



**“DEATH WAS SLOWLY
CREEPING ON US ”**

LIVING UNDER SIEGE IN BURKINA FASO

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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First published in 2020

by Amnesty International Ltd

Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street

London WC1X 0DW, UK

Index: AFR 60/7209/2023

Original language: English

amnesty.org



Cover photo:

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CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	7
CRIMES BY ARMED GROUPS IN BESIEGED LOCALITIES	8
THE WAY FORWARD	9
2. METHODOLOGY	11
3. BACKGROUND	13
3.1 THE ARMED CONFLICT	13
3.2 THE POLITICAL INSTABILITY	17
3.3 THE DIRE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION	19
4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK	21
4.1 INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAW	21
4.1.1 INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW	21
4.1.2 INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW	22
LEGAL PROTECTION OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS	23
4.2 RELEVANT NATIONAL LEGISLATION	23
4.2.1 THE CONSTITUTION, CRIMINAL CODE AND THE CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE	23
4.2.2 RESTRICTIVE LAWS	25
5. CRIMES BY ARMED GROUPS AGAINST CIVILIANS IN BESIEGED PLACES	28
5.1 AT LEAST 46 CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES UNDER SIEGE IN JULY 2023	28
5.2 CRIMES AGAINST CIVILIANS	30
5.2.1 KILLINGS	30
5.2.2 ABDUCTIONS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS	34
5.3 ATTACKS AGAINST FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOOD SYSTEMS	35
5.3.1 PROHIBITION FROM FARMING AND GRAZING	35
5.3.3 ATTACKS AGAINST SUPPLY CONVOYS	38
5.3.4 IMPACT OF SIEGES AND ATTACKS ON LIVELIHOODS	42

5.3.5. ATTACKS AGAINST WATER INFRASTRUCTURE	45
5.4 REDUCED ACCESS TO EDUCATION	47
5.5 REDUCED ACCESS TO HEALTH	48
6. BURKINA FASO'S RESPONSE TO THE SIEGE SITUATIONS	52
6.1 ATTACKS AGAINST CIVILIANS	52
6.1.1 THE ATTACK AGAINST CIVILIANS OF HOLDÉ	52
6.2 RESTRICTIONS TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE	55
6.2.1 RESTRICTED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN CERTAIN AREAS	56
6.2.2 PROHIBITION OF CASH TRANSFERS	57
6.3 TENSIONS WITH HUMANITARIAN ACTORS	58
7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	60
7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS	61
7.1.1 TO ALL PARTIES TO THE ARMED CONFLICT	61
7.1.2 TO THE BURKINABÈ GOVERNMENT	61
7.1.3 TO THE BURKINABÈ DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES	63
7.1.4 TO ANSAROUL ISLAM AND THE ISLAMIC STATE IN THE SAHEL	63
7.1.5 TO THE AFRICAN UNION	63
7.1.6 TO INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS	63
APPENDIX	65

GLOSSARY

WORD	DESCRIPTION
ACPHR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
14 TH RIA	14 th Joint Forces Regiment/14e regiment inter-armes
ACERWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location Event Database
CAT	Committee Against Torture
CONASUR	National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IED	Improvised explosive devices
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ISS	Islamic State in the Sahel
JNIM	Jamat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin
MPSR	Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ONEA	National Water and Sanitation Office

WORD	DESCRIPTION
SNR-PDICA	National recovery strategy for internally displaced people and host communities
UN	United Nations
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WASH	Water and Sanitation Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report focuses on war crimes and other human rights abuses committed by belligerent parties to the conflict against civilians in besieged localities of Burkina Faso, especially in the Sahelian, Northern, Eastern and Boucle du Mouhoun regions, in the period from 2020 until July 2023. Ansarul Islam and the Islamic State in the Sahel (ISS) have directly attacked civilians, their livelihoods systems by prohibiting access to pastures and farmlands, and abducted women and girls living in besieged cities, among many war crimes and abuses. This situation has pushed many of the residents of the places under siege to flee their homes. The report also addresses the Burkinabe authorities' response to the expanding armed conflict, including war crimes and other human rights violations such as attacks against civilians, restrictions to freedom of movement and humanitarian assistance.

Since 2016, Burkina Faso is facing a non-international armed conflict opposing government forces with Ansarul Islam, a local armed group affiliated with Al Qaida, and with the Islamic State in the Sahel (ISS). The conflict is part of the broader armed conflict in the Central Sahel, that began with the 2012 conflict in Mali, before spilling over to neighbouring Burkina Faso and Niger, and further south to the northern hinges of Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire. Civilian populations in Burkina Faso have borne the brunt of the violence, with the yearly casualties increasing substantially since 2017 and a dire humanitarian situation. As of April 2023, almost 2 million Burkinabè (a bit less than 10% of the total population) were internally displaced according to the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR).¹

In response to the conflict, the Burkinabe authorities proclaimed a state of emergency beginning on 1st January 2019, restricting freedoms, and providing exceptional power to administrative authorities, which has been regularly renewed and decreed in several regions. They have also formed in 2020 an auxiliary unit to the armed forces, the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDPs), who are trained for a period of two weeks and receive a monthly allowance from the government. The VDPs were mostly recruited from already existing self-described "self-defence groups" such as the Koglweogos ("Guardians of the Bush" in Moore) and Dozos hunter's groups, active in Western Burkina Faso.

The conflict has had a strong impact on the political trajectory of Burkina Faso: military officers successfully undertook two coups d'état in 2022 (in January and September) in response to the worsening security situation and military setbacks among other reasons. In November 2022, the new transitional government, announced a national mobilization campaign to recruit more VDPs at the communal and national levels to meet the security challenges; at least 50,000 were recruited. In response to this mobilization, Ansarul Islam announced retaliatory policies towards communities where VDPs originated or were stationed; promising to restrict movement in several of these localities. Concretely, the armed groups reinforced their tactic of siege of cities, towns, and villages– which already started with Arbinda in 2019, which disproportionately affects civilian populations.

To collect evidence on the abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of besieged localities, Amnesty International undertook two research trips in Burkina Faso (27 November - 8 December 2022 and 28 May - 4 June 2023) and met in Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya with internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have fled 16 of the 46 besieged cities/towns/villages, humanitarian workers, journalists, civil society members, and members of the diplomatic community. Requests for meeting were sent to several ministers but remained unanswered. A consultant conducted additional interviews with IDPs in Dori and Arbinda in May - June 2023. Amnesty International interviewed 97

¹ Conseil National de Secours d'Urgence et de Réhabilitation (CONASUR) "Enregistrement des personnes déplacées internes du Burkina Faso", Situation au 31 mars 2023 (no.03/2023).

individuals including 30 women, 60 men, and 7 children affected by the conflict in Northern and Eastern Burkina Faso. This includes a focus group discussion with 7 women who had fled from the village of Dambini in the commune of Solhan, and with 5 survivors of the attack against the village of Holdé (commune of Djibo), who were displaced in Ouahigouya.

On 27 September 2023, Amnesty International addressed the key findings detailed in this report to Prime Minister Apollinaire Joachimson Kyelem de Tambela of Burkina Faso and requested a response to the conclusions and other questions. On 11 October 2023, additional follow-up letters were sent to 7 other ministries, at the suggestion of the Prime Minister's Office. At the time of publication of this report, no response to the preliminary findings had been provided by the authorities to Amnesty International.

“So many things have changed here in 2022. Djibo, Sebba and many other secondary towns are under siege. In Sebba, there is no free movement after Sampelga [coming from Dori, in the north]. Bourzanga [Bam province, between Djibo and Kongoussi] is also difficult to accede to. Many smaller villages are also under siege,” a humanitarian worker on the situation in Burkina Faso

CRIMES BY ARMED GROUPS IN BESIEGED LOCALITIES

Ansaroul Islam and other armed groups have enforced a brutal encirclement strategy of several cities, towns, and villages at the frontlines in Burkina Faso, which has had a serious humanitarian impact.

Amnesty estimates, based on various collations from humanitarian organizations, that at least 46 locations were under a form of siege by armed groups in Burkina Faso, as of July 2023. These cities, towns and villages are spread all over the national territory, ranging from Tin-Akoff in the far north, to Pama (east) and Mangodara (southwest), and from Nouna in the west, to Diapaga in the east. Amnesty International defines a city/town/village under siege by armed groups, as one in which the military and/or VDPs are present and where armed groups, stationed mostly around the town/city/village, prohibit or restrict free access to people, goods and services through checkpoints at the main exit, the laying of IEDs in the main road axis to limit traffic, and occasional attacks against people, soldiers and supply convoys trying to reach those besieged towns. As a leader of a civil society organisation explained, “these days, a town/village falls under siege every day. Arbinda has been under siege since 2019. The situation is similar in Gorgadji, Sollé, Mansila and Titao and there are real risks for the inhabitants. Even sometimes at the provincial level, access is tough; Gourcy and Tougan are harder of access in 2023.”

Despite the presence of military and VDPs in these besieged localities, armed groups undertook unlawful attacks and killed civilians, prohibited them from access to farmland, pillaged and forcibly taxed them, and attacked infrastructure critical to their livelihoods such as water systems.

Amnesty International has collected information and evidence of attacks by elements of armed groups against civilians living at the frontlines where the presence of armed groups is very marked. In Solhan, (in the commune of Sebba, Yagha province), on the night of 4-5 June 2021, armed fighters alleged to be members of Ansaroul Islam, attacked a position of the VDPs and then went from house to house, killing at least 130 people, including 20 children. On 11 June 2022, members of the Islamic State in the Sahel attacked the town of Seytenga, 10 km distant from the border with Niger, where the presence of the Islamic State in the surrounding areas was becoming increasingly restrictive to the residents. After encircling the village and preventing the trapped residents from fleeing to safety, the armed assailants went from house to house, killing men by shooting them dead. According to a UNHCR situation report following the attack, more than 86 people, mostly civilians were killed by the assailants.

Women in besieged localities are particularly vulnerable to violence by armed groups. On 12 January 2023, at least 60 women, girls, and new-borns, were abducted by alleged members of Ansaroul Islam near the village of Liki (Arbinda, Soum), while they were collecting firewood and gleaning wild fruits, due to the siege of Arbinda. There had been a delay in the supplying of the village due to the siege and ongoing military operations in the Yagha province, and the severe hunger had forced the women to go nearly 15 km away from the town to glean resources and collect firewood. These women were freed in Tougouri (Namentenga province, Centre-Nord region), on 16 January, during a routine road patrol by security forces.

In Djibo and several other localities, armed groups have prohibited residents from farming their lands or grazing their livestock in the pasturelands outside of the town's perimeter, and have used violence, whether physical punishment, theft of livestock or killings, to enforce the sieges. A 52-year-old IDP explained to the organisation: “The terrorists [sic] call us miscreants and prohibit us from farming our land. I couldn't farm this year [2022] nor have access to pasturelands for my livestock. At the beginning of the rainy season, they told us in Djibo that no one was allowed access to the farmlands. Besides, they come and

take our livestock in the pasturelands without any consequence. Whoever defy their orders, runs the risk of being killed by them”.

Beyond the violence, one effect of the siege has been to create inflation in many of the towns encircled by armed groups, due to the rarefaction of basic foodstuffs and the difficulties in supplying them, due to the risks of ambush and attacks. A humanitarian worker based in Dori told the organization: «In Dori, there is no water. People must go to Gorom [Gorom-Gorom] to buy freshwater. Nowadays the water bottle that used to cost 600 XOF (1 USD), has spiked to 1500 XOF (2,5 USD). Prices are increasing, especially for basic foodstuffs”.

Many residents of besieged localities have had no choice but to flee, sometimes with the bare minimum, to escape the hard living conditions created by the siege. Food insecurity has been effectively used by Ansaroul Islam to coerce populations into submission, to exert pressure on the military, and to force the departure of civilian residents.

One other effect of this encirclement strategy has been to reduce access to health and education in the frontline areas; many schools and health centres have been rendered non-functional due to the conflict, either due to attacks or the massive flight of staff members, a situation that impacts on the rights of the residents.

THE GOVERNMENT'S REPONSE

Protection of the population and humanitarian assistance are real challenges for Burkinabe authorities in a country where large parts of its territory are under influence of armed groups and where dozens of localities are under siege.

Amnesty International has collected information and testimonies on crimes committed by the army forces in the village of Holdé, in the context of the siege of Djibo. On 9 November 2022, the town of Holdé, a few kilometres from Djibo, but under the influence of Ansaroul Islam was attacked by military and VDPs. At least 49 civilians, most of them being women and children, were killed during the attack according to testimonies of survivors and a list provided by local sources. Arzika*, who lost several relatives during the attack, told Amnesty International: “When we returned [after attack], we saw that they had killed quite a few people in three large courtyards in a row. In two of the courtyards, all the people killed were women and children and in the third, there was an 87-year-old man. All these victims are my relatives. The two compounds where the women were killed are our family's. In the first yard, there was my mother, my three children, my sister-in-law and two of her children”.

