara civilians killed within the context of communal violence or in retaliatory killings. However, several Bambara men were killed as they tended the fields in the days or weeks after the Dozo attacks on Peuhl civilians. Over 10 civilians, including Bambaras, were killed in at least five IED explosions in Djenné *cercle*, including in July, when an IED killed civilians and destroyed two mule carts between Dorobougou and Sofara.

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness, Djoulouna, September 21, 2018.

Civilians Missing After Communal Violence

When the shooting started the children ran, quick, into the forest. After the attackers fled, they came out from hiding and returned home. But some of them, including my first-born son, never came back.

- Peuhl villager from Koro *cercle*, July 2018.

Family members and village elders from five villages provided Human Rights Watch with lists totaling 51 people who had gone missing as they fled attacks or were detained by Dogon or Bambara militia in other circumstances. The vast majority were Peuhl, including numerous children.

The missing included nine children not seen since the July 1 attack blamed on Dogon militia in Bombou; 10 men detained by Bambara militia around Koumaga; 14 people, including at least four children, who went missing after the attack on Gueuerou, and 13 villagers who went missing around Tagari village, in Koro *cercle*. Two Dogon men are among the missing, including one from Tiguila who did not return home after collecting wood near his village and is feared to have been executed by armed Islamists.

Village elders from Koumaga village said three men detained during the June 23 attack by Dozos remain unaccounted for. Seven men from nearby Dodala village, 10 kilometers from Koumaga, detained on June 24 by a large group of Dozos, also remain unaccounted for. Two villagers provided Human Rights Watch a list of the missing men, whom they had looked for in detention centers run by the gendarmes, police and army. They said the men ranged in age from 40 to 80 years old. Said a Peuhl villager:

At around 9 a.m., dozens of Dozo riding two by two on motorcycles stormed the Peuhl part of the village. They stayed for 30 minutes, going from house to house. I recognized several Dozo from the Bambara side of the village; others wore masks. They arrested four from our family but let one go – a businessman – after they robbed him. To the others they screamed, “Get on the motorcycles!” and took seven men away. I heard one say, “Hamdalai, for every one of you [Peuhl] dead, there is one less jihadist.” Seeing, this, the rest of us fled...We learned they returned the next day to steal our

animals, rice, even the doors off our houses. We've looked for the men everywhere without success.¹⁶⁴

Two villagers from Bombou said nine children between 7 and 14 years went missing on July 1 when Dogon militia attacked their village. The father of a 7-year-old boy said, "The children had set off with the animals as the burning [of the village] started. Since that day I've not seen my son."¹⁶⁵

Fourteen villagers, including a man in his 70's and at least four children, went missing after the early June 2018 attack by Dan Na Ambassagou on Gueuerou village, Koro *cercle*. A villager provided Human Rights Watch with a list of the missing. A man whose 16-year-old son was among the missing said:

During the attack on the day of the baptism, we all ran for our lives, and after things calmed, we couldn't find 14 of our people, including my boy. We called the army who finally came two days later. They took a group of us in a convoy of four army trucks to search for them. We drove to all the surrounding villages including 10 Dogon villages; as we drove up, they hid and all we saw were the carcasses of the cows they had slaughtered hanging to dry. There was no one to ask, only the cows hanging. We went from village to village the first day, and again the next day, but have yet to find a trace of them.¹⁶⁶

Seventeen villagers including several adolescents, left their place near Birga (Tialogol-Belco), Koro *cercle*, with their livestock on or around July 4. "There was no food, little water and it was tense, so they decided to move to a calmer place where their cattle could graze. They called us along the way for the first few days, but then stopped answering their phones," a family member said.¹⁶⁷ After being detained by a Dogon self-defense group from Toroli and Tensagou villages, four people, including children, managed to escape

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with village elders, Bamako, July 14, 2018.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness Sévaré, July 12, 2018, and phone interview September 16, 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch phone interview with witness from Gueuerou village, Mopti region, November 20, 2018.

¹⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

while the other 13 remain unaccounted for. One of the three who escaped told Human Rights Watch:

The 17 of us left the village travelling with 40 cows, 177 goats and sheep, and 11 donkeys, travelling at night because of all the attacks. None of us was armed. We got lost along the way – and when hiding, fell upon Dogon in their fields, who called their militia. Six armed men came, calling us dogs and hitting us. They took our animals, and as they tied up the adults, I jumped up over a fence and managed to escape. I spent a week in the bush looking for my village, drinking water, not eating. A few of us managed to escape but we've not seen the others.¹⁶⁸

Two village elders said they believed the 13 were killed and later thrown in a well discovered in early July near Tagari village, Koro *cercle*.¹⁶⁹ One of them explained:

When they stopped answering their phones we asked the FAMA to help us find them. There are Dan Na Ambassagou all over and it was too risky for us to go alone. The FAMA drove the villagers around for several hours looking for traces of the missing. We went to Baye, Kologo, Ekanga, Tensagou, in each asking, “Have you've seen a group of Peuhl with their animals?” On the way back, the soldiers saw vultures overhead near Tagari, and turned around to investigate. We used our turbans to cover our mouths as there was a horrible smell coming from the well...there were turbans and shoes scattered about, and blood near the well. I fear that is where our family members are.¹⁷⁰

The case of the villagers believed killed and thrown in a well in Tagari was referenced in the September 25, 2018 report on the situation in Mali from the UN Secretary General.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch phone Interview with witness, Koro *cercle*, July 12, 2018.

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with village elders, July 12, 2018 and phone interview with Koro *cercle*, October 29, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl elder, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

¹⁷¹ Situation in Mali, Report of the Secretary-General, September 25, 2018; p.8. <https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/n1829038.pdf>; (accessed November 5, 2018).

Three Peuhl men who were detained by Dozo in early 2018 from the largely Bambara village of Gagna, 10 kilometers from Djenné, remain unaccounted for. A family member told Human Rights Watch he had received credible information that the men had eventually been turned over to and remained, at time of writing, in the custody of the national intelligence agency. They had not been given access to their family or a lawyer.

Communal Violence, Displacement and Hunger in Mopti Region

We have nothing, we are sick, our children are hungry, we have no animals, and no land. It's like they put us in a well and took the rope away.

– Peuhl village chief from Koro *cercle*, July 2018.

We can't go a kilometer from our farms without being attacked. Our animals have been stolen, we're cut off from markets, commerce is paralyzed, the roads are mined. Our food stocks are finished. People are dying of hunger in the villages – five just this week.

– Dogon village chief from Douentza *cercle*, July 2018.

The United Nations reported that over 10,000 people in the Mopti region have been forced to flee their homes in 2018 as a result of communal violence.¹⁷² The office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) said that the violence had led to “widespread displacement of a civilian population already vulnerable due to a lack of protection and basic social services provided by the State.”¹⁷³

The vast majority of those displaced in the Mopti region were from Koro and Douentza *cercles*, near the Burkina Faso border, and from Djenné *cercle*. Many of their villages had been burned either during an attack or after the inhabitants had fled.

The chief of Briga-Peuhl village said attacks by Dogon self-defense groups had forced over 3,000 Peuhl civilians from a dozen villages to seek refuge in his village. He said they feared leaving the village to farm or seek food.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² UN OCHA reported that the number of internally displaced people in Mopti increased from 2,000 in April to 12,000 in July. <https://www.unocha.org/story/mali-food-security-protection-and-peace-what-people-need-most-deputy-humanitarian-chief>

¹⁷³ “Press briefing notes on Nicaragua, Mali and Kashmir,” July 17, 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23383&LangID=E> (accessed October 9, 2018).

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Chief of Birgha-Peuhl village, July 7, 2018, Bamako.

In August, an aid group working in Mopti region, sent Human Right Watch a list of 41 Dogon hamlets whose inhabitants had been “driven from their homes without having the chance to pack up anything.”¹⁷⁵ Residents of several Dogon villages in Koro and Douentza *cercles*, particularly in areas bordering Burkina Faso, described being forced to flee, at times after being directly threatened by Peuhl armed groups.

Three local government officials sent Human Rights Watch lists of a total of 23 Peuhl villages and numerous hamlets whose residents had fled their homes after being threatened by Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups.¹⁷⁶ These included seven Peuhl villages that had been completely destroyed by Dan Na Ambassagou in Koro *cercle*; 11 villages and hamlets whose residents had been driven from their homes by Dogon a self-defense group in Douentza *cercle*,¹⁷⁷ and five hamlets whose residents had been driven from their homes by Bambara militia in Djenné *cercle*.¹⁷⁸

Human Rights Watch interviewed numerous villagers living in improvised and squalid camps in Bamako, Sofara, Sévaré and Bandiagara. “We have nothing, no land to cultivate, our cows have been stolen, we’re surviving by sending our children to beg,” a displaced Peuhl villager from near Koporo-Pen village who had fled to Sévaré said.¹⁷⁹

Self-Defense Groups Undermine Livelihoods

Dozens of Peuhl, Dogon and, to a much lesser extent, Bambara people from over 40 villages and hamlets described what appeared to be organized efforts by the opposing community and its self-defense group to undermine their livelihoods and ultimately drive them from their villages.

Numerous Peuhl villagers said they were banned from selling or buying at markets by Dogon and Bambara self-defense groups, something they referred to as “the embargo.” Many Peuhl and Dogon chiefs described their populations being cut off and forced to

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch email exchange with aid worker in Mopti region, August 2, 2018; list of displaced hamlets and villages from communes of Dioungani, Madougou, Sangha and Bondo on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁷⁶ List of displaced hamlets and villages on file with Human Rights Watch.

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with local government officials, Bamako, July 6, 2018.

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with local government officials, Sévaré, July 9, 2018.

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with displaced witness, Sévaré, July 14, 2018.

endure what they described as “a blockade” by opposing self-defense groups, which they said threatened or attacked people who were grazing their animals or working their fields. Several Dogon chiefs said entire villages had been “forbidden” from planting their crops at all. While the dynamics differed slightly from community to community, the result has been the same: profound economic hardship and hunger.

“Embargo” on Peuhl Villagers

Peuhl villagers and chiefs said the pressure to leave their villages began around February 2018 and followed the killing, allegedly by Islamsit armed groups, of Dogon civilians and self-defense group members. All described a sequencing that began with “the embargo,” and was followed by direct threats and ultimately attacks on and often burning of their villages.

