

ACSRT/Incident-Preliminary-Report-02-2019

26<sup>th</sup> March 2019

## Preliminary Report

### 160 Ethnic Fulanis killed in Central Mali

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019

#### Incident:

On Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2019, armed men dressed as traditional Dozo hunters attacked the villages of Ogossagou and Welingara in Central Mali and killed at least 160 inhabitants while injuring over 55 others. Although the initial body count a day after the gruesome killings was 136, the number has since risen to 160 and possibly more. The victims are said to be predominantly ethnic Fulani. The massacre, which began at 04:00 hrs (0400 GMT), is the deadliest single incident since the French intervened in Mali in the aftermath of the Tuareg uprising in 2012.

According to security sources, the dead included pregnant women, children and elderly people.



The attack occurred as a U.N. Security Council mission visited Mali aimed at seeking solutions to violence that killed hundreds of civilians in 2018 and which is fast spreading across the Sahel region of West Africa particularly Burkina Faso and Niger. The mission was also to assess the challenges for the implementation of the 2015 Peace Agreement.

Following the incident, Malian President, Ibrahim Boubakar Keita held an extraordinary Council of Ministers meeting on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March after which he condemned the attack and ordered the dismissal of two Generals, Chief of Army Staff General M'Bemba Moussa Keita and Chief of Land Forces General Abdrahmane Baby. The president also called for the

dissolution of the Dan Nan Ambassagou association (Dozo self-defence groups) and reaffirmed that the protection of the population remained the monopoly of the state.

### **Analysis:**

Maliens have grown increasingly frustrated by the failure of government forces to protect them from both jihadist onslaughts and ethnic reprisals. But the massacre of civilians in the villages of Ogossagou and Welingara that left charred bodies of women and children smouldering in their homes has shocked both the local and international community and clearly demonstrates the enormity of the incident since northern Mali fell to armed rebels and jihadi groups in 2012.

The gravity of the onslaught attracted condemnations from Africa and beyond. The Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat in a communique, condemned what he called a despicable attack on innocent and defenceless civilians and urged the relevant authorities to do everything possible to identify the perpetrators and bring them to justice. The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, expressed shock and outrage and called on the Malian authorities to quickly investigate the tragedy and bring its perpetrators to book. The UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) followed suit in strongly condemning the attacks. The Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA, ex-rebellion) also condemned with the utmost energy this imprescriptible crime" and called "to the immediate cessation of these massacres which are akin to a real orchestrated pogrom". The EU on its part called for immediate measures including the disarmament and dismantling of all the militias in central Mali while France welcomed the commitment of the Malian government to dissolve militias that fuel terror in the region.

The assault occurred six days after the JNIM attacked a military base in Dioura, in the same region that claimed the lives of 26 Malian soldiers. According to the Al Qaeda coalition group, the attack against the military base was retaliation for purported heinous crimes committed by the Bamako government forces and the militias that support them against what the Group called their Fulani brothers. The statement by the JNIM led to some speculations that the attack on the Fulani populace was also in retaliation for the Dioura incident. However, there is no evidence that the government was backing any militia against the Fulanis.



The violence that rocked northern Mali in 2012 is fast moving to the centre of the country. The number of violent incidences in central Mali surpassed those in the north in 2018 and the early part of 2019. While violence persists, the Peace Agreement reached in 2015 is yet

to be fully implemented. Although the UN Secretary-General acknowledged that progress has been made in the implementation of the agreement, the process is still frustratingly slow according to some UNSC members.

The continued spread of violence from the north to central Mali, diverts attention from the agreement and complicates its implementation process.

Jihadi groups linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in central Mali, particularly the Macina Liberation Front (MLF) led by Amadou Kouffa, would seek to exploit the tragedy to recruit more Fulanis into their ranks. Amadou Kouffa has successfully taken advantage of ethnic rivalries to boost recruitment and render vast swathes of territory virtually ungovernable.

### **Conclusion:**

As indicated in our Preliminary Analysis following the re-emergence of Amadou Kouffa, (ACSRT/Incident-Preliminary-Report-01-2019 dated 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019), the deteriorating security situation in central Mali demonstrates the inability of the government to obtain information necessary to preserve lives and property. The announcement for the dissolution of the self-defence groups must be accompanied by the institution of measures to guarantee the safety of citizens as the emergence of the self-defence groups have been attributed to the state's failure to protect the local communities.

This is indeed very crucial as the leader of the Dogon militia blamed for a massacre, Youssouf Toloba, denied the involvement of his fighters but defended the existence of the Dan Nan Ambassagou militia because the Malian military, according to him, had failed to respond to violence in Dogon villages. He dismissed President Keita's vow to eliminate the group, noting that the President did not create the group and as such could not proscribe it. His bluff shows the lack of trust in the Malian security services in a part of the country where the State's presence is hardly felt.

Be that as it may, the government of President Boubakar Keita has to demonstrate that it is capable of dissolving the self-defence groups and disarming them. In this regard, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program that begun in the north as part of the 2015 Peace Agreement and which is being extended to central Mali should be accelerated to ensure that the dissolved self-defence groups are fully disarmed and properly reintegrated into their various local communities.

Should there be the absence of the State in those communities where jihadi activities are rife, the groups will emerge again but will only operate underground, a situation that will further complicate an already complex situation.