The Burkinabe authorities undertook efforts to provide the residents of the besieged localities with humanitarian aid to reduce the socio-economic impact of this tactic of war on the local populations. But they have put measures in place which have created difficulties for the work of humanitarian organizations, and in the access of civilians in need to humanitarian relief.

Due to the attacks against supply convoys to besieged towns, the army imposed military escorts on truck carrying some essential products such as fuel, foodstuffs, to alleviate the risk of diversion by armed groups. These measures in practices, limited the ability of humanitarian actors to relieve some of the besieged localities, as humanitarian actors are in greater danger of being affected by attacks directed at the military escorts. The measures led to a substantial reduction of humanitarian convoys on the road and an increased reliance on airlift, which has a limited tonnage compared to road traffic.

Beyond the obligation of military escort, other measures such as the prohibitions of cash transfer to beneficiaries in the Sahelian and Eastern regions, due to the alleged risk of diversion, disruption of social cohesion and dependency of IDPs by administrative authorities have further hindered humanitarian relief, this, as the needs continue to increase in Burkina Faso.

THE WAY FORWARD

Almost seven years after the conflict started, the prospects for security and human rights in Burkina Faso look bleak. Civilians are trapped in the cycle of tit-for-tat reprisals between Ansaroul Islam, the Islamic State in the Sahel on one hand, and the VDPs and the armed forces on the other. In besieged localities, residents must flee, often with the bare minimum, in order to survive, while those who stay (including elderly persons whose capacity to make the flight to safety is limited) must face violence, increased deprivation and worsening living conditions. While the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate, distrust still governs the interactions between the government and humanitarian organizations.

In this context, Amnesty International exhorts armed groups who have encircled many cities in Burkina Faso to:

- Respect rules of international humanitarian law, including immediately cease all attacks against civilians or directed against means of survival for the civilian population such as water points, which imperils the livelihoods of civilians, cease all abductions and other grave abuses.
- Commit publicly to the respect of international humanitarian law and condemn abuses by their members.
- Allow rapid and unfettered access by humanitarian relief agencies to assist the civilians in need, including in besieged areas; and facilitate the safe evacuation of the sick, elderly, families with children and other civilians who wish to leave the area.
- Allow the civilian population in besieged areas to have access to water, food, and other necessities.

We also call on the authorities of Burkina Faso to:

- Respect international humanitarian law, including immediately cease all attacks against civilians.
- Allow rapid and unfettered access by humanitarian relief agencies to assist the civilians in need, including in besieged areas; and facilitate the safe evacuation of the sick, elderly, families with children and other civilians who wish to leave the area.
- Ensure that members of Ansaroul Islam, and other armed groups suspected of war crimes and other serious human rights abuses, including the attacks against villagers in Solhan (June 2021), Seytenga (June 2022), and the abduction of women in Arbinda (January 2023) are investigated and, where there is sufficient evidence, prosecuted in fair trials not subject to the death penalty before ordinary criminal courts.
- Ensure that members of the military including VDPs suspected of war crimes and other serious human rights violations, including the attack on Holdé (November 2022), are investigated and, where there is sufficient evidence, prosecuted in fair trials not subject to the death penalty before ordinary criminal courts.
- Prioritize and fund measures to support health services in provincial/regional capitals hosting displaced persons, especially for vulnerable populations such as children and elderly persons.
- Prioritize and fund measures to support schools in communities hosting displaced persons.
- Foster the continued collaboration with the UN bodies in Burkina Faso and other international, and national humanitarian organizations to help to establish humanitarian corridors and alternatives to military escorts, allowing those organizations to assess and monitor the needs of conflict-affected civilians and to deliver assistance to them.

We also call all the government and humanitarian actors to work together in taking urgent steps to ensure that all displaced persons, including children, have access to sufficient food, health care, education, and shelter.

2. METHODOLOGY

This report focuses on the crimes and other human rights violations and abuses against civilians in areas under siege by armed groups in Burkina Faso from January 2020 to June 2023.

Amnesty International delegates conducted two research missions in Burkina Faso, between 27 November and 8 December 2022, and then between 28 May and 4 June 2023. The delegates visited Ouagadougou and Ouahigouya to conduct interviews in displacement sites with internally displaced persons (IDPs) and other families affected by the conflicts. Amnesty International notably conducted a focus group discussion with 7 women who had fled from the village of Dambini in the commune of Solhan, and with 5 survivors of attack against the village of Holdé (commune of Djibo), who were displaced in Ouahigouya. Delegates also met with IDPs from several towns of the Eastern region, settled in Fada Ngourma, who came in Ouagadougou to be interviewed. Several IDPs and key stakeholders in Arbinda and Dori Sahel region were also interviewed in May and June 2023 by a consultant.

In total, Amnesty International interviewed 97 individuals including 30 women, 60 men, and seven children affected by the conflict in Northern and Eastern Burkina Faso. Of the 97 people interviewed, 55 were born, grew up or lived in 16 towns, cities, and villages under siege by armed groups in the provinces of Loroum (Northern region), Soum, Seno and Yagha (Sahel region); Tapoa, Kompienga, Komondjari and Gourma provinces (Eastern region). Many of the interviewees were displaced several times due to the expansion of the conflict. Several of these provinces are next to Burkina Faso's borders with Mali, Niger, and Togo.

Interviews were conducted in Fulfulde, Foulé, Gulmancema and Moore with the assistance of an interpreter, and in French. To protect the anonymity of the person interviewed, Amnesty International has not used their real names in this report and has replaced them with generic names or initials.

In addition to these persons directly impacted by the conflict, delegates also interviewed 50 other key stakeholders; these included 25 humanitarian actors, from field agents to senior representatives, active in the response to the conflict, 15 representatives of the civil society, five members of the diplomatic community, including UN staff in Burkina Faso, and five journalists who were based in the country at the time of the interview. Requests for meetings were sent to several cabinet ministers but most remained unanswered.²

Interviews were conducted in private or semi-private settings, including private rooms in public buildings and the private homes of some of the residents, ensuring that interviewees were comfortable with the interview setting and understood the purpose of the interview.

Before each interview, Amnesty International informed interviewees about the nature and purpose of the research and ensured their informed consent on how the information they provide could be used. People were told they could end the interview at any time and could choose not to answer specific questions. Interviewees were not provided with incentives for speaking. Amnesty International reimbursed transport and food costs when interviewees had to travel to meet with delegates.

Seven children, that is individuals below the age of 18, were interviewed over the course of this research. Amnesty International took special measures aimed at avoiding their re-traumatization and making them at ease during the interviews. This included allowing them to be interviewed next to older family members or

² Letters seeking audience were sent to the Ministry of State, for Defense and Veteran Affairs; Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Security; to the Keeper of the Seals, Ministry of Justice, Human Rights, in charge of the relations with institutions and to the Ministry of Solidarity, Humanitarian Action, National Reconciliation, Gender and Family. Amnesty International received no replies from the three first ministries; the Ministry of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action acknowledged receipt of the letter but couldn't receive the delegation during the appointed week.

friends. Amnesty International undertook interviews in a setting that was secure and that was often familiar to the children and/or their guardians.

Beyond the interviews, this report is also based on the analysis of national law and reports produced by humanitarian actors, UN bodies, civil society organizations, local associations, and academia, on the conflict in Burkina Faso and the broader Sahelian region.

Amnesty International follows the UN Commission on Human Rights Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and considers as internally displaced persons all those "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border".³

On 27 September, Amnesty International addressed the key findings detailed in this report in a letter to the Prime Minister Apollinaire de Tambèla and requested a response on those findings and related questions. On October 11, additional follow-up letters were sent to 7 other ministries⁴, at the suggestion of the Prime Minister's Office. At the time of publication of this report, no response to the preliminary findings had been provided to Amnesty International.

³ UN Economic and Social Council/Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39. Addendum: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, p. 5 para 2.

⁴ The additional letters were addressed to the Minister of Justice and Human Rights (1), the Ministry of Defense and Veteran Affairs(2), the Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene (3), the Ministry of National Solidarity and Humanitarian Action, National Reconciliation, Gender and Family (4), the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and National Languages (5), the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Security (6), the Minister-Delegate to the Minister of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Security, in charge of Security (7).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 THE ARMED CONFLICT

Since 2016, Burkina Faso has been grappling with a spill-over of the armed conflict in Mali that initially opposed the Malian army to separatist armed groups allied with Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups. Ansarul Islam, the first armed group active in the current armed conflict in Burkina Faso, is an offshoot of Katiba Macina/Ansar Dine armed groups active in Mali. In March 2017, several al-Qaida affiliated groups in Mali, including Katiba Macina and Ansar Dine, coalesced into the Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM).⁵

In December 2016, Ansarul Islam claimed for the first time, an attack against Burkinabè army positions in Nassoumbou (Soum province, Sahel region),⁶ 30 kms distant from the Malian border, causing the death of 12 soldiers.⁷ The attack heralded the beginning of an armed conflict in Burkina Faso, that has now affected two thirds of the country's regions, ranging from the Sahel to parts of the Northern, Eastern, and Central-North regions. Since 2020, the conflict has further expanded to Western Burkina Faso and the south-eastern regions bordering Togo, Ghana, and Benin.⁸

Since then, other armed groups have emerged to become parties to the conflict. Another Islamist armed group, the Islamic State in the Sahel (ISS), a group affiliated with the Islamic State⁹, operates in Burkina's Sahel region (Oudalan, Seno and Yagha provinces), and straddling to Mali's (Gao and Menaka regions) and Niger's (northern Tillabéri and Tahoua's regions) along these countries' shared frontiers.¹⁰

In response to the expanding armed conflict, local communities have formed self-proclaimed "self-defence groups", sometimes with the support of the government. In Burkina Faso's Central, Eastern, and Northern regions, Koglweogos' groups, that tended to assure police duties in rural areas, increasingly got involved in the conflict by fighting against Ansarul Islam and the ISS.¹¹ In the Western regions (Boucle du Mouhoun, Kossi, Hauts-Bassins), several Dozos groupings, a traditional hunter's brotherhood, took a similar role to the Koglweogos. In January 2020, the National Assembly of Burkina Faso enacted a law on "the volunteers for the defence of the homeland" (VDPs), which allows the army to recruit civilian volunteers at the local level,

⁵ The coalition is also known by its French/English acronym GSIM, which stands for Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (Groupe pour le soutien à l'Islam et aux Musulmans en français).

VOA/AFP. « Le GSIM, une alliance de groupes jihadistes du Sahel liés à Al-Qaïda », 4 March 2018 <https://www.voafrique.com/a/le-gsim-une-alliance-de-groupes-jihadistes-du-sahel-lies-a-al-qaida/4279668.html>

⁶ Burkina Faso is divided administratively into regions, provinces and departments or communes. There are 13 regions, which includes a total of 45 provinces and 350 departments or communes. Burkina Faso/Ministère de l'administration territoriale et de la décentralisation. 2021. *Tableau de bord statistique 2019 de l'administration du territoire*, page 18 :

matd.gov.bf/fileadmin/user_upload/storage/fichiers/MATD_TB-2019_Administration_territoire_VF.pdf

⁷ France 24, « Burkina Faso : douze militaires tués près de la frontière malienne » 16 December 2016 : france24.com/fr/20161216-burkina-faso-attaque-jihadiste-militaires-frontiere-mali-niger-aqmi-ansar-dine

⁸ International Crisis Group, *Containing Militancy in West Africa's Park W, Africa report no.310*, 26 January 2023,

www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso-niger-benin/310-containing-militancy-west-africas-park-w;

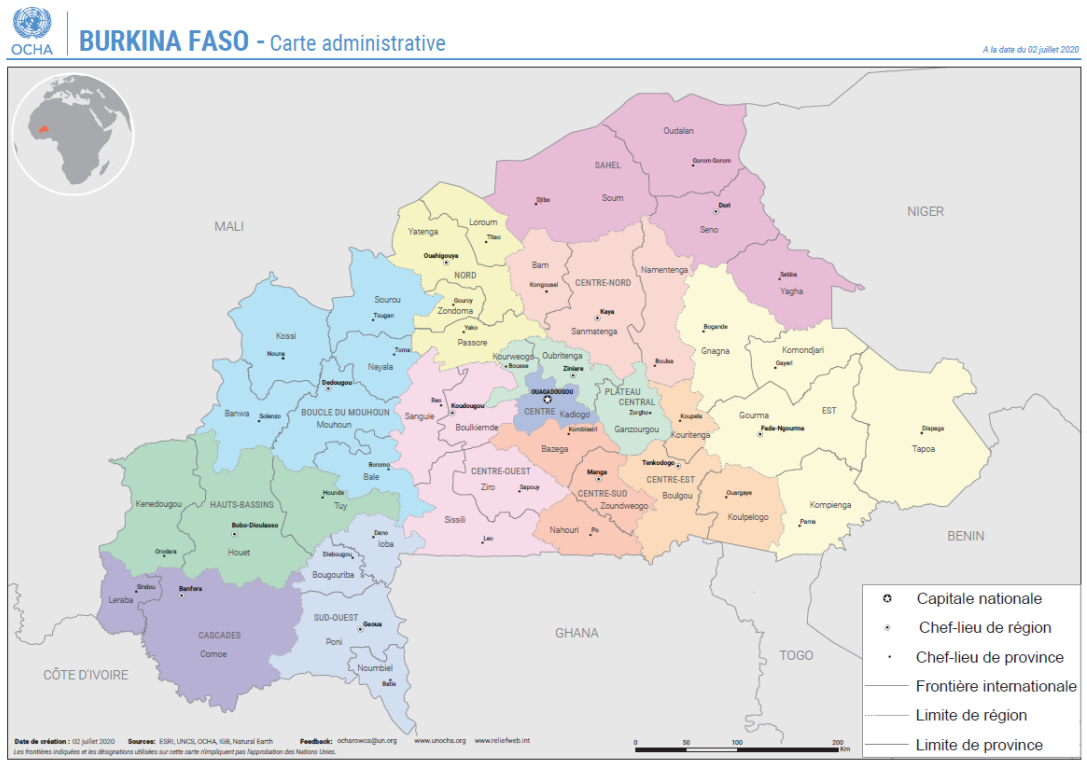
Promediation and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. *The Jihadist threat in northern Ghana and Togo: Stocktaking and prospects for containing the expansion*: [kas.de/documents/261825/16928652/The+jihadist+threat+in+northern+Ghana+and+Togo.pdf](https://www.kas.de/documents/261825/16928652/The+jihadist+threat+in+northern+Ghana+and+Togo.pdf)

⁹ The group is distinct from the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), which is active in the Lake Chad region. ISS used to be known also as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, prior to its official recognition as a province by the Islamic State, in March 2022.

