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Mali: Mutinous soldiers captured and killed in purge

Elements of Mali's military appear to be carrying out a purge and extrajudicial killings of soldiers who took part in a mutiny last month in a barracks outside the capital Bamako, Amnesty International said today based on its research.

The bodies of four soldiers were discovered earlier this month near the capital and several others, including a Colonel, remain unaccounted for. These apparent extrajudicial executions and disappearances raise fears that soldiers loyal to General Amadou Haya Sanogo, who staged a coup in March 2012, are purging their ranks to quell dissent.

"This is the latest shocking example of how a small group of soldiers who appear to consider themselves above the law continue to cling onto power in Mali," said Gaëtan Mootoo, Amnesty International's researcher on West Africa.

The organization is calling for the Malian authorities to open an independent and impartial investigation into these very serious events, and ensure that those allegedly responsible for the acts are suspended from duty and prosecuted. Such investigations will be a crucial addition to the efforts to restore the rule of law after the armed conflict in northern Mali.

"It's appalling to see that despite the election of a democratically elected president in August 2013, a small group of soldiers loyal to the former junta continue to impose terror on their perceived opponents, in total impunity," said Mootoo.

The soldiers who were allegedly extrajudicially executed appear to have been targeted because they took part in a mutiny on 30 September at the Kati military barracks near the capital Bamako. The soldiers revolted against some officials in the ex-junta, especially its leader General Sanogo, for failing to promote their ranks. In a statement, the soldiers said they decided to take up arms to demand their right to be promoted and to receive payment that was due to them.

One of them, first class soldier (soldat première classe) Lassiné Keita, was arrested by soldiers loyal to the ex-junta in a bar in Bamako on the night of 30 September.

A witness contacted by Amnesty International said: "I was with [Lassiné Keita]. I went out at one point and when I came back I was told that my friend had been taken away by soldiers."

Lassiné Keita's body was later found near Kati barracks on 4 October.

The body of another soldier, Dramane Cissoko, was reportedly dropped off at a morgue in Bamako.

Since the mutiny, the whereabouts of Colonel Youssouf Traoré remain unknown and Amnesty International fears that he may have been subjected to enforced disappearance. The corpse of his bodyguard, Salif Meiga, nicknamed "Ganda Koye", was found with his head severed and his driver is also reportedly missing. Colonel Traoré was one of the leaders of the military junta that overthrew the democratically elected President Amadou Toumani Touré in March 2012.

"It's deeply troubling how the soldiers allegedly responsible for these extrajudicial executions and enforced disappearances continue to target military personnel or civilians believed to resist or protest against General Sanogo's de facto rule," said Gaëtan Mootoo.

In the wake of the 30 September mutiny, some 30 soldiers were arrested and are currently detained at the Camp I of the gendarmerie. Some of them handed themselves over to the gendarmerie to seek protection.

"Any detained soldiers must be protected against torture and other ill-treatment and against any reprisals, including enforced disappearance," said Gaëtan Mootoo.

Background

Since the March 2012 military coup in Mali, the soldiers who led the putsch have committed serious human rights violations without being held to account.

Amnesty International documented the case of 21 soldiers who have been subjected to an enforced disappearance after being abducted from their cell in the Kati barracks in early May 2012. These soldiers were accused of being supporters of former President Touré and of staging a counter-coup.