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Mali must urgently identify bodies found in mass grave

Authorities in Mali must urgently identify the 21 bodies found in a mass grave last night, believed to belong to soldiers abducted in May 2012, Amnesty International said.

“Ever since the soldiers were abducted from the Kati Military Camp, their loved ones have been desperate to know what has happened to them. Authorities in Mali must now do everything in their power to give the families the full truth,” said Gaëtan Mootoo, Mali researcher at Amnesty International, who met with some of the relatives of the soldiers last week.

“Unfortunately, the initial reports seem to confirm our fears that the 21 soldiers could have been executed,” added Gaëtan Mootoo. “Amnesty International extends its deepest sympathies to all the families concerned.”

The mass grave was discovered following the arrest of General Amadou Haya Sanogo who led a military coup in Mali in March 2012. Several of his soldiers were also detained.

They were charged with kidnapping, murder and assassination in connection with the disappearance of 21 ‘red beret’ soldiers suspected of supporting a counter-coup against General Sanogo.

Last week, an Amnesty International delegation, led by the organization’s Secretary General Salil Shetty met with relatives of the disappeared soldiers.

Fatimata Cissé, whose husband is one of the 21 disappeared soldiers, told the delegation:

“I’m completely traumatised not knowing what has happened to my husband. I can’t go on like this. Even if he is in a mass grave, I need to know.”

Sagara Binto Maiga, President of the wives and relatives of the disappeared Red Berets (soldiers), said: “We told the Minister of Defence that we would march naked into the mosques if he did not tell us what has happened to our loved ones. We gave them a deadline of the arrival of the Amnesty International delegation [at the end of November]. He told us to be patient and that they were doing what they can. The very next day Sanogo was arrested and charged.”

“Amnesty International welcomes the efforts the government is making towards restoring justice and rule of law,” says Gaëtan Mootoo. “But it is the tip of the ice berg. More needs to be done to establish the truth of all the grave human rights violations committed over the last two years.”

During its most recent visit to Mali, Amnesty International launched an Agenda for Human Rights, calling on the authorities to investigate and bring to justice all perpetrators of human rights abuses and violations committed over the past two years.

In particular, the Agenda called for information on the whereabouts of the 21 soldiers and the execution of more than 40 civilians by Malian security services.