¹⁰ On Islamic State in the Sahel's abuses, see Amnesty International, *Niger: "I have nothing left except myself": The worsening impact on children of conflict in the Tillabéri region of Niger* (AFR 43/4627/2021), 13 September 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/afr43/4627/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr43/4627/2021/en/), pp. 19-43.

¹¹ Ismaël Compaoré and Heidi Bojsen. « Sécurité d'en bas au Burkina Faso: Koglweogo, gardiens de la brousse, gardiens de la société ? » / "Security from Below in Burkina Faso. Koglweogo, Guardians of the Bush, Guardians of Society?" *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 239 | 2020m 671-697: journals.openedition.org/etudesafriques/31833#tocto1n3

for 1-year renewable, and trained for 15-days before their deployment, to support the army in the conflict against the Islamist armed groups.¹² Many of the “volunteers” were recruited among the Koglweegos and Dozos.



Administrative map of Burkina Faso, as of 2 July 2020. Source: UNOCHA¹³

THE 2020 LAW ESTABLISHING THE “VOLUNTEERS FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE HOMELAND”.

On 21 January 2020, in response to the attack against the supply convoy of the Boungou gold mine in November 2019, in which at least 37 persons died¹⁴ and following the public calls of various local and self-proclaimed self-defence groups, Burkinabè authorities adopted a law “on the volunteers for the defence of the homeland”¹⁵ (VDPs) with the view of supporting the army efforts in the conflict.

Article 2 of the law defines the volunteer as “a natural person of Burkinabè nationality, auxiliary to the defence and security forces, voluntarily serving the security interests of his village or sector of residence, under a contract signed between the volunteer and the State”. Article 3 specifies that “the mission of the VDP is to contribute, if necessary, by force of arms, to the defence and protection of people and property in his village or sector of residence”.¹⁶ The VDP is recruited at the local level, after the approval of members of his community, for a 1-year renewable term (Articles 5 and 6). The VDP receives “financial assistance” (article 12).

¹² Burkina Faso, *Loi n°002-2020/an portant institution de volontaires pour la défense de la patrie*, 2020 : justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Loi-002-2020AN-portant-institution-de-Volontaires-pour-la-defense-de-la-patrie.pdf See also *Loi n°028-2022/alt instituant les volontaires pour la défense de la patrie (VDP)*, 2022, assembleenationale.bf/IMG/pdf/loi_no028_instituant_vdp.pdf

¹³ Reliefweb, Administrative map of Burkina Faso, as of 2 July 2020: reliefweb.int/map/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-carte-administrative-la-date-du-02-juillet-2020

¹⁴ Sophie Douce, « Burkina Faso : Au moins 37 morts dans l'attaque d'un convoi transportant des travailleurs de la mine d'or Semafo », 7 November 2019, business-humanrights.org/fr/derni%C3%A8res-actualit%C3%A9s/burkina-faso-au-moins-37-morts-dans-l-attaque-d-un-convoi-transportant-des-travailleurs-de-la-mine-d-or-semafo/

¹⁵ VDP is the acronym for Volontaires pour la défense de la patrie, the official name of the auxiliary force set up by the Burkinabè government in 2020 to support its security and defence forces.

¹⁶ Burkina Faso, *Loi sur les volontaires pour la défense de la patrie* (2020), Articles 2 et 3.

In June 2022, the Burkinabè government adopted an additional decree¹⁷ to organize and structure the VDPs. A Patriotic Watch and Defence Brigade (BVDP) was created at the national level under the military to command the action of VDP groups at the communal (from 80 to 120 VDPs depending on the size of the commune). The VDPs respond directly to the military commanders of their unit and these units respond to the Minister of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Security.

On 17 December 2022, the authorities amended the law establishing the VDPs.¹⁸ Since then, VDPs can be recruited to serve at national level depending on security needs, without being confined to intervening exclusively on a communal territory as before.¹⁹

As armed forces under the direct control of the military and paid by the state, Amnesty International considers the VDPs as members of the Burkinabè military.

The conflict in Burkina Faso is therefore a non-international armed conflict, opposing the Burkinabè army (which VDPs are members of, and to which Koglweogos and Dozos groups are affiliated with) and the armed groups Ansaroul Islam affiliated with the JNIM and Al-Qaida, and the ISS, affiliated with the Islamic State. It has had a devastating impact on the civilian population. Between January 2017 and June 2023, at least 16,385 individuals including at least 6,201 Burkinabè civilians have been killed in the context of the conflict, according to data from the Armed Conflict Location Events Database (ACLED).²⁰

Number of civilian casualties per year in Burkina Faso between 2016-2023

■ Number of civilian casualties



Chart: Amnesty WARO • Source: ACLED

All parties to the conflict have committed atrocities against the population. Amongst these atrocities, in February 2023, at least 60 civilians were killed during an attack against the town of Partiaga (Tapoa province, Eastern region).²¹ The attack led to a massive population displacement to Diapaga and Namounou, two towns in the Tapoa province. In June 2021, alleged Ansaroul Islam fighters attacked positions of the VDPs, at the entrance of the town of Solhan, Yagha province, before overrunning the town and indiscriminately killing residents. At least 132 people, including civilians, were killed during the attack, 40 wounded and 707 households displaced.²² Later tolls in the ensuing days reported by the media

¹⁷ Burkina Faso, Décret no.2022-0369/PRES-TRANS/MDAC/MATDS portant création d'une brigade de veille et de défense patriotique, 2022.

¹⁸ Burkina Faso, Loi N°028-2022/Alt Instaurant Les Volontaires Pour La Defense De La Patrie (VDP), 2022.

¹⁹ Burkina Faso, Loi N°028-2022/ALT Instaurant Les Volontaires Pour La Defense De La Patrie (VDP), 2022.

²⁰ Raleigh, Clionadh, Andrew Linke, Håvard Hegre, and Joakim Karlsen. (2010). "Introducing ACLED-Armed Conflict Location and Event Data." *Journal of Peace Research* 47(5) 651- 660. See curated data files on Burkina Faso. Data covers the year 2016 to June 2023.

²¹ Mouvement burkinabè des droits de l'homme et des peuples/Section du Gourma (MBDHP), « Déclaration sur le drame de Partiaga », 7 March 2023. See also Dramane Traoré. « Burkina Faso : "une soixantaine" de civils tués dans une attaque dans l'Est du pays ». 8 March 2023, aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/burkina-faso-une-soixantaine-de-civils-tu%C3%A9s-dans-une-attaque-dans-l-est-du-pays/2840522

²² Amnesty International, *Burkina Faso: In the wake of the Solhan massacre, the priority must be to protect the people*, 2021(Index: AFR 60/4249/2021), 7 June 2021.

established the number of deaths at at least 160,²³ which made the attack the most lethal single incident since the beginning of the conflict.

Journalists and NGOs have also documented cases of rapes and sexual violence against women and girls by Ansaroul Islam. These incidents occurred while they were collecting firewood at the outskirts of villages in besieged towns, fleeing attacks or not respecting ultimatums set by Ansaroul Islam. One journalist who has worked extensively on this topic told Amnesty International: “Incidents of conflict-related sexual violence are common but underreported in Burkina Faso. One of the initial cases that made me work on this topic, was one where a +60-year-old woman was abducted and raped by 18 young men for several weeks in 2018, when she was visiting her relatives in the Yatenga.”²⁴

Attacks against civilians were also committed by Koglweogo and/or VDPs. For instance, beginning on 1 January 2019 and for several days, suspected Koglweogo members attacked several villages in the Centre-North and Sahel regions, beginning in Yirgou (Sanmantenga province, Centre-Nord) but also several other villages in the communes of Kaya and Boussouma, (Centre-Nord), Arbinda, Kelbo and Djibo (Soum province in Sahel region), killing at least 49 civilians, mainly members of the Fulani community. Sixty-six other persons remained unaccounted for after the killings, which were in retaliation to the assassination of the village chief of Yirgou and five other villagers, by suspected members of Ansaroul Islam on 1 January 2019.²⁵ Local organizations established the toll of the killings in Yirgou as at least 210 dead²⁶. On 8 March 2020, suspected Koglweogo members raided the villages of Barga, Dinguilha and Ramdolla (Nord region) killing at least 43 inhabitants and destroying buildings.²⁷

Defence and security forces also committed abuses against civilians in their operations against armed groups. On 30 December 2022, members of a government auxiliary force attacked two neighbourhoods with most of them belonging to the Fulani community in the town of Nouna, Kossi province, killing at least 27 people.²⁸ The Office of the Prosecutor of Nouna announced an investigation into the killings. On 5 February 2019, the government announced the “neutralization” of 146 “terrorists” in the northern provinces of Yatenga and Loroum. Investigations by the Burkinabè Movement for Human and Peoples’ Rights (MBDHP) showed that in Kainh, Daybara, Somé and Banh, 60 civilians were killed by the military.²⁹ On 9 April 2020, members of special military unit arrested and executed 31 persons during a patrol in Djibo³⁰. Although the government announced investigations into several of these killings, which could amount to war crimes, no further information about the investigation were made public.

Over the years and particularly since 2022, Ansaroul Islam and other armed groups have adopted an encirclement strategy against several villages, towns, and cities, to exert pressure on the communities and the government to accede to their demands or to force them to leave these areas (see Chapter 5). Defence and security forces, including VDPs and affiliated Dozo armed groups, are present in several of these besieged cities such as Djibo, Barsalogho, Sebba or Nouna. The siege tactics may aim to achieve military objectives in some of these places, but disproportionately affects civilian residents (See chapter 5 and 6).

The intensification of the conflict and the violence has pressured social cohesion among the Burkinabè. Given that many of the initial leaders of the armed groups are of Fulani descent, a sociocultural group present mostly in the Sahel region, stigmatizing discourses and hateful speech have increased in Burkina Faso, amalgamating the armed groups to the Fulani community.³¹ This phenomenon is by no means unique to Burkina Faso and has occurred also in Mali and in Niger, in the context of the conflict in Central Sahel,

²³ TV5 Monde, “Burkina Faso : le bilan de l'attaque de Solhan s'alourdit à 160 morts”, 5 June 2021, [information.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-le-bilan-de-lattaque-de-solhan-salourdit-160-morts-35828](https://www.information.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-le-bilan-de-lattaque-de-solhan-salourdit-160-morts-35828)

²⁴ Interview with journalist, private media organization, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

²⁵ OCHA, Burkina Faso: Affrontements intercommunautaires (Update) : 10 janvier 2019, reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-affrontements-intercommunautaires-update-10-janvier-2019

²⁶ Lamine Traoré, “Au moins 210 morts lors du massacre du 1^{er} janvier, selon un collectif », 4 février 2019, <https://www.voafrique.com/a/au-moins-210-morts-lors-du-massacre-du-1er-janvier-selon-un-collectif/4771648.html>

²⁶ Amnesty International, « Burkina Faso. Les récits de témoins confirment que le massacre a été perpétré par un groupe arme. », 20 march 2020.

²⁷ Amnesty International, “Burkina Faso: Witness testimony confirms armed group perpetrated mass killings”, 20 March 2020, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/burkina-faso-witness-testimony-confirms-armed-group/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/burkina-faso-witness-testimony-confirms-armed-group/)

²⁸ Amnesty International, “Burkina Faso: Perpetrators of Nouna killings must face justice”, 10 January 2023, [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/burkina-faso-perpetrators-of-nouna-killings-must-face-justice/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/burkina-faso-perpetrators-of-nouna-killings-must-face-justice/)

²⁹ Mouvement burkinabè pour les droits de l'homme et des peuples (MBDHP), *Que s'est-il passé à Kain-Ouro et environnants le 4 février 2019?*, Mars 2019, [kaceto.net/IMG/pdf/rapport_kain_1_la_bonne_version_sans_fond.pdf](https://www.kaceto.net/IMG/pdf/rapport_kain_1_la_bonne_version_sans_fond.pdf), p. 9.