The wife of a village chief from Koro *cercle* said, “it wasn’t like they pointed their guns and said ‘leave.’ Rather, when at market the Dogon would say, ‘You the Peuhl are nourishing the presence of jihadists in our villages and you need to go.’”¹⁸⁰

Dogon self-defense group members were more direct, as described by a market woman from another village in Koro *cercle*: “When the militiaman saw me at market, he confronted me saying, ‘We’ve forbidden your husbands at market so why are you here? You’re just buying and selling so you can feed them and the jihadists. Get out now!’”¹⁸¹

In other cases, the “embargo” order was communicated by the local chief. “The village chief, a Dogon, came to us saying, ‘do not enter the market or the Dozo will kill you,” said a market woman from Koro circle¹⁸² We responded, ‘Are we not from this town too? Are you not the village chief?’ He had no answer. From that time, we were too afraid to go to market, and the hunger started.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl woman, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Peuhl market woman, Bamako, May 27, 2018.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl market woman, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon chief, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.



A market day in Symbi, central Mali in 2011. Access to markets by traders of different ethnic groups has been undermined by attacks carried out by Islamist armed groups and ethnic self-defense groups.

© 2011 Greenshoots Communications / Alamy Stock Photo.

Many Peuhl villagers said their Dogon friends warned them when not to travel to local markets: “Often, our Dogon friends would sneak into our camp at night saying, ‘Tomorrow, on market day, don’t travel because the road will be barricaded by the militia.’”¹⁸⁴

A Peuhl market woman added: “We’ve known the Dogon women our whole lives -- some wept as we left. They said the directive came from outside. We’ve never seen the jihadists and yet this is what’s caused all the confusion, all the pain.”¹⁸⁵

Many Peuhl said that some Dogon villagers and chiefs appeared opposed to the actions of the Dogon militiamen: A villager from Koro said, “A month after the embargo, the mayor said, ‘I fear for your people; we are all Malians, but you must leave. We can no longer

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Sévaré, July 14, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with merchant, Bamako, May 27, 2018.

protect you.’ After we fled, they burned my house, my grain stocks, and stole my camel, donkeys, sheep, cart and motorcycle.”¹⁸⁶ Another Peuhl villager from Koro said:

We started seeing the militia from February, more each time and always armed. They’d come at night, which was terrifying, and threatened the men, especially the young men. We kept the children inside, and one night, the Dogon chief, who was firmly against all this, told my husband he should go and never return...that it was too dangerous. I stayed to take care of our home, I couldn’t bring myself to leave the village I’d grown up in. I moved in with the chief, but for the last 10 days, I couldn’t go to market, and then couldn’t even leave the house. The chief said, “there’s no solution to this problem. I can’t protect you.”¹⁸⁷

Blockades, Explosive Devices and Malnutrition in Dogon Communities

Dogon community leaders alleged that Islamist armed groups and Peuhl self-defense groups had imposed blockades on their communities. They said these groups had “forbidden” their villagers from planting or working their fields and alleged that numerous Dogon men had been killed while doing so. They said the blockade had resulted in profound economic hardship and led to a hunger crisis in numerous villages.

One Dogon youth leader said, “We’re living off our stocks of millet but yesterday my mother told me our stock is almost finished. People are literally dying of hunger in the villages.”¹⁸⁸

A Dogon elder living in Koro *cercle* said, “Since May, it is the Islamists who rule the bush. They stop us from farming and stole our animals. We are terrified to go to our farms.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Sévaré, July 14, 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

¹⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon youth leader, Mopti region, July 10, 2018.

¹⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with villager, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

A villager from Douna village in Douentza *cercle* told Human Rights Watch, “Since January, after the jihadists killed a young marabout from our village, they’ve stopped us from farming and stole our animals – we are hungry and tired.”¹⁹⁰ A Dogon businessman from a village near Saberé, explained that the economic hardship had driven his family from their village:

After Saberé was attacked, the Peuhl called the Dogon elders from our side of the village and said that we must leave. We believe it was the youth who have joined the jihadists who were behind it. We had already been subject to an embargo - they’d stopped us from going to the local market at Douna Pen. But in the meeting, they said, “It is clear, our people are at war. You need to leave.” My family left the next day, and the others followed. Today, not even a Dogon chicken is left in our village.¹⁹¹

Others said they had to travel long distances to avoid Peuhl hamlets that they believed to be full of armed men who would attack them. A farmer from Dioulouna, a large village in Douentza *cercle*, said, “the only way to go to do commerce is to go south, into Burkina Faso. But even yesterday, the Dogon were stopped by armed Peuhl men in Burkina who said no Dogon would pass.”¹⁹² As described above, Dogon villagers believe that Islamist armed groups had planted IEDs on local roads to target Dogon merchants on their way to and from markets.

In Douentza *cercle*, a “mystery illness” characterized by edema and boils that some initially blamed on the poisoning of wells by armed Islamists¹⁹³ was in August determined

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with villager, Mopti region, July 10, 2018.

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with villager, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

¹⁹² Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Mopti region, July 11, 2018.

¹⁹³ “Centre du Mali : La maladie mysterieuse de Mondoro, Chimique ou naturelle ?” *Malijet*, August 8, 2018, http://malijet.com/la_societe_malienne_aujourd'hui/la_sante_au_mali/214560-centre-du-mali-la-maladie-mysterieuse-de-mondoro-chimique-ou-nat.html (accessed October 9, 2018).; “Mondoro (Mopti): L’apparition d’une maladie mysterieuse fait une dizaine de victimes,” *Malijet*, August 5, 2018, <http://malijet.co/nord-mali/mondoro-mopti-lapparition-dune-maladie-mysterieuse-fait-une-dizaine-de-victimes> (accessed October 9, 2018).



Dogon women bring their wares to market in a Dogon village, Mopti region, central Mali. Access to markets by traders of different ethnic groups has been undermined by attacks carried out by Islamist armed groups and ethnic self-defense groups. © 2008 Die Bildagentur der Fotografen GmbH / Alamy Stock Photo.

by Malian health officials to be acute malnutrition caused by a “food shortage related to the communal conflict within Mondoro Commune.”¹⁹⁴

As of August 2018, the malnutrition in three largely Dogon villages and numerous hamlets had, according to a government report seen by Human Rights Watch, led to 224 cases and 35 deaths, the vast majority Dogon.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Mopti Direction Regionale du Sante, *Rapport de la Mission d'Investigation des cas de Maladie Inhabituelle dans les Sires de Sante de Douna, Niagassadiou et Tiguila Commune de Mondoro, cercle de Douentza*, August 5, 2018. The report noted other factors which had contributed to the hunger crisis in Mopti region including a blockade imposed by armed groups, low harvest, the flight of pastoralists due to animal theft leading to a stark reduction in leading sources of protein (milk and meat); the departure of health workers and inaccessibility of the area to humanitarian workers due to insecurity, including improvised explosive devices. (Report on file.)

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

Widespread Livestock Theft

Both communities described the widespread theft of animals which both precipitated deadly cycles of retaliatory attacks and resulted in disastrous economic and nutritional consequences. Some 10 village chiefs from all ethnic groups showed Human Rights Watch a tally of animals stolen from their villages, many putting the number in the thousands.

Numerous Peuhl men told Human Rights Watch spoke that they frantically, and often futilely, tried to round up their animals in the minutes before being driven from their villages by Dogon or Bambara militiamen. “For us, our cows are our lives, the source of nutrition for our families, the money in our bank, without them we are nothing and we cannot survive,” one said.¹⁹⁶

Several villagers from Koro *cercle* described travelling hundreds of kilometers to Bamako to search for their stolen livestock. One herder accused Dogon militiamen of stealing 103 cows, while another said over 1000 animals had been stolen from his village of Guererou. “I lost 100 heads of cows; 200 sheep and many goats. I’ve only found two cows.” Both men found a handful of their animals in Bamako and said local gendarmes had arrested the Dogon merchants for trying to sell them.¹⁹⁷

A dozen Dogon villagers also described losing their cattle. One farmer said that during a May attack on his village, “they took 205 camels, 240 cows, 500 muton and hundreds of donkeys.”¹⁹⁸ A villager from Ibi village said, “In May the Peuhl stole hundreds of our animals and again, in late September, they stole more 400 cows from our area, near Madougou. Things are still very tense.”

Many other Dogon villagers said that as communal tension rose, Peuhl herders to whom they had given their animals to tend, stole the animals when they, the Peuhl, had fled the area.

¹⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with witness, Bamako, July 8 and 14.

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with farmer, Mopti region, July 10, 2018.

**In Their Own Words:
Views on Justice for Communal Violence**

Without justice, how can we prevent the dynamic of recidivism, of family members wanting to avenge those who have been killed. This will be the cycle as long as injustice is the order of the day. – Peuhl youth leader, October 2018

We all have vengeance in our hearts. If justice isn't done, how can we have reconciliation?

--Dogon youth leader, September 2018.

The poor do not get justice. In Mali it just never happens; Our people are gone. We have left it up to God. – Bambara farmer, July 2018

A Peuhl will never get justice - we are simple people; poor people, they will ask for money we don't have, we have no idea what to do now." – Animal merchant, July 2018

The killings, the lawlessness has led to a climate of "neither faith, nor justice. – Dogon elder July 2018

Twenty-three people were slaughtered like sheep that day. We are terrified of the Dozo who did this. We want them arrested, it is the only way to stop all this. – Peuhl villager, July 2018

Many people are joining the Dozos more in search of Peuhl's gold and cows than anything else. The killings and pillage won't stop until they arrest a few of them. – Village elder, May 2018

Honestly, if the state arrested just a few of these people, a clear message would be sent...but they haven't, and the atrocities have continued. – Government official, July 2018

Two days after the killings, a delegation of ministers and officials visited the mass grave, presented condolences and said the Dozo shouldn't have killed over twenty of our people. Since then, nothing. – Peuhl villager, July 2018.

Killing is a regular occurrence. Just yesterday two of our people were gunned down taking a sick relative to the clinic. We have no hope in the world that there will be an investigation.

– Bambara villager, 2017

We want peace – we want things to continue as before – we don't want Dogon people to suffer and be killed; we don't want the Peuhl to suffer and be killed either; we just want to go back in time to when we were brothers. – Dogon chief, July 2018

The Role of the Malian Government

Violence can never resolve what are deep problems rooted in the lack of justice, the lack of security, poor management of dwindling natural resources, poverty and lack of education. If it continues, it risks destroying the entire region and will only reinforce the Jihadists, who will be the real winners.

–the late Modi Diallo, May 2018

Nearly all those interviewed for this report expressed considerable concern about the deteriorating security situation and the increasing number of deadly attacks in central Mali in 2018. They believed the Malian government had failed to adequately protect vulnerable civilians and to hold to account members of self-defense groups responsible for serious abuses.

A member of Parliament who was part of a March 2018 delegation to investigate the rising incidents of violence noted that members of all ethnic groups involved in the violence had similar grievances against the government: “All sides complained of how long it took the army to respond to emergencies. All sides asked for disarmament. And all sides complained about the lack of investigations into killings and other crimes.”¹⁹⁹

A community leader noted, “Regardless of its origin, the communal violence has taken on a life of its own. The number of attacks, deaths and displaced has increased to an alarming degree....and it’s not stopping.”²⁰⁰ An aid worker said, “the worse things get, the more difficult it becomes to try to stop the cycle of jihadist presence and retaliation in the area.”²⁰¹

Those interviewed detailed numerous efforts by the national, regional and local governments; the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission; and nongovernmental

¹⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Malian parliamentarian, Bamako, May 26, 2018.

