

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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BURKINA FASO: IN THE WAKE OF THE SOLHAN MASSACRE, THE PRIORITY MUST BE TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE

Amnesty International condemns in the strongest possible terms the massacre carried out by unidentified armed men in the village of Solhan (Sebba commune, Yagha province) on the night of 4-5 June 2021, resulting in the deaths of at least 130 people. This was the deadliest attack on civilians since armed groups began operating in Burkina Faso in 2016.

At least 130 people, men, women and children, were killed in Solhan, according to the Burkinabé authorities, when armed men riding motorcycles entered the village on the night of 4 June 2021. The assault began around 9 p.m. and continued until the early hours of the morning. Armed assailants burst into the village, indiscriminately killing its residents. They also looted villagers' property, including stores and motorcycles, and destroyed several building structures. Fifty people were further injured in the attack, according to media sources.

The attack caused people to move to Dori, capital of Seno Province, and Sebba, the nearest town, the very next day, after the burial of the victims in three mass graves. The humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso remains critical with 1,218,754 people internally displaced as of 30 April 2021, an increase of 6.19% on March 2021, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.¹

According to data from the Armed Conflict Location Event Database, some 400 civilians have been killed in Burkina Faso since January 2021. Over the course of 2020, at least 1,019 Burkinabé civilians were killed in attacks by different parties to the conflict, according to a report from the People's Coalition for the Sahel.²

Amnesty International is urging the Burkinabé authorities and their international partners to redouble their efforts to protect civilians in the context of the armed conflict, particularly in the northern and eastern regions. Those responsible for war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian or human rights law must be identified as soon as possible and brought before the competent national courts to answer for their actions in fair trials.

Amnesty International is also calling on all armed groups in Burkina Faso to respect international humanitarian law and, in particular, to put a halt to the attacks on civilians immediately.

BACKGROUND

This massacre is just one in a series of attacks on civilians that has plagued Burkina Faso since 2016 on the part of armed groups affiliated to Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM). These attacks include the Kompienbiga attack on civilians (at least 30 dead) on 30 May 2020, and the Namoungou cattle market attack (20 dead) on 7 August 2020. This year, in the tri-border area, IS-GS also claimed responsibility for several attacks on civilians similar to the Solhan attack, particularly on the Nigerien side of the border in Tchomobangou and Zarma Darey (3 January, 103 dead), Banibangou (15 March, 67 dead) in the Tillabéri region, and in the areas of Intazayene, Woursanat, and Bakorat in the Tahoua region (21 March, 137 dead).

¹ Burkina Faso UNHCR Data Portal: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/bfa>

² Sahel: The Sahel: What Needs to Change | Towards a new people-centred approach | Recommendations by the People's Coalition for the Sahel, page 9