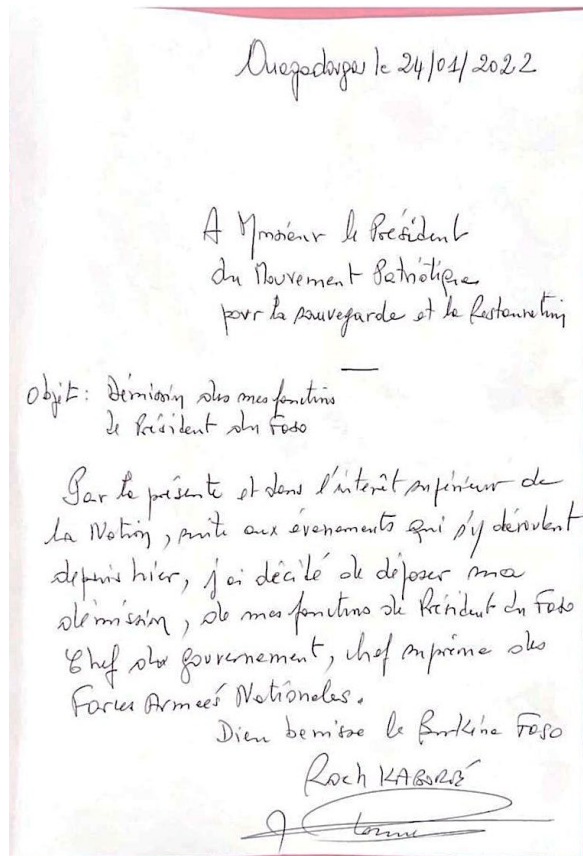
³⁰ Amnesty International, “They Executed Some and Brought the Rest With Them”: Civilian Lives At Risk in the Sahel, AFR 37/2318/2020m p. 14.

³¹ Courrier International, « En ciblant les Peuls, le Burkina Faso tombe dans le piège communautariste », 11 February 2023, [courrierinternational.com/article/analyse-en-ciblant-les-peuls-le-burkina-faso-tombe-dans-le-piege-communautariste](https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/analyse-en-ciblant-les-peuls-le-burkina-faso-tombe-dans-le-piege-communautariste) ; DW, Sandrine Blanchard, « Comment endiguer la stigmatisation des Peuls dans le Sahel », 24 June 2022, [dw.com/fr/stigmatisation-peuls-sahel-mali-burkina-faso/a-62240675](https://www.dw.com/fr/stigmatisation-peuls-sahel-mali-burkina-faso/a-62240675)

The Burkinabè government and other national associations³² have denounced hateful speech committed by supporters of the regime, which called for violence against the Fulani communities or against individuals critical of the government in a public way.³³

3.2 THE POLITICAL INSTABILITY

The military of Burkina Faso took power two times in 2022, through coups d'état. They justified the putsches, on the poor response by the then governments to the growing armed conflict. The 24 January 2022 coup led by Lt-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, head of the Patriotic Movement for Safeguard and Restoration (MPSR), against the democratically elected president Roch Marc Christian Kaboré was motivated according to the putschists by the worsening security situation and they promised a return to constitutional order after a "reasonable time".³⁴ President Kaboré who was detained by the military after the coup, resigned via a letter, for the "superior interests of the nation", a day after.³⁵



 ↑ Resignation letter of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré

Two months prior to the coup, a detachment of the gendarmerie was attacked in Inata (commune of Tongomayel, Soum province, Sahel region). At least 49 gendarmes and four civilians were killed, and several

³² Primature/Porte-parole du gouvernement, Communiqué du 17 June 2022. See also « Déclaration de la ligue islamique pour la paix au Faso sur le contexte actuel », Ouagadougou, 23 August 2022 and Tabital Pulaaku Burkina Faso. *Communiqué*, 11 June 2020, lefaso.net/spip.php?page=web-tv-video&id_article=97417&rubrique4

See also. France Info/AFP, "Burkina Faso : imams et prêcheurs musulmans dénoncent les discours haineux contre les Peuls", 30 August 2022, www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-imams-et-precheurs-musulmans-denoncent-les-discours-haineux_5333875.html; Libération/Agnes Favière. « Le Burkina Faso confronté à une dangereuse vague de haine anti-peul », 4 September 2022.

³³ Amnesty International, « Burkina-Faso. Face aux attaques répétées, le droit à l'information doit être protégé », 7 April 2023 : [amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2023/04/burkina-faso-face-aux-attaques-repetees-le-droit-a-l-information-doit-etre-protége/](https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2023/04/burkina-faso-face-aux-attaques-repetees-le-droit-a-l-information-doit-etre-protége/)

³⁴ Agence d'Information du Burkina Faso, « Burkina : Les auteurs de la tuerie de Nouna répondront de leurs actes (Procureur) » 2 January 2023, aib.media/regions/2023/01/02/burkina-les-auteurs-de-la-tuerie-de-nouna-repondront-de-leurs-actes-procureur/

³⁵ France 24. « Coup d'État au Burkina Faso : le président Roch Kaboré renversé par l'armée », 24 January 2022, france24.com/fr/info-en-continu/20220124-burkina-faso-le-pr%C3%A9sident-roch-kabor%C3%A9-d%C3%A9tenu-par-des-soldats-mutins-france-24

others were unaccounted for.³⁶ The attack aroused a great deal of emotion nationwide, following the publication of a leaked document by the commander of the detachment alerting about the poor conditions in the post, with soldiers being forced to forage to eat.³⁷

After taking power the MPSR dissolved the National Assembly and all municipal councils and replaced them respectively by a Transitional Council and special delegations. Lt-Colonel Damiba who was declared president of the transition by the Constitutional Council in February 2022 put in place a government which reorganized the army command and strategy. The new authorities established “zones of military interest” in the north and southeast, reorganized the VDPs under a brigade and opened the possibility of a dialogue with armed groups.³⁸ The newly erected zones of military interest are areas where all civilians were legally bound to leave, two weeks after the proclamation of the decree, to allow for intense military activities by the army in areas where armed groups are very active.

On 30 September 2022, junior officers of the army, who were members of the MPSR, led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, toppled Lt-Colonel Damiba and his government in another coup. The putschists justified the coup by the government’s inability to curb the advance of armed groups, a priority task that the MPSR had set for itself eight months earlier, when they toppled President Kaboré. The second coup intervened four days after Ansaroul Islam had ambushed a 207 truck-convoy supplying the besieged town of Djibo in Gaskindé, which caused the death of 37 persons [27 soldiers and 10 civilians] and wounded 29 persons (21 soldiers, 1 VDP and 7 civilians),³⁹ 70 truck drivers were not accounted for following the attack.⁴⁰ On 2 October, Lt-Colonel Damiba resigned as president of the transition and went to exile in Togo.

Captain Ibrahim Traoré, who was designated as the president of the transition by the national assizes on 14 October 2022, named a government on 25 October 2022. The new transitional authorities adopted a different military strategy, announcing the recruitment of more than 50,000 VDPs in November 2022 and declining the possibility of dialogue with armed groups. While 35,000 among the 50,000 would be recruited in each commune (100 VDPs among the country’s 350 communes) where they would operate, the remaining 15,000 would be recruited and deployed nationally, beyond their communes, to respond to security needs.⁴¹ At the end of November 2022, more than 90,000 were enrolled as VDPs according to the government, which stressed in May 2023, that the ultimate objective was to mobilize 100,000 VDPs.⁴²

In April 2023, the government promulgated a decree “on general mobilization and safeguard” which grants the authorities the “right to request people, goods and services, the right to control and allocate supply resources and, to this end, to impose the necessary constraints on individuals or corporate bodies; the right to summon for the sake of national defence, any individual or collectively”.⁴³ The decree based on a 1994 law revised in 2005 also allows for the conscription of active and inactive members of the defence and security forces, and of all aged above 18 years old, if they are physically deemed fit and if the needs is expressed by competent authorities and persons aged 18 and above, fit for military service, if the needs is expressed by competent authorities.⁴⁴ Based on this decree, any Burkinabè citizen could be conscripted into the army as a member of the military and/or as a VDP for the purpose of supporting the army in the armed conflict against the Islamist armed groups.

The risks of abuse of this decree, despite the provisions for contestation when goods and services are requisitioned, or when individuals are mobilized for military service (Article 13), have already raised serious concern, including regarding forced enrolment into the VDPs.⁴⁵ Just a month before its promulgation,

³⁶ Le Faso.Net, « Attaque d’Inata : Le bilan passe à 53 morts dont 49 gendarmes et 4 civils », 17 November 2021, [efaso.net/spip.php?breve3697](https://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?breve3697)

³⁷ Leaked communications of the commander of the Inata post, Burkina Faso. Amnesty International holds an electronic copy of this document.

³⁸ Burkina Faso, 2022. Ordonnance no. 2022-003 portant création d’une zone d’intérêt militaire pour les opérations dans la région de l’Est, 2022 [burkina24.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/DECRET-1.pdf](https://www.burkina24.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/DECRET-1.pdf) and Ordonnance no. 2022-004 portant création d’une zone d’intérêt militaire pour les opérations dans la région du Sahel, 2022. Burkina Faso, Décret no.2022-0369/PRES-TRANS/PM/MDAC/MATDS/MEFP portant création d’une brigade de veille et de défense patriotique, juin 2022.

³⁹ Anadolu Agency, « Burkina Faso : 37 morts, dont 27 soldats, dans l’embuscade de Gaskindé (nouveau bilan) », 5 October 2022, [aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/burkina-faso-37-morts-dont-27-soldats-dans-l-embuscade-de-gaskinde%C3%A9-nouveau-bilan/2703357](https://www.aa.com.tr/fr/afrique/burkina-faso-37-morts-dont-27-soldats-dans-l-embuscade-de-gaskinde%C3%A9-nouveau-bilan/2703357)

⁴⁰ TV5 Monde/AFP, “Burkina Faso : l’attaque de Gaskindé, catalyseur du coup d’État » 6 October 2022, [information.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-l-attaque-de-gaskinde-catalyseur-du-coup-detat-1309829#:~:text=L'attaque%2C%20revendiqu%C3%A9%20par%20AI.compt%C3%A9s%20disparus%2C%20selon%20leur%20syndicat](https://www.information.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-l-attaque-de-gaskinde-catalyseur-du-coup-detat-1309829#:~:text=L'attaque%2C%20revendiqu%C3%A9%20par%20AI.compt%C3%A9s%20disparus%2C%20selon%20leur%20syndicat)

⁴¹ Brigade de veille et de défense patriotique, Communiqué, Ouagadougou, 25 October 2022.

⁴² RTB - Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina, « Discours sur la situation nationale du premier ministre Apollinaire Joachimson Kyélem de Tambèla », 30 May 2023, [youtube.com/watch?v=L6HDhVXVxYQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6HDhVXVxYQ)

⁴³ Burkina Faso, décret N° 2023- 0475 /PRES-TRANS/ PM/MDAC/MATDS/MJDHRI portant mobilisation générale et mise en garde, 2023, Article 2.

⁴⁴ Burkina Faso, Décret N° 2023- 0475 /PRES-TRANS/ PM/MDAC/MATDS/MJDHRI portant mobilisation générale et mise en garde, 2023, Article 5.

⁴⁵ Interview with UN Staff, 30 May 2023, Ouagadougou.

Boukaré Ouedraogo, president of the “Appel de Kaya”, a civil society organization, was forcibly enrolled as a VDP by the military, notwithstanding his visual impairment. A week prior, Ouedraogo had criticized the government for the lack of drinkable water in Kaya, and for their faulty response to the security situation. In a speech during a visit to Kaya in March 2023, President Traoré alluded to Ouedraogo’s situation, blamed him for exposing a “vulnerable point” that caused a loss of military lives during attacks, and threatened on the same occasion all CSO members of being forced to join the VDPs in case of public communication judged critical by the authorities. While Ouedraogo was discharged a few weeks later, two other civil society members were allegedly forcibly enrolled into the VDPs for having allegedly criticized the transitional authorities.⁴⁶ In light of this case, the decree may also be used to silence voices raised against the new authorities. One board member of a journalists’ association in Burkina Faso told Amnesty International that “with this decree the government can enter a radio station and demand the interruption of a show, without the possibility of an appeal”.⁴⁷ The possibility of conscription as scheduled in article 5 of the decree has also led to a massive youth flight from Western Burkina Faso, where the army has been conducting operations since late 2022, to neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire.⁴⁸

3.3 THE DIRE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

The Burkinabè government’s authority is limited to between 40 and 60% of the national territory due to the expanding conflict, according to assessments by humanitarian organizations.⁴⁹ In May 2023, during a presentation to the National Transitional Council, Prime Minister de Tambèla assessed the state controls only 65% of Burkina Faso’s territory.⁵⁰ A situation that leads to a catastrophic humanitarian situation and complicates humanitarian assistance.