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with community leader, Mopti, July 12, 2018.

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch interview with aid worker, London, May 4, 2018.



Malian army forces secure a road between Goundam and Timbuktu, northern Mali, on June 2, 2015, as part of a counterterrorism operation in the Sahel. Attacks by Islamist armed groups since 2015 have spread into central Mali, challenging the Malian army's ability to secure territory and fostering the growth of ethnic self-defense groups. © 2015 PHILIPPE DESMAZES/AFP/Getty Images.

organizations including Humanitarian Dialog²⁰² and World Vision to stop the deadly “tit-for-tat” violence, reconcile communities and commit to addressing the issues that gave rise to the insecurity. For much of 2018, community leaders, academics and government representatives were concerned that, as noted by one academic, “nothing seems to be working.”²⁰³

More generally, most of those interviewed believed the Malian government needed to act quickly and neutrally to better protect civilians, to restore security, and to hold those responsible for unlawful killings and other serious abuses to account.

²⁰² Humanitarian Dialog brokered two agreements to reduce ethnic tension between the Peuhl and Dogon: on July 1, 2018, a unilateral ceasefire signed by one factor of Dan Na Ambassagou, and in late August 2018, an accord to end communal violence in Koro signed by dozens of Peuhl and Dogon village chiefs.

²⁰³ Human Rights Watch Interview with academic, Mopti region, May 27, 2018.

Unrealized Commitment to Disarm and Hold Abusers to Account

During 2018, the government's approach to the perpetrators of crimes ranged from threats of arrest and prosecution to reconciliation efforts apparently devoid of a justice component. In March, in the face of rising communal violence, both Prime Minister Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga and a government delegation led by the Ministry of National Reconciliation and Social Cohesion and comprised of key NGOs, parliamentarians and village leaders from both the Peuhl and Dogon communities, visited the Mopti Region in response to the deteriorating security situation.²⁰⁴

During his separate March 25, visit to Mopti region, Prime Minister Maïga pledged to "disarm by force or will the militias who hold weapons of war,"²⁰⁵ including those who had license and traditional hunting rifles. Furthermore, in meetings with villagers, the government committed to deploy thousands of security force personnel to the region to guarantee security and to open investigations into the communal violence.²⁰⁶

The government has largely failed to follow through on these commitments. "The governments promise to us was clear," said a Peuhl government official. "They did a communique saying only the army could have arms; the Ministry of Justice said anyone who disobeyed would prosecuted. It was clear. It was specific. We applauded. We were relieved. But the very next week, the Dozos were at it again."²⁰⁷

Many Dogon and Peuhl leaders said the number of attacks against their respective communities actually significantly increased after the March government delegation.²⁰⁸ Many of the incidents documented in this report occurred after the March commitment.

²⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with delegation members, Mopti region and Bamako, May 23-26, 2018.

²⁰⁵ "Tournée du PM : A Koro, Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga promet de désarmer tous les milices," Studio Tamani, March 26, 2018, http://malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/207095-tournee-du-pm-a-koro-soumeylou-boubeye-maiga-promet-de-desarmer.html

²⁰⁶ Ibid. See also, "Mali: le Premier ministre Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga acheve sa tournée," *RFI*, March 27, 2018, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180327-MALI-VISITE-PREMIER-MINISTRE-KIDAL-SOUMEYLOU-BOUBEYE-MAIGA-GAO-TESSALIT> (accessed October 9, 2018).

²⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl government official, May 26, 2018.

²⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Dogon and Peuhl community leaders and villagers, Bamako, Mopti and Sévaré, May 25-27 and July 9-16, 2018.

Abdoul Aziz Diallo, the president of Peuhl cultural organization Tabital Pulaaku, said, “despite the government promises and commitments...it is clear the situation is getting worse.” He added that the Peuhl community “reserved the right to defend itself against all attacks on the part of any militia.”²⁰⁹

After the June massacre of some 25 Peuhl civilians in Koumaga, in Djenné *cercle*, a government delegation visited the community and once again committed to investigate.²¹⁰ A June 23 government communique responding to the killings, said a reinforcement of soldiers dispatched afterwards would “proceed to disarm all those keeping firearms in the area” and, again, pledged to prosecute all those involved in the incident.²¹¹ However, at writing, community members told Human Rights Watch they have seen no evidence of an investigation into this or the many other serious abuses committed by self-defense groups.

By October, the government’s approach had appeared to turn away from accountability. On September 27, the Dan Na Ambassagou chief of staff, Toloba, signed a unilateral ceasefire negotiated by way of a process supported by Humanitarian Dialog on behalf of the government. The agreement appealed to Dogon and Peuhl communities to commit to ceasing all attacks, pillage and cattle theft.^{212 213} On October 2, Prime Minister Maïga met with Dan Na Ambassagou leaders and pledged to help self-defense group members benefit from a government Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reinsertion (DDR) program, as well as other grants to start revenue-generating initiatives.²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ “Mali; Affrontements Inter-Communautaires Entre Peuls et Dogons Dans Les *cercles* de Koro et Douentza: Tabital Pulaaku Monte Au Crenau,” *Tabital Pulaaku*, May 8, 2018, <http://www.tabitalpulaaku.org/mali-affrontements-inter-communautaires-entre-peuls-dogons-cercles-de-koro-douentza-tabital-pulaaku-monte-creneau/> (accessed October 9, 2018).

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl residents of Komaga and a civil society leader, Sévaré, July 9 and 12, 2018.

²¹¹ Communiqué du Gouvernement, Cabinet du Premier Ministre, Bamako, 23 June, 2018.

²¹² “Engagement en faveur d’un cessez-le-feu unilatéral de Youssouf TOLOBA et son groupe armé de Dan Na Ambassagou,” September 27, 2018 <https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Cessez-le-feu-unilat%C3%A9ral-Youssouf-Toloba-Dan-Nan-Ambassagou-Septembre-2018.pdf> (accessed October 5, 2018).

²¹³ “Crise de la région de la Mopti: Dan Na Ambassagou engagé pour la paix,” *Maliweb*, September 17, 2018, <https://www.maliweb.net/insecurite/crise-de-la-region-de-la-mopti-dan-nan-ambassagou-engage-pour-la-paix-2776993.html> (accessed October 5, 2018).

²¹⁴ “Mali : a Mopti, le Premier ministre assiste au depot d’armes d’un groupe dogon,” *MaliZine*, October 3, 2018, <http://malizine.com/2018/10/03/mali-a-mopti-le-premier-ministre-assiste-au-depot-darmes-dun-groupe-dogon/> (accessed October 9, 2018).

In response to the ceasefire, a youth leader from Mopti region said, “Without justice, I fear the ceasefire is stillborn, the cycle of revenge can only be broken with justice.”²¹⁵ A Peuhl teacher noted: “Are not the militias being rewarded for all their killing and destruction? After so many lethal incidents, so much killing – no investigations, no justice, no compensation. It’s as if the life of a Peuhl has no value.”²¹⁶

On November 22, Dan Na Ambassagou announced their withdrawal from the September ceasefire, following a confrontation with the army and several lethal attacks which left both Peuhl and Dogon civilians dead.²¹⁷

Failure to Impartially Respond to Communal Violence

Peuhl village elders and community leaders, as well as diplomats and domestic and international aid workers gave several factors for questioning the impartiality of the government’s response to communal violence in central Mali. First was the failure of the security forces to make a serious effort to disarm abusive militias. Second was the failure of the security forces to impartially apply a 2018 ban on using motorcycles for transportation between villages in the Mopti region (as a security measure), which they alleged was rarely applied to the Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups. Third was the failure of authorities to respond to pleas from Peuhl communities for help when under attack.

Peuhl leaders and others also raised concerns about whether the Dogon and Bambara self-defense groups received any state support, how they obtained their weapons, and why the criminal justice system had made scant progress in investigating their alleged serious crimes.

²¹⁵ Human Rights Watch WhatsApp message from Bamako, October 24, 2018.

²¹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl teachers, Sévaré, October 5, 2018Sévaré.

²¹⁷ « Une dizaine de Peuls tués en trois jours dans le centre du Mali, » *VOA Afrique*, November 22, 2018, <https://www.voaafrrique.com/a/une-dizaine-de-peuls-tu%C3%A9s-en-trois-jours-dans-le-centre-du-mali/4669879.html> (accessed November 28, 2018).



Dan Na Ambassagou militia gather for a meeting reportedly held in Koro cercle, Mopti region, central Mali, in November 2018. The Malian government imposed a ban on motorcycles in Mopti region for security reasons, although they have not always applied the ban impartially on all ethnic groups. ©2018 Private.

Self-defense Groups Moving with Arms; Defying Motorcycle Ban

Dozens of villagers and others described seeing members of Dogon and Bambara self-defense groups carrying firearms after the March 2018 order by the prime minister banning anyone except members of the security forces from carrying them. Often, the militiamen were seen with their firearms on motorcycles, which since 2017 have been subject to two bans put in place by the Ministry of Defense to address the spread of Islamist armed groups, which frequently use motorcycles to move from village to village in central Mali.²¹⁸

Villagers provided detailed accounts of self-defense group members, in groups ranging in size from 2 to about 100, and visibly armed with military assault weapons and hunting rifles, walking around towns, villages and marketplaces, manning checkpoints, obliging people to descend from public transportation vehicles, checking identification cards, conducting house-to-house searches, driving in front of gendarme, army and police bases,

and engaging in conversation with members of the security forces.²¹⁹

A social science researcher who frequently travels around Koro *cercle* by road said that:

²¹⁸ “Mali : interdiction des motos et pick-up dans certaines zones du nord et du centre,” *Jeune Afrique*, February 3, 2018, <http://malijet.com/actualite-politique-au-mali/flash-info/203770-mali-interdiction-des-motos-et-pick-up-dans-certaines-zones-du-n.html>, (accessed November 5, 2018) and “Mali : Mali: le gouverneur de Mopti interdit la circulation en moto dans la region,” *RFI*, March 27, 2017. <https://maliactu.net/mali-mali-le-gouverneur-de-mopti-interdit-la-circulation-en-moto-dans-la-region>, (accessed November 5, 2018.)

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with villagers, community leaders, aid workers and diplomats, Bamako and Sévaré, February 6-15; May 25-27; July 9-16, 2018.

