

Beat: News

UN EXPERT CALLS FOR INDEPENDENT PROBE INTO MOURA MASSACRE IN MALI

300 CIVILIAN MEN ALLEGEDLY KILLED

Paris, Washington DC, 07.04.2022, 16:40 Time

USPA NEWS - A UN human rights expert on Wednesday called for a full and independent investigation into alleged mass crimes committed in central Mali's Mopti region late last month, and pleaded with all parties to ensure the "absolute protection" of civilians and an end to the current vicious cycle of violence.

Alioune Tine, the Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Mali, expressed alarm about unconfirmed reports that members of the Malian armed forces, accompanied by Russian private military personnel, executed dozens of civilians during a military operation from 27 to 31 March, in Moura. According to news reports, and a detailed report from the authoritative NGO Human Rights Watch, released on Tuesday, around 300 civilian men were allegedly killed over a period of five days, during the Government sanctioned operation carried out against suspected jihadists. In addition to summary executions and other killings, the expert said in a press release, there had also been reports of rape, arbitrary arrests, looting and theft.

CHRONIC INSTABILITY

Mali has been plagued by violence, political upheaval and allegations of human rights abuses for the past decade, since a failed Islamist coup in the north, left swathes of the central and northern regions vulnerable to armed groups, and battling a humanitarian crisis, and constant food insecurity. A wave of attacks by groups such as the Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as some operations by the Malian military, have trapped civilians in the grip of jihadist and military violence since the start of the year, said the UN human rights office OHCHR. In a statement on 1 April, the Malian Army Etat-Major confirmed that the armed forces had conducted a "large-scale" military operation in the Moura area from 23 to 31 March. As a result, it said, 203 fighters from "armed terrorist groups" were killed and 51 people arrested. In a statement on 5 April, the Malian Army Etat-Major denied its involvement in human rights violations in Moura. Eyewitnesses reportedly said that Malian soldiers had arrived by helicopter and exchanged gunfire with militants, but had then killed unarmed men trying to flee, in groups of up to ten at a time.

DELIVERING JUSTICE "In view of the serious allegations of mass crimes, with dozens of civilians killed during these operations, I call on the Malian authorities to conduct a thorough, independent, impartial and effective investigation into all alleged violations as soon as possible," Tine said. "The findings must be made public and the alleged perpetrators brought to justice." "The information received at this stage raises serious questions and concerns about potential serious violations of international human rights law and/or international humanitarian law. In addition, some of these violations may constitute crimes within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court," the expert added. Failure to bring alleged perpetrators of human rights violations to justice could undermine the confidence of the population in the armed forces and be exploited or instrumentalized by armed groups, presenting themselves as a credible alternative to the failure of the State, Tine said. "The fight against impunity is therefore a priority and a constituent element of the fight against terrorism," he added.

ACCESS NEEDED

"I urge the transitional Malian authorities to grant unhindered access to the Human Rights and Protection Division of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) so that it can conduct a thorough investigation to shed light on allegations of serious human rights violations, in accordance with the mandate of the UN Security Council." The UN expert repeated his call for the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open investigations as soon as possible to establish criminal responsibility for crimes under the Rome Statute that have been committed in the past and that continue to be committed in Mali." Source: UN News.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-20394/un-expert-calls-for-independent-probe-into-moura-massacre-in-mali.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDSiV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Jedi Foster, RSR

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619