According to OCHA, one in five Burkinabè, or 4.7 million people, need humanitarian assistance. Despite these numbers, the response is still below the required needs in 2023: out of \$877 million solicited by humanitarian organizations, only 30% has been acquired as of August 22, 2023.⁵¹

Burkina Faso has been described as among the world’s most neglected displacement crises by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).⁵² As of April 2023, almost 2 million Burkinabè (a bit less than 10% of the total population) were internally displaced due to the conflict according to the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR).⁵³ The Sahel and Centre-Nord were the two regions hosting most of these populations with respectively 50,1961 and 49,3954 IDPs at that date, according to CONASUR.

Food insecurity is a major humanitarian concern in Burkina Faso. Since the beginning of the conflict, the number of food-insecure people in the country has been multiplied by nine.⁵⁴ In 2022, 1,817 Burkinabè residents faced the risk of famine [see phase 5 in the table below].⁵⁵ Between October and December 2022, it was estimated that more than 2.6 million faced severe acute food insecurity [Phase 3 or above]. The persons at risk of famine were projected to rise to 42,000 between June and August 2023, by the harmonized framework on food insecurity, of the humanitarian food and security cluster in Burkina Faso.

The humanitarian situation has notably worsened with the new tactic used since 2022 by Ansaroul Islam and other armed groups to place cities, towns, and villages of Burkina Faso under siege. Armed groups prevent the besieged populations to access to food, drinkable water, and health – forcing people to displace,

See also TV5 Monde, « Burkina Faso : des cas d’« enrôlement forcé » au sein des VDP pointés par la société civile », 29 mars 2023, [information.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-des-cas-denrolement-force-au-sein-des-udp-pointes-par-la-societe-civile](https://www.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-des-cas-denrolement-force-au-sein-des-udp-pointes-par-la-societe-civile)

⁴⁶ TV5 Monde, « Burkina Faso : des cas d’« enrôlement forcé » au sein des VDP pointés par la société civile », 29 mars 2023, [information.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-des-cas-denrolement-force-au-sein-des-udp-pointes-par-la-societe-civile](https://www.tv5monde.com/afrique/burkina-faso-des-cas-denrolement-force-au-sein-des-udp-pointes-par-la-societe-civile)

⁴⁷ Interview with leader of journalist national union, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

⁴⁸ Interview with several UN human rights staff, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

⁴⁹ Interview with UNOCHA advisor, November 2022, Ouagadougou. Interview with security advisors, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

⁵⁰ RTB - Radiodiffusion Télévision du Burkina, « Discours sur la situation nationale du premier ministre Apollinaire Joachimson Kyélem de Tambèla », 30 May 2023, [youtube.com/watch?v=L6HDhVXVxYQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6HDhVXVxYQ)

⁵¹ OCHA, « Burkina Faso Rapport de situation », [Burkina Faso | Rapports de situation \(unocha.org\)](https://www.unocha.org/burkina-faso/fr/rapports-de-situation).

⁵² Norwegian Refugee Council, *The World’s Most Neglected Displacement Crises*, 2022, nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/neglected-2022/the-worlds-most-neglected-displacement-crises-2022.pdf

⁵³ CONASUR, *Tableau de bord général sur l’enregistrement des personnes déplacées internes du Burkina Faso (mars 2023)*.

⁵⁴ Food Security Cluster Burkina Faso, “Burkina Faso: pour la première fois, le cadre harmonise identifie des populations en phase 5”, (bulletin spécial), fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/cluster_secual_bulletin3_dec2022_vf.pdf


⁵⁵ Food Security Cluster Burkina Faso, 2022. “Burkina Faso: pour la première fois, le cadre harmonise identifie des populations en phase 5”, (bulletin spécial) fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/cluster_secual_bulletin3_dec2022_vf.pdf “Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution, and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. (For Famine Classification, area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.)” [fews.net/about/integrated-phase-classification](https://www.fews.net/about/integrated-phase-classification)

while the authorities restrict humanitarian access and assistance by measures set up by the government in the context of the state of emergency (See Chapter 6).

Annex 1: Acute Food Insecurity Reference Table for Area Classification

Purpose: to guide convergence of evidence by using generally accepted international standards and cut-offs. The classification is intended to guide decision-making aiming at short-term improvements in food security.

Phase name and description	Phase 1 None/Minimal	Phase 2 Stressed	Phase 3 Crisis	Phase 4 Emergency	Phase 5 Catastrophe/ Famine
	Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Households either: • Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or • Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Households either: • Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or • Are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. (For Famine Classification, area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.)
Priority response objectives	Action required to build resilience and for disaster risk reduction	Action required for disaster risk reduction and to protect livelihoods	Urgent action required to:		
			Protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps	Save lives and livelihoods	Revert/prevent widespread death and total collapse of livelihoods

 [Understanding the five phases of the IPC Food Insecurity Scale⁵⁶](#)

⁵⁶ IPC, "Understanding the IPC: Q&A", ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Q_A.pdf (last updated September 2023), p. 3.

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

4.1.1 INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Amnesty International considers that the armed conflict in Burkina Faso, forms part of the conflict in the Central Sahel (affecting parts of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso), and in which the same armed groups (JNIM and ISS) operate irrespective of national borders, along with other armed groups.⁵⁷

The conflict in Burkina Faso constitutes a non-international armed conflict, which is defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as “a situation of violence involving protracted armed confrontations between government forces and one or more organized armed groups, or between such groups themselves, arising on the territory of a State”⁵⁸ and in which armed groups show a minimum degree of organization and the armed confrontations reach a minimum level of intensity. As such, international humanitarian law applies. This includes the Geneva Conventions and its protocols, especially Common Article 3 to the Geneva conventions, as well as customary international humanitarian law. All parties to the conflict are bound to respect international humanitarian law – government forces and armed groups alike.

PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS UNDER INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The key obligations regarding the protection of civilians under international humanitarian law include:

- *The principle of distinction between civilian objects and military objectives* which call on all parties to the conflict to always *distinguish between civilian objects and military objectives*. Attacks must be directed only at military objectives, while civilians and civilian objects should be spared from the effects of hostilities.
- *The principle of precautions in attack*: Those carrying out attacks must take all feasible precautions to verify that targets are military objectives and to avoid, or at least minimize, incidental harm to civilians. They must also give effective advance warning when launching attacks unless circumstances do not permit.
- *The principle of proportionality in attack* which prohibits disproportionate and excessive damage to civilian life, physical integrity and to civilian objects, in relation to concrete military advantage, during attacks.

⁵⁷ These are essentially self-proclaimed self-defence armed groups, such as Dan Na Ambassagou and Dozo groups in Mali, and Koglweogo and Dozo groups in Burkina Faso.

⁵⁸ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), “Internal conflicts or other situations of violence – what is the difference for victims?” 12 December 2012, (Interview) icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/interview/2012/12-10-niac-non-international-armed-conflict.htm

- ***The principle of precautions against the effects of attacks*** which calls on all parties to the conflicts to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilians under their control against the effects of attacks.
- ***The prohibition of direct attacks against civilians.*** Deliberate attacks on civilians or civilian objects are prohibited. Civilians may not be made the object of attack, and their lives and physical integrity must be respected and protected.
- ***The prohibition of Indiscriminate attacks against civilians.*** Indiscriminate attacks are defined by the ICRC as:
 - “(a) which are not directed at a specific military objective.
 - (b) which employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective; or
 - (c) which employ a method or means of combat the effects of which cannot be limited as required by international humanitarian law.
 - and consequently, in each such case, are of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction⁵⁹”
- International humanitarian law also protects several categories of individuals, activities and professions from parties to conflict. These include among others medical personnel and their activities, medical transports, and vehicles, medical units who must be respected and protected. Humanitarian relief personnel and objects must also be respected and protected, and they must also be allowed rapid and unimpeded access to the civilians in need. Persons and objects displaying the distinctive emblem, whether religious or medical, are also protected from direct attacks.

These obligations are enshrined in various international treaties including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, and in customary international humanitarian law.⁶⁰ They aim to safeguard the lives and well-being of civilians during armed conflicts. States and armed groups are responsible for upholding these obligations and ensuring the protection of civilians both in situations of international armed conflicts and non-international armed conflicts.⁶¹

Burkina Faso is also a party to the Rome Statute, which defines war crimes under its article 8 as, in the context of non-international armed conflicts, serious violations of article 3 common to the four Geneva Conventions and other serious violations of the laws and customs applicable.⁶² These may include murders of civilians, acts of torture or other humiliating and degrading treatment, taking of hostages, intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population, intentionally directing attacks against humanitarian personnel, rape and other sexual violence, conscription of children under the age of 15, among other crimes.⁶³

4.1.2 INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

International human rights law always applies. Burkinabè authorities must ensure the respect and protection of human rights on the whole territory of the country, including regions affected by the armed conflict and other regions.

Burkina Faso has ratified various international and regional human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),⁶⁴ the International Covenant on Economic Social

⁵⁹ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rule 12.

⁶⁰ ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rules 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 20, 22, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, and 55.

⁶¹ Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War (GCIV); Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-international Armed Conflicts (APII).

⁶² ICRC, What are “serious violations of international humanitarian law”? Explanatory note: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/2012/att-what-are-serious-violations-of-ihl-icrc.pdf> (accessed on 26 October 2022).

⁶³ Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, articles 8(2) (c) and 8(2)(d).

⁶⁴ Ratified on 4 January 1999. See OHCHR. UN Treaty Body Base, Burkina Faso: tinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=27&Lang=en

and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),⁶⁵ the Convention against Torture (CAT)⁶⁶ and the Optional Protocol to the CAT,⁶⁷ the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),⁶⁸ the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child⁶⁹ (African Children's Charter). Burkina Faso has also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration, which promotes the protection of the right to education in times of conflict.⁷⁰

LEGAL PROTECTION OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Under International Humanitarian Law, parties to an armed conflict may not order the displacement of the civilian population, in whole or in part, for reasons related to the conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. In case of displacement, all possible measures must be taken to ensure the displaced persons are under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety, and they have access to sufficient food and water.⁷¹

In addition, in 2012 Burkina Faso ratified the Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, better known as the Kampala Convention, to protect IDPs from violence, abuse, and discrimination. This treaty defines the responsibilities of the states in the protection of this vulnerable category of persons, such as preventing arbitrary displacement, the protection of IDPs' rights during displacement, and the implementation of durable solutions for IDPs. State parties must also commit to establishing a national authority responsible for its response to internal displacement.⁷²

The Kampala convention also sets the responsibilities of non-state armed groups in times of conflict, as respecting the rights of IDPs and prohibits them from carrying out arbitrary displacements, separating family members, restricting IDPs' freedoms of movement, obstructing humanitarian access to IDPs and recruiting children or allowing them to participate in armed hostilities.⁷³ State parties are also further mandated to prevent interference to the rights of IDPs by non-state actors.

4.2 RELEVANT NATIONAL LEGISLATION

4.2.1 THE CONSTITUTION, CRIMINAL CODE AND THE CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE

The Constitution of Burkina Faso⁷⁴ establishes that human rights must be protected, fulfilled and promoted in the whole country – in regions affected by the armed conflict or not, including the right to life and physical

⁶⁵ Ratified on 4 January 1999. See OHCHR. UN Treaty Body Base, Burkina Faso:

tinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=27&Lang=en

⁶⁶ Ratified on 4 January 1999. See OHCHR. UN Treaty Body Base, Burkina Faso:

tinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=27&Lang=en

⁶⁷ Ratified on 7 July 2010.

⁶⁸ Ratified on 31 August 1990.

⁶⁹ Ratified on 8 June 1992. See BURKINA FASO entry page on the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: acerwc.africa/en/member-state/ratifications/31/burkina-faso

⁷⁰ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, "Burkina Faso is the 19th African Union member to endorse Safe Schools Declaration, Press Release", 12 September 2017: protectingeducation.org/news/burkina-faso-is-19th-african-union-member-to-endorse-safe-schools-declaration/

⁷¹ ICRC, Customary international humanitarian law, rules 129 and 131.

⁷² African Union, *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa* (Kampala Convention), 2009, Articles 3 and 4.

⁷³ Kampala Convention, Article 7.