Over the past four months I've regularly seen armed Dogon militia maintaining checkpoints at the entrance and exit to every village. They stop cars and verify IDs like they were policemen. The government said all armed men should be disarmed, yet when they *laisse faire...* they're guilty of tolerating if not supporting the militia. Even yesterday, when driving to Yorou, I passed by several armed Dogon in each village.²²⁰

A Peuhl man displaced after the September 1 attack during which 12 Peuhl men were killed by Dozos in Dankoussa, in Djenné *cercle*, Djenné said:

It's unbelievable....the Dozos, some I personally saw killing people just days ago, come into Djenné on motorcycles, which are supposed to be banned, then walk around Djenné on market days in plain sight...They promenade around in front of the prefect's office, the judge's office, the gendarmerie – all agents of the state who know they shouldn't be carrying arms and yet there they are!²²¹

In early 2018, a village elder described seeing “about 50 armed Dogon on their motorcycles passing through Koro, with guns. The road goes straight past the gendarme camp. They were on their way to their training camp on the hill. The state is at fault for not treating everyone the same.”²²²

Another person described what he saw in mid-2018 in the town of Bankass:

About three months ago, I saw a large group of over 100 Dogon militiamen on many motorcycles, some with guns, stop in front of the military camp at around 7 or 8 a.m. Sometime later, they drove off, we think to their training camp on the escarpment. At 4 p.m. we saw them driving back through

²²⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Koro *Cercle*, July 12, 2018.

²²¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Sofara, September 9, 2018.

²²² Human Rights Watch interview with village elder, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

Bankass as they returned to their villages. Who knows what they and the army were talking about, but it should have been an opportunity to disarm them!²²³

An animal merchant from Koro *cercle* said:

From February they [Dogon militia] started erecting checkpoints. ...To avoid them, we had to go miles out of our way. A few weeks ago, I was stopped at the entrance to Koporo Pen and later at Diangatene. There were dozens of them with their hunting rifles – 10 here, 5 there. They asked for my ID...one said I should be taken away, but another one, who I'd grown up with, said, 'Let him pass.' I was terrified."²²⁴

Members of Peuhl village self-defense groups questioned why the Malian army had at times disarmed them but had yet never disarmed the Dogon or Bambara self-defense groups operating in neighboring villages. A villager from Bombou said:

Before the seventh Dogon attack on our village, the FAMA disarmed seven of us...they happened to drive by and found some of our sentries on the lookout. When the FAMA met that day with the village chief we asked them why they took our arms and not the Dogon? The Dogon attacked, again, a week later and killed several of our women and children. They still have their arms.²²⁵

A European diplomat said, "We have *demarched* the government on their failure to disarm the militias and what appears to be the lack of impartial application of the motorcycle ban; It's very clear the ban does not apply to the Bambara and Dogon who enjoy total freedom of movement."²²⁶

²²³ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Bamako, July 7, 2018.

²²⁴ Human Rights Watch Interview with an animal merchant, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

²²⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

²²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with European diplomat, Bamako, July 3, 2018.

A European security analyst said that, “The February decree from the army was clear: no circulation on motorcycles permitted. Period. And yet we see the militias driving in front of military bases, driving through town in front of gendarme HQs? Why is that being allowed in a period when intercommunal violence and killings are trending up?”²²⁷

“All this leads us to believe there is at least tolerance of the militias, if not coordination or even worse cooperation between the government and the Dozos,” another security analyst observed.²²⁸

During an interview with Human Rights Watch in July, Dogon community and militia leaders acknowledged the government’s ultimatum regarding disarmament and were well aware of the ban on motorcycles imposed in early 2018. However, they refused to abide by the regulations. “Disarming ourselves will expose us to massacres. We will not do it,” one militiaman said. “The ongoing presence of and attacks on us by jihadists makes it very clear that the jihadists have not been disarmed, so, how can we?” said another.²²⁹

In May and July, a few Dogon community leaders said they had given the government several conditions for both disarming and respecting the ban on motorcycles, but that the conditions had yet to be met.²³⁰ First was for the army to deploy in large numbers, set up bases in strategic villages that are vulnerable to attack, and ensure security throughout the Dogon country. They acknowledged recent efforts by the army to establish camps in Koro *cercle*, but characterized them as “symbolic” and denounced their slow response time. Second was a development program to improve roadways, water and electricity and provide employment opportunities. They noted that the 2012 conflict and presence of Islamist armed groups had decimated the tourism industry and created widespread unemployment. “The government has put millions into the north, but they’ve forgotten us” a Dogon elder said.²³¹ Third was for the Dogon to be included in a disarmament, demobilization and re-entry program.

²²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with European security analyst, Bamako, July 4, 2018.

²²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with European security analyst, Bamako, July 6, 2018.

²²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with two Dogon self-defense group members, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

²³⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Dogon community leaders, Bamako, May 26 and July 14 and 15, 2018.

²³¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon community leaders, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

One Dogon militiaman said, “The army is just not there -- we don’t know if they lack petrol, the will to defend or what – but this I do know: when we’re being killed, we’re not going to stay there with our hands crossed. We’re going to defend ourselves. We also know the long-term solution is a stronger and professional army.”²³²

Alleged State Support of Dogon and Bambara Militias

As discussed above, Peuhl leaders have alleged that the Malian government is providing arms, ammunition and financial and logistical support to the Dogon and Bambara militias. Human Rights Watch was unable to confirm these allegations. However, some militia members said they had, at times, received informal support from individual government members, including some members of the security forces. The allegations merit further investigation.

Members of Dogon and Bambara self-defense groups told Human Rights Watch that they owned semi-automatic military assault weapons but rejected allegations that they had received them, or any weapons, from the Malian government.

Several Dan Na Ambassagou members and a Dozo leader asserted that any firearms other than hunting rifles in their possession had been captured from armed Islamists. A Dan Na Ambassagou member said: “No one is helping us! We get our guns from the terrorists when they run away, from terrorists we kill, from those we capture. We got a lot when we overran one of their big camps near the Burkina Faso border.”²³³

Two high-level Dan Na Ambassagou leaders and a Dozo leader told Human Rights Watch that during 2017, in the absence of support from the Malian government, they had solicited funds to arm and support their organization from Dogon and Bambara individuals and other businessmen. They did not provide details about any support but characterized what they received as “donations” from a few individual security force members and government officials. Said one:

²³² Human Rights Watch Interview with militia members, Mopti region, July 9, 2018.

²³³ Human Rights watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou members, July 2018.

The army never gives us arms...they've refused to help us, but we're trying to get Dogon businessmen from Mali and the Dogon in the diaspora to help our effort. We do however get small amounts from friends in the security forces from time to time— 20,000, 30,000, 50,000 CFA [US\$34, US\$52, US\$86] via Orange money [online cash transfers], and sometimes rice for our supporters. Some mayors, elected representatives, soldiers and gendarmes tell us “What you are doing is good, it will help us, you are in places we are not, you're helping us deal with this problem.”²³⁴

Peuhl community leaders accused the government of not only arming the Bambara and Dogon militias, but also training them. They said the tactics they used when attacking their villages had become increasingly sophisticated, something they said could only have been learned by way of formal training.²³⁵

Witnesses to a few battles in which Dan Na Ambassagou and Dozos had easily overwhelmed Peuhl village self-defense forces similarly described seeing military tactics “we'd never seen before.”²³⁶ A villager from Koro *cercle* explained: “This year, they've started using tactics as if they'd benefitted from military training: during the attack one group advances, while another brings water, and another takes the wounded.”²³⁷ Another villager noted that “when they advance it's in one flank, and someone is screaming orders. No way simple farmers are going to figure this out,” another villager said. “Where did they learn to do that?”²³⁸

Dan Na Ambassagou leaders denied being trained in any official capacity by members of the Malian security forces but said they had received training from retired members of the Malian security forces or from Dogon who had fought in other West African conflicts.²³⁹ Said one Dogon leader:

²³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou leaders, Mopti region, February 2017.

²³⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl community leaders, Bamako and Sévaré, July 9-13, 2018.

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl villager, Sévaré, July 9, 2018.

²³⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Peuhl villager, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

²³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with villager, Mopti, July 12, 2018.

²³⁹ Human Rights Watch Interview with community leaders, Sévaré, 2017.

FAMA doesn't train us directly but we have a few former armed forces members with us who go to Sévaré to get guidance and advice from their brothers in the army from time to time...then they return to pass on that information to us. When we need more training, we send them back. This was what we did in December 2016 when our men first gathered in the bases for our initial formation –the training was in the hills and the escarpment – the gendarmes don't know this area, and then, from time to time since then.²⁴⁰

Two other members of Dan Na Ambassagou said the training had come from Dogon who had fought with armed groups in northern Mali, or as mercenaries in Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia. One militiaman said, "the Dogon are known for being tough fighters. Many fought with Guillaume Soros's New forces [then-rebel group in Cote d'Ivoire] for years. When our problems started, they returned home and trained their own brothers."²⁴¹

A 2017 Human Rights Watch report on communal violence in central Mali quoted Bambara and Peuhl villagers describing how they could easily buy military rifles from traders including some going back and forth to Mauritania and Algeria. A Peuhl youth leader said, "The price of a nice cow, that's how much a Kalashnikov costs." A Bambara villager said, "the state doesn't give the Dozo anything, except rice and help with medical bills. No, both the Dozos and even the Peuhl buy their Kalashnikovs. The state is not present, so we are all doing this...there is no control at the border, or customs... we know how to go about purchasing them and who we have to ask."²⁴²

Security Force Response to Communal Violence

Numerous members from the Bambara, Peuhl and Dogon communities at once praised and criticized the Malian security forces' response to communal violence in central Mali. Some villagers and village leaders credited the security forces with trying to calm tensions by

²⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon leaders, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

²⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou leader, July 13, 2018.

²⁴² "Mali : Spate of Killings by Armed Groups: Investigate Abuses, Protect Vulnerable Civilians," Human Rights Watch news release, April 5, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/05/mali-spate-killings-armed-groups>.

patrolling, helping them look for missing relatives; helping locate looted livestock; evacuating wounded civilians; ensuring civilians' safe passage from village to village; escorting convoys of students to enable them to take exams; retrieving the bodies of those killed; summoning and warning abusive self-defense force commanders to cease committing abuses; and ensuring the delivery of humanitarian aid.²⁴³

However, many elders from the three communities complained bitterly about the slow or absent response to attacks by Malian security forces, whom they claim to have alerted in advance of or during attacks on their communities. Village elders from 14 villages told Human Rights Watch the security forces had failed to respond to 23 attacks, including many in which civilians were killed. They said that while a rapid response may not have been able to save all these lives, they likely could have saved some of them.

The village leaders also claim to have communicated the whereabouts of abusive armed group bases as well as their command structure and the names of particular commanders implicated in abuses, but said they were, at writing, unaware of any effort to dismantle the bases or detain the armed men.

