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Mali: Government must stop bombing civilians

The Malian government must end bomb attacks against the civilian population in the north of the country, Amnesty International said today after a four year old girl was killed amid shelling.

Fata Walette Ahmedou was injured yesterday afternoon after an army helicopter shelled the Kel Essouck camp near the northern town of Kidal, some 1,600 km north-east of the capital Bamako. She died of her injuries on Thursday morning

At least 12 other people were wounded in the attack, including Khawlata Walette Alladi who suffered severe pelvic wounds and had to have her leg amputated. Another woman who had recently given birth suffered head injuries.

“It’s the civilian population who is bearing the brunt of this indiscriminate bombing. In addition to human casualties, the attacks have killed dozens of cattle, camels and goats which the Nomad Tuareg population rely on,” said Gaëtan Mootoo, Amnesty International’s researcher on West Africa.

“These bombings violate international humanitarian law and the government must stop them immediately.”

The Kidal area has been bombed by Malian army helicopters since 11 February.

One witness told Amnesty International that 15 shelling cartridges with propellers were found after the latest attack. .

The Azawad National Liberation Movement (Mouvement national de liberation de l’Azawad, (MNLA), a Tuareg armed opposition group, launched a military uprising in the north of the country last month.

Since then dozens of people have been killed and thousands displaced by fighting between the MNLA and Mali’s military. Thousands of people have fled across the border into neighbouring Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.

On 18 February 2012 the MNLA reportedly killed a traditional leader Moussa Balobo Maïga in Hombori, some 900 km north-east of Bamako. The MNLA denied being responsible of this killing and accused the Malian gendarmerie (paramilitary police).

Amnesty International is also concerned about reports that on February 17 two Tuareg Red Cross staff were briefly detained and ill-treated by the military outside Kidal.

“The Malian army and the MNLA must do their utmost to protect anyone not taking an active part in hostilities as stated in the Geneva Conventions,” said Gaëtan Mootoo.