⁷⁴ Burkina Faso, (*Conseil National de Transition*), Loi constitutionnelle n°072-2015/CNT portant révision de la constitution, 5 November 2015 assembleenationale.bf/IMG/pdf/loi_072_portant_revision_de_la_constitution.pdf and Constitution of Burkina Faso (1991) adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/BURKINA%20FASO_Constitution.pdf

integrity (Article 2), the free movement of persons and goods (article 9) and the rights to health and education (article 26 and 27). These rights are also recognized by the October 2022 transitional Charter.⁷⁵

The Criminal Code⁷⁶ also includes provisions on crime under international law. War crimes are defined as infractions against persons and goods during a conflict, whether international or non-international, and that are in violation with IHL, including the 1949 Geneva Convention.⁷⁷

Some of the infractions defined as war crimes include:

- “Wilful taking of life, infliction of great suffering, injury to body or health, torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, or outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment of persons protected under the law of armed conflict”⁷⁸
- “Direct attacks against civilian population, or against civilian populations not taking a direct part in a conflict, and which causes death or serious injuries or seriously endanger their health”⁷⁹
- “Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization or other forms of sexual violence against protected persons”⁸⁰
- “The infliction to adverse parties to the conflict who have fallen into one’s powers, of mutilation or medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are neither motivated by medical, dental or hospital treatment, nor carried out in the interest of these persons, and which result in their death or seriously endanger their health”⁸¹
- “The conscription or enlistment of minors in the armed forces or armed groups, or to take an active part in hostilities this provision does not preclude the voluntary enlistment of over fifteen years of age into the national armed forces.”⁸²
- Wilful attacks against:
 - o “Medical buildings, equipment, units and means of transport, and personnel using, in accordance with international law, the distinctive emblems provided for by the Geneva Conventions.
 - o personnel, facilities, equipment, units, or vehicles employed in a humanitarian aid or peacekeeping mission in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, insofar as they are entitled to the protection which the international law of armed conflict guarantees to civilians and civilian objects.
 - o buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided that such buildings are not military objectives.”⁸³
- The pillaging of a town or a city taken following an assault, and the destruction or confiscation of the goods belonging to an adverse party, not justified by military necessity⁸⁴
- “Attacking or bombarding, undefended cities, villages, housing, buildings (...), which are not military objectives”⁸⁵
- “Starving deliberately civilians as a way of warfare, by depriving them of goods necessary for their survival. This includes intentionally preventing the dispatch of relief supplies scheduled under the Geneva Conventions”⁸⁶

The Criminal Code also provides for war crimes exclusively linked to non-international armed conflict, as is the case in Burkina Faso.⁸⁷

⁷⁵ Burkina Faso, Charte de la Transition, 2022, www.sig.bf/2022/10/charte-de-la-transition/

⁷⁶ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal (Criminal Code), 2018, [bkf198257.pdf \(fao.org\)](http://bkf198257.pdf(fao.org))

⁷⁷ Burkina Faso has signed the Rome Statute in 1998 and ratified the treaty in 2004. See: International Criminal Court. “Burkina Faso” in Assembly of State Parties to the Rome Statute, asp.icc-cpi.int/states-parties/african-states/burkina-faso

⁷⁸ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal, 2018, Article 411-2.

⁷⁹ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal, 2018, Article 411-3.

⁸⁰ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal (2018), Article 411-4.

⁸¹ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal (2018), Article 411-5.

⁸² Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal (2018), Article 411-6.

⁸³ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal, 2018, Article 411-7.

⁸⁴ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal, 2018, Article 411-9.

⁸⁵ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal, 2018, Article 412-2.

⁸⁶ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal, 2018, Article 412-7.

⁸⁷ Burkina Faso, Loi N°025-2018/AN portant code pénal, 2018, Articles 413-1, 413-2 and 413-3.

Burkina Faso's Code of Military Justice gives competence to military courts in times of peace, for ordinary offences committed by members of the military and assimilated,⁸⁸ during their service or within the premises of military facilities. Ordinary courts can refer other offences involving members of the military and assimilated to military courts, if it infringes on probity, good standards, honour, and discipline of the military institution, by tarnishing its reputation or disturbing public order.⁸⁹ Civilians working in military facilities, former soldiers excluded from the military, and individuals who are involved in military operations without being contractually or legally members of the armed forces, are also under the jurisdiction of military courts. According to the Code of Military Justice, "in times of war" the competence of the military courts extends to infractions committed by war prisoners, infractions on the legislation on arms and weapons, and any other infraction involving a member of the military and assimilated member.⁹⁰ Individuals charged as co-accused to members and assimilated members of the military in the commission of infractions, are also prosecuted before military courts instead of civilian ones.⁹¹

The code of military justice is also vague enough to include potentially crimes under international law committed by the military in times of conflict. This potential overreach with the competence of ordinary courts is in contradiction with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights' Guidelines and Principles on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa (2003), which state that: "The only purpose of military courts shall be to determine offences of a purely military nature committed by military personnel."⁹² Traducing civilians before military courts is contrary to the international fair trial standards.

4.2.2 RESTRICTIVE LAWS

Burkina Faso has amended its national legislation since 2015, allegedly to respond to the worsening security situation. At times, the national legal framework has imperilled human rights in Burkina Faso.

DECREE ON THE STATUS OF THE BURKINABÈ SPECIAL FORCES

In June 2021 the government adopted a decree⁹³ on the status of Special Forces in Burkina Faso. The special forces are defined as an elite unit of the army specially selected, trained and equipped for special operations, outside of standard military operations.⁹⁴ Article 10 of the decree creating their status, stipulates that the "personnel from special forces cannot be pursued for acts accomplished during mission or as part of their official activities".⁹⁵

In case of commission of human rights violations or crimes under international law by special forces, this immunity clause would violate the country's obligations under international law to investigate and prosecute such violations and crimes. Therefore, Amnesty International calls on this immunity clause to be revoked.

STATE OF EMERGENCY LAW AND FOLLOWING DECREES

A January 2019 law has amended the regime of state of emergency in Burkina Faso. The new amendment defines a state of emergency as a "crisis situation enabling the administrative authorities to take exceptional security measures which are likely to affect the rights and freedoms of individuals".⁹⁶ A state of emergency can be declared by the President via a decree, "over all or part of the country, in case of imminent danger resulting from serious breaches of public order, or in case of events of nature and gravity enough to be qualified public calamity".⁹⁷

⁸⁸ These include active members of the military or those in the reserve, on official leave or on irregular leave. *Article 35 and 36. Loi no.24-94/ADP modifiée par la loi 44-2017/AN portant code de justice militaire*, <http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Code-de-justice-militaire-du-Burkina-Faso.pdf>

⁸⁹ Burkina Faso, *Loi no.24-94/ADP modifiée par la loi 44-2017/AN portant code de justice militaire*, [justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Code-de-justice-militaire-du-Burkina-Faso.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Code-de-justice-militaire-du-Burkina-Faso.pdf), Article 34.

⁹⁰ Burkina Faso, *Loi no.24-94/ADP modifiée par la loi 44-2017/AN portant code de justice militaire*, [justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Code-de-justice-militaire-du-Burkina-Faso.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Code-de-justice-militaire-du-Burkina-Faso.pdf), Article 45.

⁹¹ Burkina Faso, *Loi no.24-94/ADP modifiée par la loi 44-2017/AN portant code de justice militaire*, [justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Code-de-justice-militaire-du-Burkina-Faso.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Code-de-justice-militaire-du-Burkina-Faso.pdf), Article 48.

⁹² African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), *Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa, 2003* | African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights ([au.int](http://www.africancourtshumanrights.org)).

⁹³ Burkina Faso, Décret no 2021-0-481/PRES/PM/MDNAC portant statut particulier des personnels des forces spéciales, 2021, netafrique.net/statut-particulier-des-personnels-des-forces-speciales-des-internautes-en-colere/

⁹⁴ Burkina Faso, décret no 2021-0480/PRES/PM/MDNAC portant création des forces spéciales, 2 juin 2021, Article 2-3.

⁹⁵ Burkina Faso, décret no. 2021-0481/PRES/PM/MDNA portant statut particulier des personnels des forces spéciales, Article 10.

⁹⁶ Burkina Faso, *Loi n°023-2019/an portant réglementation de l'état de siège et de l'état d'urgence au Burkina Faso*, Article 10.

⁹⁷ Burkina Faso, *Loi n°023-2019/an portant réglementation de l'état de siège et de l'état d'urgence au Burkina Faso*, [justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Loi-n%C2%B0023-2019-AN-portant-reglementation-de-letat-de-siege-et-letat-durgence.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Loi-n%C2%B0023-2019-AN-portant-reglementation-de-letat-de-siege-et-letat-durgence.pdf)

⁹⁸ Burkina Faso, *Loi n°023-2019/an portant réglementation de l'état de siège et de l'état d'urgence au Burkina Faso*, [justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Loi-n%C2%B0023-2019-AN-portant-reglementation-de-letat-de-siege-et-letat-durgence.pdf](http://www.justice.gov.bf/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Loi-n%C2%B0023-2019-AN-portant-reglementation-de-letat-de-siege-et-letat-durgence.pdf), Article 10.

Under a state of emergency, administrative authorities are empowered to limit and restrict the movement of persons or vehicles in specific places and at times fixed by order; to authorize search of private homes without warrants, among other measures, dissolve any group or association which participates or incite to disturbing public order, and even censor media, publications and speeches judged as likely to disturb public order.⁹⁸

Prior to the adoption of this law, the president had declared a state of emergency on 31 December 2018 in 14 provinces spread across 6 regions beginning on 1st January 2019.⁹⁹ In this context, the governor of the Sahel region prohibited the use of motorbikes and tricycles in several communes bordering Mali and Niger, since February 2021.¹⁰⁰

In June 2021 the state of emergency was extended for an additional 18 months in these six regions, to “enable the administrative authorities of the regions concerned to continue to take appropriate measures in their areas of competence to fight insecurity and terrorism”, as stated by the government spokesperson.¹⁰¹

In June 2022, under the state of emergency regime, the National Theatre Commander, Lt-Colonel Didier Yves Bamouni, took a decree prohibiting the circulation of motorized vehicles “in areas with a high security challenge”.¹⁰² This was complementary to several restrictions, including night-time curfews in several cities and towns.¹⁰³

In March 2023, the government of Burkina Faso expanded the state of emergency on 21 out of the country’s 45 provinces spread across 8 of the country’s 13 regions.¹⁰⁴

State of emergency laws which lead to measures restricting human rights are permitted under international law, but they must respond to a situation of public emergency, still respect the principle of proportionality, and be limited in time. Article 4 of the ICCPR provides that “in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed, the States Parties to the present Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with their other obligations under international law and do not involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin”.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ Burkina Faso, Loi no.023-2019/AN portant réglementation de l'état de siège et de l'état d'urgence au Burkina Faso, 2019, Article 13.

⁹⁹ Burkina Faso, Décret n°2018-1200/PRES du 31 décembre 2018 portant déclaration de l'état d'urgence dans quatorze (14) provinces du Burkina Faso.

¹⁰⁰ Info Wakat, “Sahel : Les localités où il est interdit de circuler à moto ou tricycle de jour comme de nuit” 3 février 2021, infowakat.net/sahel-les-localites-ou-il-est-interdit-de-circuler-a-moto-ou-tricycle-de-jour-comme-de-nuit/

¹⁰¹ Service d'information du gouvernement du Burkina Faso. « Prorogation de l'état d'urgence de 18 mois dans six (06) régions » 9 June 2021,

https://www.sig.gov.bf/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1239&cHash=48bac04dcb756ab0af055e80bd97acf3

¹⁰² Burkina Faso, Ordonnance no.2022-006/PRES-TRANS portant interdiction de circulation d'engins motorisés dans les zones à fort défi sécuritaire, 29 juin 2022.

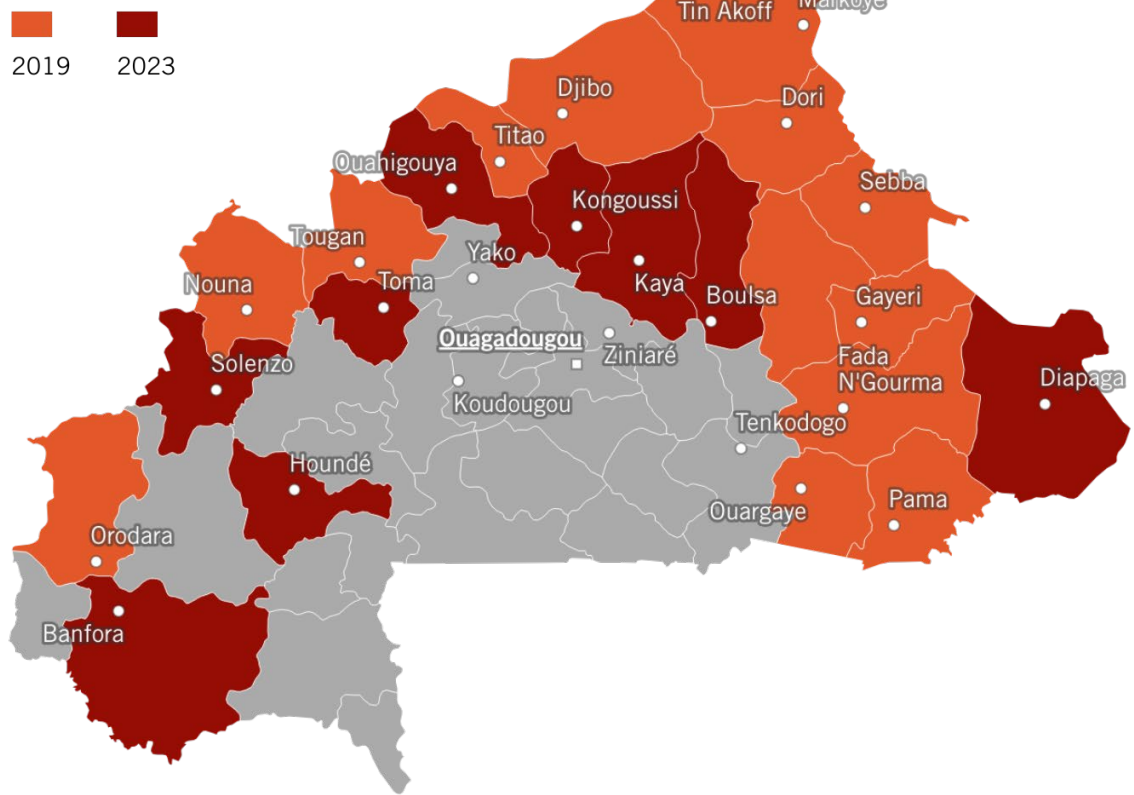
¹⁰³ Région du Nord/Gouvernorat de Ouahigouya : Communiqué administratif, no.2023-003/MATS/RNRD/GVT-OHG/CAB, 3 mars 2023, lefaso.net/spip.php?page=web-tv-video&id_article=119899&rubrique459; Communiqué de M. le gouverneur de la région du Sahel no 2023-MATDS/R-SHL/G/CAB, 3 juillet 2023, lefaso.net/spip.php?article122779

¹⁰⁴ Le Faso, « Lutte contre le terrorisme au Burkina Faso : L'état d'urgence prorogé de 6 mois » 14 May 2023, lefaso.net/spip.php?article121450#:~:text=L'%C3%A9tat%20d'urgence%20est,menace%20s%C3%A9curitaire%2C%20selon%20le%20gouvernement.