Several village chiefs and community elders showed Human Rights Watch text messages they had sent to gendarme or army officers appealing for their immediate protection. The community leaders had simultaneously alerted government representatives urging them to appeal to the security forces to better protect their villages. They all said they notified the closest security forces base, which was between 10 and 40 kilometers away.

Peuhl and Security Force Protection

Peuhl leaders expressed harsh criticism for the alleged slow or inadequate response of the Malian security forces to violence against their community, which they considered to be turning a blind eye to anti-Peuhl violence or outright collusion with the Bambara and Dogon militias.

²⁴³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Bambara, Peuhl and Dogon community leaders and villagers, Bamako and Sévaré, July 2-17, 2018.

One Peuhl leader whose village had lost a dozen civilians during an attack by a self-defense group said, “When you send intel on planned attacks, they don’t react; when you call them, they don’t come. If they happen to show up, it’s usually too late. We pay our taxes so that they protect all of us equally.”²⁴⁴ The village chief’s son described his father calling soldiers when their village in Koro *cercle* was attacked by Dan Na Ambassagou on multiple occasions:

Our village was attacked eight times. Each time my father called the FAMA base, 25 kilometers away. Before the worst one, we heard at night that the militia would attack the next day. I was there when he called the FAMA around 9 a.m. – they didn’t answer. When we saw the militia coming, we called again - they answered but they said they were not able to get there. They only came after we’d buried the dead.²⁴⁵

An elder from Koumaga decried the army for failing to respond to the June 2018 Dozo attack that left at least 23 civilians dead. “The army has a base in Djenné that is only 18 kilometers from Koumaga,” said the elder. “We called them; many people called the army, the gendarmes... Everyone has family members in Djenné, and they raised the alarm too. They finally came around 4 p.m. – after the Dozo had been killing all day.”²⁴⁶ Two witnesses said some Dozo were in the vicinity when the army arrived, but that the army failed to arrest them for questioning.²⁴⁷

Another Peuhl village leader questioned why the security forces had failed to respond to an attack on his village of Bombou that he said went on for several hours. He said, “the army base is not far, and all that shooting! The crack of gunfire really carries in the bush, the army had to have known we were under attack.”²⁴⁸

Several Peuhl villagers cited other factors to support their allegations of complicity if not outright collaboration between the Malian security forces and the militias. For example,

²⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Peuhl leader, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

²⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with community leaders, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with community leaders, Sévaré, July 9, 2018.

²⁴⁸ Human Rights Watch, Sévaré, July 10, 2018.

one witness, whose father was wounded during an attack by Dan Na Ambassagou in Koro *cercle*, recounted how the military convoy carrying him and his wounded father stopped at a Dan Na Ambassagou base: “On the way to the hospital we came to the village where the militia had their base. The army convoy we were in was obliged to stop for about five minutes, during which the Dozos and soldiers talked. That seems strange. Who is in control here?”²⁴⁹

Two Peuhl villagers said they saw army and militias in proximity of an attack on their village. One said he saw the army standing by while militias looted property from their villages. Other villagers reported second-hand accounts, which Human Rights Watch could not confirm, of militias carrying looted goods past military checkpoints; security force members training militiamen during their vacations or on weekends; and that security force identity cards were found on the bodies of Bambara and Dogon militiamen killed in battles with Peuhl village self-defense forces.²⁵⁰

Numerous villagers called for a strong security force response so as to deter further attacks. One Peuhl youth leader captured the views of many people Peuhl interviewed by Human Rights Watch: “I swear if the FAMA today, showed up in force and disarmed just three or four militia units, and made just a few arrests, this problem would finish.”²⁵¹

Bambara and Dogon and Security Force Protection

Representatives of the Bambara and Dogon self-defense groups cited inadequate protection of their communities as the very reason for their creation: “From 2016, we wrote our mayors, prefect, ministers and the army to tell them they must do something,” one Dan Na Ambassagou member said.²⁵² “We called them after every assassination, after every attack. We called them with intel about jihadist camps and impending attacks, but they didn’t come.”²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with witness, Mopti, July 12, 2018.

²⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with witnesses, Mopti, Sévaré, and Bamako, May 25-27, July 9-16, 2018.

²⁵¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with villagers, Sévaré, July 7, 2018.

²⁵² Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou leader, Bamako, July 15, 2018.

²⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Dan Na Ambassagou member, Sévaré, July 9 2018.

A high-level Bambara Dozo leader said, “From 2014 we called the gendarmes, the army, wrote letters to the Ministries of Territorial Administration, Defense, Reconciliation and Justice...and to the prime minister to raise the alarm. We didn’t want the problem in the north to come to the center. But they were slow to respond and anyway, they can’t be everywhere. Asymmetrical war is tough even for the FAMA and we wanted to give them a helping hand.”²⁵⁴

Dogon village leaders also described feeling insufficiently protected by the Malian security forces who they had called for protection before or during attacks numerous attacks by Peuhl armed group. “After every attack – and there have been many - we called the FAMA – they’re only 25 kilometers away in Mondoro, but they rarely if ever came,” said one villager. According to another, “We feel abandoned. They were bold, heavy attacks...We called the FAMA but were left to defend ourselves from the terrorists. I don’t even think the gendarmes came to file a report after a village elder was murdered.”²⁵⁵

A local mayor said that, “If the FAMA responded quickly things wouldn’t have deteriorated to where they are now. But each time either they come two, three days later, or not at all. Sometimes they only come to offer their condolences, or to help evacuate a body, then they left.”²⁵⁶ A Dogon elder from Koro *cercle* said, “After the May attack on Saberé, we called the FAMA who came two days later. Then we complained to the prefect who said, he’d deal with it later. They just didn’t see the urgency. This is why we are relying on Dan Na Ambassagou.”²⁵⁷

Many villagers from all contesting sides pleaded with the FAMA to remain in their villages after an attack, “after the FAMA secured the area so we could bury our dead, we begged for them to stay, but they said they couldn’t. They said they didn’t have enough men to do that.”²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Dozo leader, Bamako, July 18, 2018.

²⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch Interview with Dogon villagers, Sévaré, February 11, 2018.

²⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon mayor, February 18, 2018.

²⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Dogon elder, Bamako, July 14, 2018.

²⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with witnesses, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

Failure to Ensure Justice for Communal Violence

Bambara, Dogon and Peuhl community leaders were aware of few investigations and no prosecutions of those responsible for serious abuses committed in Central Mali since 2017. They expressed concern that the lack of accountability was emboldening armed groups to commit further abuses amid a general climate of impunity.²⁵⁹

Since at least 2013, numerous episodes of communal violence, underscored by ethnic tension and the presence of Islamist armed groups, have left several hundred dead and displaced thousands, the vast majority in 2018.²⁶⁰ Only one of these incidents - near the central town of Dioura in 2016 -- has resulted in arrests of the alleged perpetrators, a trial and a conviction.

A Malian lawyer from Mopti region said the lack of investigations by Malian criminal justice officials in the Mopti region feeds the cycle of impunity:

In June 2017, there was a grave situation that left six Dogon and over 20 Peuhl dead. The government went, said it was bad, promised an investigation, but the response from neither the judiciary nor the army was adequate. And look what happened: a year, almost to the day, there was another serious incident, with even more killed. What does that tell you?²⁶¹

Four victims of this attack in Koro *cercle*, by Dogon militiamen in retaliation for the killing by armed Islamists of a Dogon elder, told Human Rights Watch in 2017 that they had identified the perpetrators involved in these killings by name. One man described seeing his father gunned down; another saw a child killed by the same gunman who wounded him.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with community leaders, Bamako, Mopti, Sévaré, 2017 and 2018.

²⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with human rights advocates and village leaders, Bamako, July 2018.

²⁶¹ Human Rights Watch Interview with Malian lawyer, Mopti region, July 13, 2018.

²⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with witnesses and victims, Mopti and Sévaré, July 2017.

Witnesses to most of the massacres and several of the smaller attacks documented in this report provided Human Rights Watch with the names of the alleged perpetrators, many of whom they recognized at the scene of the crime or knew personally. “We know them, we grew up with them, they don’t hide their faces!” said a local chief from Djenné *cercle*.²⁶³

A few showed Human Rights Watch text messages they had sent to local gendarmes with the names of the alleged perpetrators and did not believe any of them had been detained for questioning. Several Dogon village leaders said they had also given to Malian authorities the names of people they knew had participated in abuses against their communities.

Most of those killed in ethnic clashes documented by Human Rights Watch were Peuhl, and much of the criticism of the government for failing to ensure justice for the communal violence came from Peuhl community leaders. Many witnesses described seeing militiamen involved in some of the worst atrocities circulating freely in local markets just a few days after the killings. Others said soldiers or gendarmes who arrived just hours after attacks on Peuhl villagers failed to collect evidence or detain militiamen still present or near the scene.

Village leaders from Koumaga said they saw soldiers and militia leaders in the same vicinity just hours after the June 23, 2018 killings had occurred. “But they didn’t arrest them!” a witness said. “Twenty-three people had just been slaughtered and they don’t arrest anyone for questioning?”²⁶⁴

And as another witness said, “two days after the killings, on the day the government delegation visited the area to assess the damage and try to calm things down, the Dozos who took part in the killing were there, armed, walking around...we know who commands these people. We told the authorities, but no one was arrested.”²⁶⁵

Peuhl leaders said the military and political leaders, command structures and bases of the Dogon and Bambara self-defense groups were well known. “They talk on the radio and TV

²⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with chief, Djenné, September 15, 2018.

²⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with village leader from Koumaga, July 9, 2018.

²⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Koumaga resident, Sévaré, July 9, 2018.

all the time; we see their names in newspapers on the internet. If their boys are killing people and burning villages, why are they, the commanders, still running free?” one Peuhl elder said.

During 2018, the Malian authorities promised to conduct investigations into atrocities committed during communal violence. For example, on June 25, two days after the Koumaga killings, Radio France Internationale (RFI) quoted government spokesperson Amadou Koïta as saying “a judicial inquiry has been opened to ensure that these crimes will not go unpunished.”²⁶⁶ However, a dozen village chiefs interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they were aware of no investigations, and neither they nor any of their citizens had received a judicial summons.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ “Mali: La prince association peule parle de 37 morts apres l’attaque de Koumaga,” *Rfi Afrique*, June 25, 2018, <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20180625-mali-association-peule-parle-37-morts-attaque-koumaga> (accessed October 9, 2018).

²⁶⁷ At time of writing, village chiefs were still unaware of any investigations being opened into atrocities committed during episodes of communal violence.

Response from Malian Authorities

Human Rights Watch shared the major findings and recommendations contained in this report with government officials both during meetings in Mali and the United States, and in a letter sent to the government on November 14, 2018, through Mali's ambassador to the United States.

