

AI Index: PRE 01/021/2013  
16 January 2013

## **Mali: ICC investigation of conflict crimes a key step towards justice**

Today's announcement that the International Criminal Court (ICC) will open an investigation into crimes under international law committed over the past year of conflict in Mali is a crucial step towards justice for the victims, Amnesty International said.

ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's announcement comes after a request from the Malian government last July to investigate cases of crimes under international law committed since January 2012, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, torture, enforced disappearances and the use of child soldiers.

"This is an important opportunity to ensure justice for victims of crimes under international law committed over the past year in Mali and sends an important message to those planning and committing such crimes that they cannot act with impunity and may be brought to justice," said Paule Rigaud, Deputy Africa Programme Director at Amnesty International.

On 18 July 2012, six months after the conflict began, Mali's Minister of Justice Malick Coulibaly delivered a letter to the ICC Prosecutor, referring the situation in Mali on the basis that national authorities are unable to investigate and prosecute the crimes.

Once again, Amnesty International urges the ICC Prosecutor to investigate fully crimes committed by all sides across the country.

"Although much attention is focused on the situation in northern Mali, it's crucial that the ICC looks at the full scope of alleged crimes across the country, including those carried out by Malian security forces," said Rigaud.

Since the beginning of the armed conflict in northern Mali in January 2012, Amnesty International has documented crimes under international law committed by all the parties to the conflict.

Tuareg and Islamist armed opposition groups have committed human rights abuses, including torture and killings of captured Malian soldiers, rape of women and girls and recruitment of child soldiers. They have also attacked and destroyed cultural and religious sites.

Malian security forces have also committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the extrajudicial executions of Tuareg civilians, indiscriminate shelling of a Tuareg nomadic camp and killing livestock which the nomadic population rely on for survival.

Crimes are not confined to the north of the country. Amnesty International has also documented cases of torture, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances and attacks against political leaders, journalists and other people who expressed dissent peacefully in the south, where the capital Bamako lies.

Measures must also be taken by the Mali government to ensure justice, truth and reparation for all victims. Despite several enquiries being opened into some of these incidents, no cases have been brought before national courts.

"The ICC will only ever be able to prosecute a small number of cases. It is essential that effective measures are taken to strengthen the Malian justice system to investigate and - when there is sufficient admissible evidence - prosecute other crimes that the ICC is unable to deal with and to ensure truth and full reparation for victims to help them rebuild their lives," said Rigaud.

The ICC announcement comes just days after French troops, at the request of the Malian government, launched a counter-offensive against armed Islamist groups to prevent the capture of cities in the south of the country.