¹⁰⁵ ICCPR, Article 4(1).

PROVINCES UNDER EMERGENCY LAWS IN BURKINA FASO

YEAR OF FIRST PROCLAMATION



Map: Amnesty International • Source: Service d'information du Gouvernement du Burkina Faso

5. CRIMES BY ARMED GROUPS AGAINST CIVILIANS IN BESIEGED PLACES

5.1 AT LEAST 46 CITIES, TOWNS AND VILLAGES UNDER SIEGE IN JULY 2023

« So many things have changed here in 2022. Djibo, Sebba and many other secondary towns are under siege. In Sebba, there is no free movement after Sampelga [coming from Dori, in the north]. Bourzanga [Bam province, between Djibo and Kongoussi] is also difficult to accede to. Many smaller villages are also under siege”, Humanitarian worker on the situation in Burkina Faso.¹⁰⁶

As of July 2023, at least 46 locations in Burkina Faso are under a form of siege by armed groups, with access to it obstructed, according to data collected from humanitarian actors.¹⁰⁷ The locations of these cities, towns and even villages under siege, or sometimes describes as of “restricted access”¹⁰⁸ is spread over the national territory, ranging from Nouna in the West to Diapaga in the East, and from Tin-Akoff in the far north, to Pama and Mangodara in the far south. The two regions of Sahel and Boucle du Mouhoun are the most affected, with 19 and 18 communes being labelled as “difficult to access” by UNOCHA respectively as of March 2023, due to these sieges.¹⁰⁹

For the purpose of this research, Amnesty International defines a town/city/village under siege by armed groups, as one town/city/village in which the army and/or VDPs are present and where armed groups, stationed mostly around the town/city/village, prohibit or restrict free access by people, goods and services to/from the town/city/village through irregular checkpoints at the main exit, the laying of IEDs¹¹⁰ in the main road axis to limit traffic, and occasional attacks against people, soldiers and supply convoys trying to reach those besieged towns. Furthermore, in several of these besieged settlements, armed groups have prohibited residents from access to their farmlands, which are often located in the periphery of the city/town/village,

¹⁰⁶ Interview with humanitarian worker active in Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁰⁷ We collected various documents provided by humanitarian actors to come to this conclusion.

¹⁰⁸ This term is also used by OCHA to describe the difficulty to access by road from Ouagadougou, some of these localities.

¹⁰⁹ Assessment of humanitarian access by UNOCHA. Document in possession of Amnesty International.

¹¹⁰ In general, the use of IEDs to enforce sieges and/or military operations has substantially increased in Burkina Faso. If in 2021, there were six IEDs incidents per month, and in 2022, 22 IEDs incidents per month, the monthly average has already reached 24 incidents per month, during the first half of 2023 Interview with senior humanitarian executives, Ouagadougou, June 2023.

and access to pasturelands for grazing, which are often outside of the city/town/village perimeter. In some areas, armed groups have destroyed critical infrastructures such as bridges. This is the case of Djibo, Sebba (Soum province, Sahel region), but also Titao (Loroum, Northern region), Pama (Kompienga, Eastern region) and Nouna (Kossi, Boucle du Mouhoun) and Tougan (Sourou, Boucle du Mouhoun). Beyond the physical restriction to access, some besieged localities are further isolated from beyond by the sabotaging of telecommunication poles, by armed groups, in a bid of restricting the flow of information.

While restricting access to an area where the opposing party to the conflict (the army) is present is not prohibited under international humanitarian law, armed groups must ensure that these strategies do not infringe the rights of the civilian population living in these areas. Armed groups blocking villages and cities must ensure that they still allow and facilitate access for humanitarian relief¹¹¹ and that the civilian population still has access to water, food, and other necessities.

THE DYNAMICS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE SIEGES

Arbinda is among the first towns to be besieged by Ansaroul Islam in 2019. This tactic of war has expanded drastically since 2022.

Armed groups resort to sieges to exert pressure on the local communities seen as hostile to the Islamist armed groups, to dissuade them from collaborating with the armed forces, and to expand their influence and the frontlines. The sieges are also a response to government policies: armed groups such as Ansaroul Islam have enforced sieges in Kompienga, Djibo, Diapaga and Nouna, as a response to the mobilization of VDPs in cities by the governments. Indeed, the announcement of the mobilization of 50,000 VDPs by the government in November 2022, was met by a communication by Ansaroul Islam, which threatened communities that would take part in this national effort and also threatened the government of a total siege on the main road axis of Burkina Faso.¹¹²

As an illustration, access to Togo from Kompienga (in the east of Burkina Faso) has been cut by Ansaroul Islam groups in reaction to the mobilization of 232 VDPs by the authorities along with the deployment of national VDPs in Kompienga in May 2023. This road allowed people including IDPs in Kompienga to buy supplies and to communicate easily with their relatives, using that country's stabler telephone network. "Since 20 May [2023], access to Togo from Kompienga has been cut in reaction to the deployment of national VDPs. We have witnessed incursions of jihadists in Kompienga and clashes with these volunteers, sometimes leading to collateral damages among the civilians. Beyond Pama, Maticoaali, a town 94 km distant from Fada, the regional capital is also under siege. Two bridges linking it to Fada have been destroyed, isolating it".¹¹³

At times, the sieges have the objective of making the life of residents too difficult to stay and weakening the posts of the army and/or VDPs that may be in these localities in order to subject the populations to the demands of armed groups (tax, enlistment, submission to their governance order), to gradually empty the localities of its inhabitants and if possible, to take control of the localities to expand the territories under their control.

To achieve their objectives, the armed groups progressively deprive the residents from their daily necessities (such as food, water), and prevent the army from circulating freely between main axes. This tactic of sieges and the food insecurity it generates, constitutes a way of pressure on the Burkinabè authorities for whom supplying effectively and regularly these localities have become one of the major challenges since 2022. Prohibitions from farming and grazing which affects livelihoods systems, in areas that are essentially rural, together with the control of major roads and the attacks on supply convoys by armed groups, affect food security and often lead to the mass displacement of residents to areas that are not under siege by armed groups.

These suffocating tactics targeted at first mainly towns and cities on the frontlines, and thereafter progressed and changed along with the expansion of the armed conflict in Burkina Faso. For example, Arbinda, a town of 45,000 inhabitants in the Soum province (Sahel region) has been under siege intermittently since 2019 while Nouna, a town of 32,000 inhabitants, in the Kossi province (Boucle du Mouhoun) has undergone a restriction to access by armed groups for the first time in 2023. Indeed, the sieges particularly affected the Sahel, Eastern and Centre-Nord regions from 2019 to 2023. Nevertheless, in 2023, this strategy was implemented also in Western Burkina Faso, especially in the Boucle du Mouhoun region. As a leader of a

¹¹¹ ICRC, Customary international humanitarian law, Rules 55 and 56.

¹¹² Morgane Le Cam. 2022. "Burkina Faso's surge in violence highlights limits of junta's counterterrorism strategy", 19 April 2023, lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/04/19/burkina-faso-s-surge-in-violence-highlights-limits-of-junta-s-counterterrorism-strategy_6023513_124.html

¹¹³ Interview with humanitarian head of mission, active in Eastern region, May 2023, Ouagadougou.

civil society organisation explained, “these days, a town/village falls under siege every day. Arbinda has been under siege since 2019. The situation is similar in Gorgadji, Sollé, Mansila and Titao and there are real risks for the inhabitants.”¹¹⁴

In some areas, entire communes are under siege, which affect dozens of villages, and illustrates the scope of the hold of armed groups; this is particularly the case in the communes of Arbinda, Djibo, Mansila, Kelbo, Gorgadji, Sebba, Tin-Akoff and Solhan in the Sahel region, but also Titao (Northern region), Pama and Gayeri (Eastern region).

Sieges may affect communes of various sizes, from the most populated communes of Kantchari (109,487 residents) and Titao (104,977 residents) to smaller communes such as Sago or Tamberi (Yagha province, Sahel region) which respectively host a population of 318 and 1,372 according to the 2019 census.¹¹⁵

The siege tactics by Ansaroul Islam is not peculiar to Burkina Faso. In neighbouring Mali over the recent years, it has been enforced against several towns and villages such as Youwarou (Mopti region), Farabougou (Ségou region) and Dinangourou (Mopti region) by Katiba Macina, a group closely allied with Ansaroul Islam, to force communities to accept their authority and cease from hosting other armed groups or collaborating with the government.¹¹⁶

In Djibo, a dialogue was initiated by local customary authorities and the command of Ansaroul Islam, to cease the siege of the city between March and June 2022. One of those authorities involved in the discussion expressed the lack of proper support by the government for these discussions which were informal, and in which, if the government was involved, remained distant. “The government told us [local authorities] that we could dialogue with armed groups, but that we couldn’t negotiate with them”.¹¹⁷

Another customary actor said: “We would like to negotiate with Ansaroul Islam, but the government should give us clear instructions on that regard. One can go far into the negotiations with Ansaroul and then be thrown under a bus by the government, because no formal instructions was ever given”.¹¹⁸ It seems that strategies to be adopted in whether to open discussions and negotiations with armed groups differed between local authorities and the government. In any case, since then, discussions between representatives of the state and the armed groups have broken down while the siege continues.

To Amnesty International’s best knowledge, Djibo was a relative exception where an attempt of discussion had started and there has been no successful discussion or negotiation process elsewhere.

5.2 CRIMES AGAINST CIVILIANS

5.2.1 KILLINGS

“At the beginning, they [Ansaroul Islam combatants] were only targeting soldiers but since the arrival of volunteers [VDPs] from neighbouring communities in Djibo, less than a year ago, they are much more assertive and target civilians too. These volunteers arrived around the harvest season in 2021. They are mostly displaced persons from Pobe-Mengao, Nassoumbou, Belehede and some people from Djibo.”¹¹⁹

KILLINGS OF CIVILIANS AT THE FRONTLINES

Since 2019, the number of civilians killed during the conflict has steadily increased every year except a lull in 2021, with 2022 being the most lethal one. In 2022, the majority of killings occurred in the Sahel, Centre-

¹¹⁴ Interview leader, human rights monitoring civil society organization, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹¹⁵ Demographical data taken from Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie. 2022. *Cinquième Recensement Général de la Population et de l’Habitation du Burkina Faso : Fichier des localités du 5e RGPH*,

¹¹⁶ Mahamadou Kane, « Comment les djihadistes ont levé le blocus sur Dinangourou », 23 August 2021, www.dw.com/fr/mali-comment-djihadistes-blocus-dinangourou/a-58961406

¹¹⁷ Interview with customary figure from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹¹⁸ Interview with actor involved in the discussions in Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹¹⁹ Interview with 39-year-old IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

Nord and Eastern regions at the frontlines, where most of the besieged towns are, according to the Armed Conflict Location Event Database (ACLED).

Amnesty International has collected information and testimonies of attacks by elements of armed groups against civilians inside, at the outskirts, or trying to flee the besieged towns/villages.