On November 28 and 29, 2018, Human Rights Watch received letters from the Ministry of Defense and Veterans, the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection, and from Mali's Ambassador to the United States, on behalf of the government, which detailed measures being taken to address communal violence. The letters further expressed the government's commitment to ensure better protection of civilians and justice for the serious crimes documented in the report, which we urge the government to undertake. All three letters are attached to the report as an appendix.

Government Response Regarding Allegations of State Support to Militias

The government denied providing support of any kind to self-defense groups in central Mali. In their written response to Human Rights Watch, the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection noted that, "The armed and security forces do not provide any equipment or training for the same militias we are trying to disarm."²⁶⁸

This assertion was previously made in interviews with several Ministry of Defense officials and two gendarme commanders in Mali. In July, General Keita, chief of staff of the Malian Armed Forces, told Human Rights Watch in a meeting: "We have never, and never will, provide weapons, ammunition, logistical support or training to self-defense groups in the Mopti region." He also noted that "the protection of civilian populations and their property against terrorist groups in central Mali is our responsibility, not the non-state actors. No one is allowed to do our job for us."²⁶⁹

²⁶⁸ See Annex: Lettre #3663, MSPC-SG-CT-ID, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministere de la Securite et de la Protection Civile.

²⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with General Keita, Bamako, July 16, 2018.

In meetings in Mali, a few security force members referenced Prime Minister Maiga’s March 2018 statement, also quoted by local and international media, that “the government will not subcontract its security” in a clear reference to the militias.²⁷⁰

Government Response to Lack of Progress on Disarming Abusive Militiamen

Security force officials interviewed in Mali said they were steadily and progressively making progress on disarming militias in central Mali. In July 2018, General Keita said:

The government has decided and ordered the disarmament of all those who are in areas of violence in central Mali, including traditional hunting rifles that have been cultural and religious property in families for generations. All weapons are now banned. The order has been clearly communicated by the government and we are doing that.²⁷¹

In October 2018, General Keita said the government had so far in 2018 recovered 360 guns from all sides, created a command post under the authority of the commander of the National Guard in Koro to better coordinate the government’s response to communal violence, including disarmament of the militias, and burned a hundred motorcycles in a July 2018 operation against Dogon militiamen.²⁷²

The Interior Ministry letter reiterated General Keita’s assertions and said the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Permanent Secretariat for Combating the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons are contributing to the disarmament process.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ “Tournee du PM : A Koro, Soumeylou Boubeye Maiga promet de desarmer tous les milices,” Malijet, March 26, 2018, http://malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/207095-tournee-du-pm-a-koro-soumeylou-boubeye-maiga-promet-de-desarmer.html (accessed October 9, 2018).

²⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with General Keita, Bamako, July 16, 2018.

²⁷² Human Rights Watch email exchange with General Keita, October 30, 2018.

²⁷³ See Annex: Lettre #3663, MSPC-SG-CT-ID, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministere de la Securite et de la Protection Civile.

²⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with General Keita, Bamako, July 16, 2018.

Government Response Regarding Alleged Inadequate Protection for Civilians

In both the written responses from the government and interviews with security force officials in Mali, the government said they understood the gravity of the problem posed by the rising communal violence and were actively taking measures to protect civilians both by disarming the militias and addressing the root causes of the violence. General Keita said that, “We are very aware and extremely concerned about the communal violence exploited by the terrorists. And we are acting.”

The letter from the Ministry of Defense and Veterans noted that Mali’s approach to reducing communal violence was multifaceted, incorporating security aspects, political aspects by way of a negotiation process to reconcile different ethnic groups, and social support by way of increasing services, economic opportunities, and the establishment of a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (*DDR*) program for combatants in central Mali. That said, they said they were well aware of their national and international obligations vis-a-vis civilian protection and ensuring justice for serious crimes.²⁷⁴

General Keita and the letter from the Interior Ministry noted that 16 new security posts had been established in central Mali in recent months, that more were planned, and that they had instituted programs to improve trust between local populations and security forces.²⁷⁵

Security force officials denied responding to communal violence in a partisan manner.²⁷⁶ They said allegations of a slow response time to community violence “can be explained mainly by the difficult operational environment, particularly the lack of resources and the challenging terrain .”²⁷⁷ General Keita noted that, “We are fighting terrorists in the north and now in the center. Mobility is difficult, we lack helicopters to increase our military presence.”²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ See Annex: Lettre #03949, MDAC-SG, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministere de la Defense et des Anciens Combattants.

²⁷⁵ See Annex: Lettre #3663, MSPC-SG-CT-ID, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministere de la Securite et de la Protection Civile.

²⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with General Keita, Bamako, July 16, 2018; and gendarme commander, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

²⁷⁷ See Annex: Lettre #03949, MDAC-SG, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministere de la Defense et des Anciens Combattants.

²⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with General Keita, Bamako July 16, 2018.

Political and military authorities said more support from Mali’s development partners was needed to assist them in fulfilling their mandate with respect to the protection of civilians. The letter from the defense ministry noted that it was “essential that the international community support the efforts of the government to reinforce the FAMA to fulfill its mandate, notably, the protection of civilians caught up in communal violence.”²⁷⁹

International security experts have recognized the challenges faced by the Malian security forces. A European security analyst said, “We don’t think the FAMA is supporting the militias in any official way, and they do intervene to stop their attacks sometimes. But their operational capacity to deploy is too little, too late, and with too few.”²⁸⁰

Another security analyst said, “The FAMA have enormous difficulties – of resources, of morale, much of it stemming from security problems all over the place, all the time. But another problem is their burdensome hierarchy and bureaucracy which slows down their response time.”²⁸¹

And another security analyst said, “the Malian G-5 Sahel force, which is pretty much a border operation to stop the spread of jihadism, is getting millions, but the Malian army responsible for operations elsewhere is desperately in need of resources to better protect civilians...a lot is being asked of them and they simply don’t have the resources to do it.”²⁸²

Government Response Regarding Justice for Serious Crimes

The government expressed its commitment to make progress fighting against impunity and ensuring justice, including for serious crimes of communal violence. One letter noted that the government of Mali “is deeply convinced that trust must be established, and justice be

²⁷⁹ See Annex: Lettre #03949, MDAC-SG, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministère de la Defense et des Anciens Combattants.

²⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with European security analyst, Bamako, July 6, 2018.

²⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with security analyst, Bamako, July 6, 2018.

²⁸² Human Rights Watch interview with security analyst, Bamako, July 16, 2018.

done, both in the name of justice for the victims and as a precondition for the establishment of durable peace.”²⁸³

In his letter which contained responses on behalf of the government, Mali’s ambassador to the United States, Mahamadou Nimaga, said that despite difficulties posed by the precarious security situation, judicial investigations are systematically opened into serious crimes being committed in central Mali that come to the judiciary’s attention.²⁸⁴

The government said some of the investigations conducted by both the Prosecutor’s Office of the High Court of Mopti and the Specialized Judicial Unit on Terrorism and Transnational Organized Crime had resulted in convictions, without providing details. The government also noted that not all investigations and legal proceedings are made public, but that this “does not mean in any way that the investigations are not being done.”²⁸⁵

A justice sector professional working in central Mali told Human Rights Watch that, indeed, several investigations into serious abuses committed by the self-defense groups had been opened in 2018, but that the precarious security situation had limited the ability of the gendarmes and local judges to make progress on them. He said:

Each time the judiciary hears of an incident of communal violence, a judicial inquiry is opened, technically speaking. There are many investigations into crimes associated with the communal violence – murder, grand animal theft, arms trafficking. However, the zone is extremely insecure because of jihadist threats, attacks and the growing number of IEDs. This has not only forced many judges of the peace to flee – including in Koro and Djenné cercles the epicenters of violence this year – but it has also made it difficult for gendarmes to conduct a proper investigation. The army has yet to deploy to several of the areas where

²⁸³ See Annex: Lettre #03949, MDAC-SG, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministère de la Defense et des Anciens Combattants.

²⁸⁴ See Annex: Lettre du Ambassade de la Republique du Mali, November, 28, 2018.

²⁸⁵ See Annex: Lettre #03949, MDAC-SG, Nov.29, 2019, from Ministère de la Defense et des Anciens Combattants.

there have been violations in recent months. And if the army is not there, the gendarmes can't go, and progress is difficult to make.²⁸⁶

Two gendarme commanders interviewed in central Mali told Human Rights Watch that the lack of resources to their units undermined efforts to investigate the many allegations they receive of arms trafficking to both Islamist armed groups and self-defense groups.²⁸⁷

In July, one gendarme commander said he had “pulled in for questioning a few local officials who were inflaming tensions,” and was investigating several cases of arms trafficking. “Even recently, we stopped a truck going to Bankass at a checkpoint not far from Sévaré and found guns in millet sacks,” he said. He stated that their investigations are hampered by a lack of resources. “It takes resources, fuel, vehicles, men to follow-up on all of these reports, which, frankly, we do not have.”²⁸⁸

Several justice professionals cited the 2016 arrest and 2017 conviction of several Bambara men for their killing of Peuhl men in 2016 near Maleimana as a positive example of justice.

When Human Rights Watch asked a government official why well-known perpetrators had not been arrested or at least questioned, he said the government had given priority to calming tensions and ensuring social equilibrium over ensuring justice:

The government's priority is on putting the fire out. During government delegations to present our condolences to the victims, we talk to and try to pressure the armed groups – but for the moment, for security reasons, it is difficult to detain them....it could enflame an already explosive situation.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch Interview with Justice Sector Official, Mopti region, July 13, 2018.

²⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch Interview with gendarme commanders, near Segou, February 8, 2018, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

²⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch Interview with a gendarme commander, Sévaré, July 12, 2018.

²⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ministry of Justice official, Bamako, July 6, 2018.

Mali's International Partners

Along with strong regional engagement with other countries in the Sahel, Mali counts the UN, the European Union, France and the United States among its key international partners.

In June 2017, Mali joined Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania and Niger in creating the G5 Sahel multinational counterterrorism military force, which obtained the support of the UN Security Council and the African Union. The force, comprised of seven battalions with 5,000 troops combined from affiliated countries, is headquartered in Bamako and concentrates much of its operations in Mali. The force has received funding pledges from the international community including the EU, which pledged €100, the US, which pledged \$111 million, and Saudi Arabia, which pledged €100 million.

In 2013, the United Nations established the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilized Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to support negotiations, and later the 2015 peace accord, protect civilians, and bolster political stability in Mali.²⁹⁰ The mission is comprised of more than 15,000 peacekeepers and personnel, frequently coordinates with the Malian armed forces, and has provided some logistical support to G5 Sahel troops. MINUSMA has also meaningfully contributed to training government security forces and members of the judiciary.

MINUSMA is mandated to provide protection to civilians under threat from armed groups, through military engagement as well as non-military means such as reconciliation efforts and community outreach. In 2016, the civilian protection mandate was strengthened by mandating MINUSMA support of the efforts of the Malian security forces to prevent the return of abusive armed groups in the north. The 2018 mandate renewal extended responsibility for supporting the Malian security forces and restoration of authority into central Mali. MINUSMA is also mandated to document and report publicly on rights violations.

²⁹⁰ "About MINUSMA," *United Nations Peacekeeping*, <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/about-minusma> (accessed October 9, 2018).

The European Union contributes to the capacity building of the Malian armed forces through the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) and the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP). Launched in February 2013, in the wake of French Operation Serval, the EUTM Mali mission assists in the training of the Malian armed forces. In May 2018, the European Union Council announced that it would extend the EUTM mandate until at least May 2020 and expanded its scope to provide additional training and support to G5 Sahel joint forces.²⁹¹

Through the European Union Development Fund (EDF) the EU has financed numerous programs to support Mali's development, including plans to address immediate humanitarian needs; encourage stabilization; and restore public administration and basic services. Additionally, the 2014 EDF approved €12 million to support justice reform and €5 million for a conflict prevention and reconciliation project.²⁹²

French military forces from Operation Barkhane, a 4500-strong ongoing antiterrorism operation in the Sahel region which began in 2014, regularly conducts operations in Mali, including in coordination with forces from Mali and G5-Sahel.²⁹³ In 2017, France and Germany launched the Sahel Alliance, a major economic development program, to address key factors underscoring insecurity in the Sahel.²⁹⁴ Mali is a priority country for French development aid. In 2017, the French Development Agency (AFD) supported over 50 programs, with a commitment of €357 million, prioritizing loans, grants and technical assistance.²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ "Mission de formation de l'UE au Mali : le Conseil proroge la mission de deux ans, avec un mandat elargi afin de prévoir un soutien à la force conjointe du G5 Sahel," European Union Council press release, Brussels, may 14, 2018, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/fr/press/press-releases/2018/05/14/eu-training-mission-in-mali-council-extends-mission-for-two-years-with-broadened-mandate-to-include-support-for-g5-sahel-joint-force/> (accessed November 21, 2018).

²⁹² European Commission, "Mali," undated, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/countries/mali_en (accessed November 21, 2018).

²⁹³ "Ministry of the Army of France, "Dossier de Presse Opération Barkhane" https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/content/download/546847/9337736/20181031_NP_EMA%20CABCOM_DP%20BARKHANE_vf%281%29.pdf, (accessed November 29, 2018).

²⁹⁴ "G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Sahel Alliance" France Diplomatie, undated, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/defence-security/crisis-and-conflicts/g5-sahel-joint-force-and-the-sahel-alliance/> (accessed November 28, 2018).

²⁹⁵ "Mali," Agence Francaise de Developpement, undated, <http://www.afd.fr/en/page-region-pays/mali> (accessed November 29, 2018).

The United States provides assistance to the Malian security services through the Security Governance Initiative, launched in 2015, which focuses on strengthening the military justice system, training officers and supporting the creation of a national security council, defense sector reform, and training of a counterterrorism rapid response unit.²⁹⁶The US Agency for International Development approved a \$690 million investment for fiscal years 2016-2020 to provide humanitarian assistance; improve the delivery of public services; and counter violent extremism. ²⁹⁷

Mali is a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which opened an investigation in January 2013 into alleged war crimes and other crimes committed since January 2012. As of March 2018, the investigation has yielded two cases: Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud, who is charged with war crimes and whose confirmation of charges hearing is scheduled to take place in the first half of 2019 and Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, who was found guilty and sentenced to nine years imprisonment in 2016. ²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ United States Department of State, "Security Government Initiative," August 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/254115.pdf> (accessed October 31, 2018).

²⁹⁷ "US Relations with Mali," Department of State of the United States of America, <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2828.htm> (accessed December 4, 2018)

²⁹⁸ "Situation in Mali: Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud surrendered to the ICC on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Timbuktu," International Criminal Court press release, March 31, 2018, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=pr1376> (accessed November 20, 2018).

Acknowledgments

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Appendix I: Letter from the Ministry of Internal Security and Civil Protection

**MINISTRE DE LA SECURITE
ET DE LA PROTECTION CIVILE**

SECRETARIAT GENERAL

BP: E- 4771 Tél: 20228058 - 20229208



N° - 3 6 6 3 - /MSPC-SG-CT-ID

REPUBLIQUE DU MALI

Un Peuple – Un But – Une Foi

Bamako, le 29 NOV 2018

**Le Ministre de la Sécurité
et de la Protection Civile**
A

**Madame le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères
et de la Coopération Internationale**

OBJET: Rapport de l'ONG Human Rights Watch sur les violences communautaires dans la région de Mopti pour l'année 2018.

Référence : Message Fax N°0824 MAECI/DAJ-DREG-CD du 19 novembre 2018.

Comme suite à votre message dont référence et objet ci-dessus, j'ai l'honneur de vous informer que depuis la mise en place du Plan de Sécurisation Intégré des Régions du Centre (PSIRC Mopti et Ségou), la gouvernance et la situation sécuritaire se sont nettement améliorées dans lesdites régions.

Pour les besoins de sécurisation des populations, seize (016) postes de sécurité sur un total de vingt-neuf (029) ont été mis en place et ont largement contribué à la tenue, de façon apaisée, de l'élection présidentielle de 2018.

La couverture sécuritaire s'étend non seulement au fleuve à travers les brigades fluviales et les centres de secours fluviaux, mais aussi aux zones inondée et exondée et à la bande frontalière avec le Burkina Faso.

La mise en œuvre du PSIRC a permis le retour tant de l'administration dans la vingtaine de localités qui en étaient dépourvues que des services sociaux de base comme l'éducation, la santé, les projets agricoles et hydrauliques, les réseaux de télévision et de téléphonie.

L'appui de la communauté internationale est salubre dans cette mise en œuvre, à travers notamment les opérations mixtes, les formations et les constructions de sites pour les postes de sécurité.

Des affrontements entre divers acteurs de l'insécurité ont cependant fait des victimes de part et d'autre, pour lesquels des enquêtes ont été ouvertes aux fins de droit par le Pôle Judiciaire Spécialisé de Lutte contre le Terrorisme et la Criminalité transnationale organisée dont la Brigade d'Investigations Spéciale sera dotée d'unités régionales afin d'en renforcer l'efficacité.

Il importe de rappeler que :

- les conflits entre éleveurs et agriculteurs qui ont toujours existé dans les régions du centre, ont cependant pris de l'ampleur avec le recul de l'administration et la présence de terroristes et de bandits armés ;
- les forces armées et de sécurité n'apportent ni équipement ni formation aux milices qu'elles cherchent plutôt à désarmer. Pour ce faire, la Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre la Prolifération des Armes légères et de petit Calibre et le Secrétariat permanent de la Lutte Contre la Prolifération des Armes légères et de petit Calibre sont à pied d'œuvre à travers des missions de sensibilisation et de collecte des dites armes.

Au titre du renforcement de la cohésion sociale, mon département a mis en place le Plan Cadre pour l'amélioration du lien de confiance entre les forces de sécurité et les populations, qui ambitionne de :

- développer une gestion concertée de la sécurité ;
- assurer une compréhension commune et partagée des rôles et responsabilités de chaque acteur ;
- adapter les capacités des forces de sécurité à un contexte sécuritaire évolutif ;
- asseoir un processus de recrutement plus ouvert.



Général de Division Salif TRAORE

Officier de l'Ordre National

Appendix II: Letter from the Ambassador of Mali to the United States

AMBASSADE DE LA REPUBLIQUE
DU MALI
AUX ETATS UNIS D'AMERIQUE



EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC
OF MALI
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Washington, D.C., le 28 Novembre 2018

N0. 2018-127/AMW/ASCC

A Madame Corinne DUFKA,
Directrice Associée, Afrique de l'Ouest
Human Rights Watch

Madame la Directrice,

Faisant suite à votre correspondance en date du 14 novembre 2018, par laquelle vous m'avez soumis le rapport provisoire que Human Right Watch s'apprête à publier sur la violence communautaire dans la région de Mopti en 2018, j'ai l'honneur de vous faire part ci-après, les éléments et commentaires du Gouvernement du Mali :

- Sur les allégations portant sur l'échec du Gouvernement à respecter ses promesses faites au début de l'année 2018, de punir les auteurs des graves violences commises, il est nécessaire de signaler que des enquêtes judiciaires ont été systématiquement ouvertes, toutes les fois ou des faits, susceptibles de constituer une infraction, ont été constatés dans la région de Mopti, parmi lesquels certains ont abouti à un jugement.
- En ce qui concerne les accusations d'absence de poursuite judiciaire contre les responsables de graves violations des droits de l'homme, les enquêtes judiciaires ont été diligentées au niveau du Parquet du Tribunal de Grande Instance de Mopti et du Pole judiciaire spécialisé dans la lutte contre le terrorisme.
- Le Gouvernement du Mali rappelle que malgré les difficultés liées à la situation sécuritaire, la justice malienne continue de poser des actes pertinents dans le cadre de la lutte contre l'impunité sur toute l'étendue du territoire national, particulièrement dans la région de Mopti.

Par ailleurs, il convient de noter que l'évaluation de la situation des droits de l'homme dans notre pays se fait de façon régulière et formelle au niveau des instances internationales comme le Conseil des droits de l'homme à travers ses sessions annuelles et le mécanisme de l'Examen Périodique Universel (EPU). A l'instar des Etats membres du Conseil, les organisations de la société civile internationale participent à ces différentes sessions et examens.

Je voudrais réitérer la disponibilité du Gouvernement du Mali à maintenir une franche collaboration avec votre organisation dans le but de promouvoir davantage les droits de l'homme dans notre pays.

Veillez agréer, Madame la Directrice, l'expression de mes cordiales salutations.

L'Ambassadeur



Mahamadou NIMAGA

Officier de l'Ordre National

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Appendix III: Letter from the Minister of Defense and Veterans

MINISTÈRE DE LA DÉFENSE ET
DES ANCIENS COMBATTANTS

REPUBLIQUE DU MALI
Un Peuple - Un But - Une foi

SECRETARIAT GENERAL



N° 03949 / MDAC-SG

Bamako, le 29 NOV 2018

*Le Ministre de la Défense
et des Anciens Combattants*
A

Madame la Ministre des Affaires
Etrangères et de la Coopération
Internationale

Bamako

Objet: Rapport de l'ONG Human Rights Watch.

Référence: Votre Message Fax n°0825/MAECI/DAJ/DREG-CD du 19 novembre 2018.

Comme suite à suite transmission visée en référence, j'ai l'honneur de vous communiquer la position de mon département sur les points soulevés par l'ONG Human Rights Watch.

Les faits articulés contre le Gouvernement et les autorités ne reposent pas sur des preuves tangibles et documentées qui peuvent donner lieu à une discussion. Cependant, la note ci-annexée résume bien la situation du centre et les efforts fournis par les responsables du pays pour stabiliser la situation.

Vous en souhaitant bonne réception, veuillez agréer Madame la Ministre, l'expression de mes salutations distinguées

Pour le Ministre et par ordre,
le Secrétaire Général

Général de Brigade Ibrahim FANE
Chevalier de l'Ordre National

Rapport de l'ONG Human Rights Watch
sur les violences communautaires dans la région de Mopti
pour l'année 2018

Réponse du Gouvernement

Le Gouvernement du Mali a des réserves sur les conclusions du rapport de l'ONG Human Rights Watch sur les violences communautaires dans la région de Mopti pour l'année 2018, tendant à faire croire que les Autorités ont "largement échoué à respecter les promesses faites début 2018, qu'aucune poursuite judiciaire n'a été lancée contre les responsables de graves violations", et que le "manque de responsabilité pour les abus peut encourager les groupes armés à commettre de nouvelles exactions".

Human Rights Watch HRW réfère, par ailleurs, à des témoignages "non documentés" de près de 180 victimes et témoins, qui auraient été obtenus lors d'entretiens réalisés au cours de missions de recherche au Mali.

Ne présentant aucune preuve qui affirmerait leur véracité, ces soi-disant témoins accusent "l'Armée de soutenir les milices ou de collaborer directement avec elles, notamment en leur fournissant des armes et un soutien logistique", des allégations qui n'ont pu être confirmées par HRW elle-même, et prétendent que l'interdiction par les FDS de la circulation de motos entre les villages est appliquée d'une façon non-impartiale, et que "des Chefs de milices auraient reçu ce qu'ils qualifiaient de dons de quelques membres des Forces de sécurité et de responsables du gouvernement".

L'absence de fondement de nombreuses allégations que contient ce rapport relatif aux violences communautaires dans la région de Mopti pour l'année 2018 impose, ci-dessous, les quelques points d'éclaircissements suivants.

1)- Sur les réponses des Forces de sécurité aux violences communautaires en 2018

Les Forces de Défense et de Sécurité (FDS) Maliennes sont astreintes au respect strict de la réglementation sur les Droits de l'Homme. L'usage de la force par les FDS est rigoureusement encadré par les règles d'engagement, les lois et règlements en vigueur. Il reste proportionné à l'ampleur de la menace asymétrique.

En outre, afin de prévenir et rapporter les éventuelles bavures, les Forces de Défense et de Sécurité sont toujours accompagnées en opération d'un détachement de Gendarmerie en prévision dans les zones en proie à la violence dans le Centre du Mali.

Aussi, lorsqu'elles s'avèrent fondées, toutes les allégations d'exactions signalées font systématiquement l'objet d'investigation et des sanctions disciplinaires sont prises à l'encontre de leurs auteurs, sans préjudice des poursuites pénales.

Les allégations de lenteur occasionnelle des délais de réponse des FDS à la violence communautaire s'expliquent, principalement, par l'environnement opérationnel difficile, notamment l'insuffisance des ressources et l'impraticabilité du terrain.

En effet, courant 2018, malgré toutes ces difficultés, les efforts déployés par les Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMA) ont permis la création de plus de quinze nouveaux postes de sécurité dans la région de Mopti, le désarmement effectif de centaines de miliciens de tous bords, la récupération de centaines d'armes des deux camps - Dogon et Peul - ainsi que la destruction d'une centaine de motos lors d'une opération contre les miliciens dogons.

2)- Sur le rôle du Gouvernement

Le Gouvernement du Mali est parfaitement conscient que c'est de la responsabilité de l'Etat de prendre des mesures appropriées pour assurer la sécurité et la protection de ses citoyens, protéger les communautés exposées et désarmer les groupes d'autodéfense là où ils opèrent.

Ainsi, la capacité de l'Etat à se tenir comme un arbitre légitime des conflits locaux a même de soutenir la négociation d'accords entre communautés du Centre, et de répondre aux besoins exprimés par les différentes couches de la population en termes de services sociaux de base, est plus que jamais primordiale pour permettre le retour de la stabilité dans les régions concernées.

Dans ce contexte, le Gouvernement du Mali s'investit sans réserve dans la résolution des tensions communautaires pour une solution et une paix durables, et ne cesse de réitérer son engagement à assumer ses responsabilités envers toutes les communautés Maliennes dans la région et honorer ses obligations en matière de Droits de l'Homme, dans le strict respect des instruments juridiques internationaux auxquels il a souscrit et de sa législation nationale.

Le quatrième déplacement du Premier ministre, Chef du Gouvernement, Monsieur Soumeylou Bouyeve MAIGA, à la tête d'une importante délégation composée de ministres et de parlementaires dans la région de Mopti, le 2 octobre 2018, avait pour objectif de constater le retour progressif des services sociaux de base dans le Centre du Mali, dans le contexte de la rentrée scolaire 2018-2019. Il visait également à accompagner la volonté des populations à s'insérer dans le processus de dialogue politique prôné par l'Etat pour le désarmement des milices: le retour de la paix et de la coexistence pacifique entre les communautés peul et dogon.

Il ne peut s'agir, par conséquent, comme le prétend le rapport de HRW, d'un quelconque échec du Gouvernement de tenir les promesses 2018.

En effet, persuadé des limites d'une réponse exclusivement sécuritaire, le Gouvernement du Mali propose des solutions traitant simultanément les enjeux sécuritaires, politiques et sociaux, en lien étroit avec les acteurs locaux porteurs de revendications.

On note, à cet égard, la mise en place des camps de regroupement pour anciens combattants pour la région Centre, dans les cercles de Douentza, Tenenkou et Koro. Ces camps, en plus de ceux mis sur pied en collaboration avec la MINUSMA pour les régions Nord dans le cadre des programmes de DDR, ont pour principal objectif de désarmer les milices d'autodéfense. Ils offrent, également, une alternative matérielle aux individus désireux de se démarquer des groupes radicaux, en leur proposant un possible accès au processus de DDR.

Parallèlement, un dialogue a été ouvert par le gouvernement malien sur les liens entre sécurité et développement, à travers le lancement du Plan de Sécurisation Intégrée des Régions du Centre (PSIRC) faisant des propositions concrètes sur le redéploiement de FDS Maliennes.

D'autres initiatives, moins formelles ou plus discrètes, ont également vu le jour afin d'ouvrir un dialogue politique avec les parties en conflit dans la région - ainsi des missions de dialogue et de bons offices, ou des contacts entre élites dirigeantes à Bamako et leaders communautaires de la région de Mopti.

3)-**Sur la Justice** et la responsabilité pour les épisodes de violence communautaires en 2018, le Gouvernement du Mali est profondément convaincu que la vérité doit être absolument établie et que justice soit faite pour les violences commises, à la fois au nom du droit des victimes et comme précondition à l'instauration d'une paix durable

Dans ce cadre, les procédures disciplinaires de l'Armée sont désormais complétées par des enquêtes judiciaires appropriées menées par le ministère de la Justice. Aussi, plusieurs autres mesures importantes sont prises, notamment

- l'instruction formelle aux commandants des troupes engagées de remettre dès arrestation à la disposition des unités prévôtales de la Gendarmerie toute personne interpellée lors d'opérations militaires aux fins d'enquête ;
- l'instruction formelle à toutes unités prévôtales de la Gendarmerie de produire un rapport mensuel sur les éventuelles violations des droits humains, et la poursuite de la formation et de la sensibilisation des forces armées en matière de droits humains

C'est dire que le Gouvernement s'efforce de remédier au manque de capacité du système judiciaire national pour enquêter sur les assassinats et autres abus, le pillage, l'incendie et la destruction de villages

Certes, le fait que les enquêtes et les poursuites judiciaires engagées contre les responsables de graves violations ne soient pas toujours communiquées au public ne signifie en aucun cas que celles-ci ne sont pas menées

Les investigations seront diligentées pour tous les cas de violation des Droits de l'Homme signalés aux Autorités. Des sanctions appropriées seront prises et communiquées le cas échéant. Aussi, il est à signaler que l'apparition de cas et les traitements juridiques nécessitent des délais long.

Conclusion

L'expansion des groupes terroristes et les réseaux de criminalité transnationale organisée, ainsi que la prolifération des armes légères et de petit calibre au Centre du Mali doivent être précisément analysées. La création, en mars 2017, d'une coalition de groupes terroristes au Mali, le Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM), associant des groupes armés de la région de Mopti dont la Katiba Macina, semble inscrire les différents groupes djihadistes du Mali dans le cadre d'une lutte globale dépassant les dynamiques strictement régionales.

Les cibles même des attaques dans la région varient fortement- autorités traditionnelles et notabilités locales, la MINUSMA et les forces de défense et de sécurité maliennes, individus particuliers, plus récemment écoles- ce qui complique encore la lecture des actes de violence

Il est, donc, essentiel, dans le contexte actuel, de situer les dynamiques de la violence au Centre Mali dans un contexte plus large et de comprendre les logiques-historiques, politiques, économiques et communautaires de la zone, afin d'y répondre de façon la plus pertinente

Il est aussi et surtout, essentiel que la communauté internationale appuie davantage les efforts du Gouvernement à renforcer les capacités des Forces Armées Maliennes (FAMA) pour s'acquitter de son mandat, notamment, une meilleure protection des populations civiles prises dans la violence communautaire

Bamako, le 27 Novembre 2018



Over 200 civilians have been killed and dozens of villages burned in communal violence in Mali's central Mopti region during 2018. The violence has also led to widespread displacement, hunger, and looting of livestock. The majority of victims are ethnic Peuhl targeted by Dogon and Bambara self-defense groups for their alleged support of armed Islamists.

Since 2015, Islamist armed groups have increased their presence in central Mali, where they have executed perceived government supporters and committed other abuses. Their recruitment of local Peuhl residents has inflamed tensions among the Peuhl, Bambara, and Dogon ethnic groups, spawning the growth of the often-abusive self-defense militias. Easy access to firearms and the weak presence of state security forces have contributed to the militarization of the self-defense groups, exacerbating existing communal tensions.

"We Used To Be Brothers," documents massacres, attacks on villages, and retaliatory killings of Peuhl, Dogon, and Bambara civilians in central Mali in 2018. It recommends that Mali's government investigate and prosecute the killings and other abuses, step up security force patrols to protect vulnerable populations, and ensure the security forces respond to the violence quickly and impartially. The report urges Mali's international partners to support the government to hold those implicated in communal violence accountable.

Peuhl animal herders waiting to cross the Bani River, near Sofara, central Mali. On August 7, 2018, Dozo militia allegedly detained 11 Peuhl traders as they waited to cross the river to go to Sofara market, and later killed them.

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