In Solhan, (in the commune of Sebba, Yagha province), on the night of 4-5 June 2021, armed fighters alleged to be members of Ansaroul Islam, attacked a position of the VDPs and then went from house to house, killing at least 132 people, including 20 children.¹²⁰ The assailants also looted property belonging to the villagers and destroyed several buildings in the village. Many of the survivors fled for Dori, the regional capital, and Sebba, the nearest town, the next day. According to media reports, the army had withdrawn from parts of the Yagha province including Solhan, due to the pressure by armed groups, leaving communities and VDPs to fend for themselves.¹²¹ The presence of IEDs set up by armed groups in the main axis has also limited the timely response of the military to attacks by armed groups. The road axis between Solhan and Sebba, for example, was riddled with IEDs. Some of the people fleeing Solhan after the attack have also been impacted by IEDs as stressed by an IDP from Solhan: "There were many IEDs on the road. The day after the attack a lady and her child who were fleeing to Sebba were victims of an explosion on the road".¹²² In some instances, Ansaroul Islam members attacked residents of besieged towns trying to flee, although they were civilians. Such was the case in Madjoari (Kompienga province, Eastern region), a town that has been encircled by Ansaroul Islam since February 2021. On 25 May 2022, armed assailants attacked civilians from Tambarga and Madjoari, trying to flee the sieges and reach Nadiagou, a commune in the Pama department, in Singou, killing at least 50 civilians, all men according to residents interviewed by the media.¹²³ Of the fleeing cohort, only four persons (two women, an elderly person, and a child) were spared by the assailants and managed to reach Nadiagou. Six days before the attack, Ansaroul Islam members attacked a position of the army and VDPs in Madjoari, killing 11 soldiers and injuring 20 others.¹²⁴

On 11 June 2022, members of the Islamic State in the Sahel attacked the town of Seytenga, 10 km distant from the border with Niger, where freedom of residents was increasingly restricted by the presence of armed groups who were targeting the town because of the presence of a VDP camp. A day before the attack, the gendarmerie post of Seytenga was evacuated by the military, following a deadly attack by fighters against the brigade on 9 June, which caused the death of nine gendarmes.¹²⁵

On 11 June 2022, after encircling the village and preventing the trapped residents from fleeing to safety, the armed assailants went from house to house, killing men by shooting them dead. The attack started at 3.30 pm in the afternoon of 11 June and ended only the next day at dawn, around 5 am. According to a UNHRC report, more than 86 people, mostly civilians were killed by the assailants.¹²⁶

One female survivor of the attack told Amnesty International:

"I was at home in Seytenga in the Ouro Loumo neighbourhood. The attack started at 4pm and lasted until 7.36 pm. Then the shots resumed at 9pm until 3am but we had fled at 11pm. They were talking on walkie-talkies in front of our window. I couldn't see them, but I could distinctly hear their voices, and they were speaking the Jelgoji Fulfulde. I lost my brother-in-law, Ouédraogo Rasmané, who was about 40 years old. At around 4pm, when the armed men were shooting in the market, he got on his motorbike and towed his friend from Soffoquel to escape. The motorbike chain broke, and the armed men caught up with them and killed them both. He was recognised two days later at the funeral by his clothes and his national ID card. He had more than 2 million francs in his pocket, which had disappeared. I left Seytenga at 11pm on foot with my family, my dad, my

¹²⁰ Amnesty International, « Burkina Faso: Après le massacre de Solhan, la protection de la population doit être la priorité » (Index Number: AFR 60/4249/2021), 7 June 2021, [amnesty.org/fr/documents/af60/4249/2021/fr/](https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/af60/4249/2021/fr/). Fifty people were also reportedly injured in the attack, according to media sources.

¹²¹ France 24, "Burkina Faso : la tragédie de Solhan "ne restera pas impunie", assure le Premier ministre, 8 juin 2021 : [france24.com/fr/afrique/20210608-burkina-faso-la-trag%C3%A9die-de-solhan-ne-restera-pas-impunie-assure-le-premier-ministre](https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20210608-burkina-faso-la-trag%C3%A9die-de-solhan-ne-restera-pas-impunie-assure-le-premier-ministre). See also UNHCR condemns deadliest attack in Burkina Faso in years, 8 June 2021, [unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-condemns-deadliest-attack-burkina-faso-years#:~:text=UNHCR%2C%20the%20UN%20Refugee%20Agency%2C%20strongly%20condemns%20the,northeast%20Sahel%20region%2C%20near%20the%20border%20with%20Niger](https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/unhcr-condemns-deadliest-attack-burkina-faso-years#:~:text=UNHCR%2C%20the%20UN%20Refugee%20Agency%2C%20strongly%20condemns%20the,northeast%20Sahel%20region%2C%20near%20the%20border%20with%20Niger).

¹²² Interview with IDP from Dambini (Commune of Solhan), December 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹²³ Burkina Faso, « plus de 50 morts dans une attaque dans une région de l'Est », 26 May 2022, [france24.com/fr/afrique/20220526-burkina-faso-plus-de-50-morts-dans-une-attaque-dans-une-r%C3%A9gion-de-l-est](https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20220526-burkina-faso-plus-de-50-morts-dans-une-attaque-dans-une-r%C3%A9gion-de-l-est) See also Burkina Faso, « Communiqué », 27 May : [burkina24.com/2022/05/27/gorgadji-et-madjoari-le-gouvernement-condamne-des-actes-barbares-et-laches-perpetres-contre-des-populations-paisibles-par-des-terroristes/](https://www.burkina24.com/2022/05/27/gorgadji-et-madjoari-le-gouvernement-condamne-des-actes-barbares-et-laches-perpetres-contre-des-populations-paisibles-par-des-terroristes/)

¹²⁴ Burkina Faso, Le Secrétaire général condamne fermement le meurtre d'une cinquantaine de personnes par des groupes armés extrémistes présumés le 25 mai à Madjoari, 27 mai 2022, [press.un.org/fr/2022/sgsm21300.doc.htm](https://www.press.un.org/fr/2022/sgsm21300.doc.htm)

¹²⁵ Rose Tapsoba, "Seytenga: psychose et désespoir après le départ des FDS" 12 juin 2022, www.actualite.bf/seytenga-psychose-et-desespoir-apres-le-depart-des-fds/

¹²⁶ UNCHR/Projet 21, « Note d'analyse de protection : urgence Seytenga ». 21 July 2022.

stepmother, my older sisters, and our neighbour and her two beautiful daughters, as well as one of my sister's sons, Harouna, aged 14, a young man from the Debel neighbourhood aged 16, and another from Foufou who later disappeared. We walked for 4 hours and arrived at Gotougou at around 4.30 am. Then we go into a tricycle at 7am. to continue to Dori where we arrived at around 10am.’¹²⁷

Another survivor of the deadly attack told Amnesty International:

“I was to the east of the new market, some 500m from the large Seytenga market. My plan was to leave Seytenga for Dori, and I had a tricycle brought in to load my luggage and equipment, which consisted of three bags of rice, four white sheep and my wife's luggage. Just as the tricycle driver was getting off the ground, we heard the gunshots. Everyone looked for each other and I took refuge in an abandoned house where eight Bella women¹²⁸ joined me. The gunmen took the tricycle; my wife and I had nothing left but the clothes we were wearing. It must be said that the shooting started and when I took refuge in the abandoned house, I looked at my watch and it was exactly 5.12pm. As soon as I got out, I saw Hamidou Alaye Ba Yamba, my neighbour lying dead. There were at least 200 motorcycles and I'm sure they [the assailants] were over 300 people. They were everywhere, east, west, north, and south.”¹²⁹

Another one told Amnesty International:

“The assailants were numerous. Around 9pm, they stopped shooting to chase away the animals and came back to loot the stores in Seytenga. I lived in Ouro Loumo and lost six relatives. Boubacar Soria was killed in front of my 11-year-old son. He was driving a tricycle with his apprentice. The child says they were shot, and they ducked. I'm traumatized.”¹³⁰

Before leaving the town, assailants looted the stores, carried livestock belonging to the villagers, and burned several motorcycles, vehicles, and buildings. Following the attack, more than 34,000 residents of Seytenga and surrounding villages fled to Dori, the Sahel capital, while at least 360 crossed the border into Niger.¹³¹ A few days after, the Islamic State in the Sahel claimed the attack, justifying it on the presence of VDPs in the Seytenga and threatening any other village harbouring security forces or VDPs of the same reprisal.¹³²

Intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities constitutes a war crime.¹³³ Under international humanitarian law, all parties to a conflict, including non-state armed groups, have an obligation to protect civilians (see Chapter 4 on legal framework). In this instance, on 11 June 2022 in Seytenga, the Islamic State in the Sahel perpetrated the war crime of an attack against a civilian population.

¹²⁷ Interview with 30-year survivor of the attack on Seytenga, May 2023, Dori.

¹²⁸ The Bella constitutes a social group among the Touareg community. See OLIVIER DE SARDAN Jean-Pierre, « Chapitre XIII. Classe, peuple, état, identité... », dans : *Les sociétés songhay-zarma (Niger - Mali). Chefs, guerriers, esclaves, paysans...*, sous la direction de OLIVIER DE SARDAN Jean-Pierre. Paris, Karthala, « Hommes et sociétés », 1984, p. 269-290. URL : <https://www.cairn.info/les-societes-songhay-zarma-niger-mali--9782865371068-page-269.htm>

¹²⁹ Interview with 47-year-old survivor of the Seytenga, May 2023, Dori.

¹³⁰ Interview with 44-year-old survivor of the Seytenga attack, May 2023, Dori.

¹³¹ UNCHR/Projet 21, Note d'analyse de protection : urgence Seytenga. 21 July 2022.

¹³² MENASTREAM. Twitter post: “#BurkinaFaso: In an unofficial audio, Islamic State Sahel Province (formerly #ISGS) claims the 11-12 June massacre in Seytenga, Seno Province, which resulted in at least 86 people killed according to an official toll...”, 18 June 2022, twitter.com/MENASTREAM/status/1547699727155601408?s=20&t=0tWELDPU26ZZLEGj30Xm-A :

¹³³ Rome Statute, article 8(2)(e)(i).

FEAR OF KILLINGS AT CHECKPOINTS AT THE FRONTLINES

“THE BOUCLE DU MOUHOUN IS THE NEW CONFLICT IN 2023¹³⁴”

The sieges particularly affected the Sahel, Eastern and Centre-Nord regions from 2019 to 2023. Nevertheless, in 2023, this strategy spread to Western Burkina Faso, especially in the Boucle du Mouhoun region. The sieges against towns such as Nouna (Kossi province) and Tougan (Sourou province) began after tragedies; in Nouna, it followed the attack against Fulani neighbourhoods by Dozo militiamen, which were reprisals for an alleged attack of the JNIM against Dozos and VDPs in training in the city on 30 December.¹³⁵ In Tougan, it was heralded by the attack against a MSF convoy by Ansaroul Islam on the Dédougou-Tougan road axis, which caused the deaths of two staff members in February.¹³⁶

As a leader of a civil society organisation explained, “Gourcy (Northern region) and Tougan (Boucle du Mouhoun) are harder to accede to in 2023. And there are killings. The VDPs will execute anybody plying these roads who has the Fulani look, while the jihadists control and execute all VDPs or natives of villages where there are VDPs. In the West, in Sidéradougou and Mangodara, the Fulanis cannot travel freely.”¹³⁷

Amnesty International has received information about alleged killings and fear of targeted killings, often based on tit-for-tat reprisals, committed by members of armed groups and by VDPs at checkpoints around the besieged towns/villages, notably in Boucle du Mouhoun region.

According to interview with civil society members and humanitarian actors, members of armed groups and VDPs maintain irregular checkpoints along the Tougan-Dedougou and Nouna-Dedougou axis, controlling passengers on buses and trucks, and sometimes proceeding to unlawful killings of people suspected to be either jihadists or sympathizers, or VDPs or natives and residents of Nouna and Tougan. Ansaroul Islam and other groups affiliated with JNIM allegedly target these places due to the mobilization of VDPs in support of the authorities. “On these axes, we are seeing irregular controls by VDPs and jihadists. VDPs controls the buses reaching Tougan and interrogate all those who have the typical Fulani look, while the radicals [sic] target people from Nouna, whom they take out of the buses and execute unlawfully next to the ditches on the road. For the violent extremist armed groups, having “Traoré” as a surname is enough to be taken out and executed. (...) We are forced to segregate our teams for security reasons. First, no individual with a European passport will take the road. And even among the nationals, you cannot send anybody anywhere. This is particularly the case in the Boucle du Mouhoun and Cascades region, especially in Banfora and Mangodara, which is also under siege”,¹³⁸ a senior humanitarian worker active in the Boucle du Mouhoun told Amnesty International.

These types of targeted killings are also likely to happen in Eastern Burkina Faso, where Ansaroul Islam targets natives of some of the towns under siege, such as Tanwalbougou. “Nowadays, bus and truck drivers even refuse to carry natives of Tanwalbougou. [...] Armed groups have ordered those drivers not to carry any woman from Tanwalbougou”, a 21-year-old IDP from Kpentchangou, who had to relocate to Tanwalbougou, then to Fada told Amnesty International.¹³⁹

A 25-year-old IDP from Tanwalbougou told Amnesty International, “people from Tanwalbougou would falsify their papers to put a different birthplace if they are adamant in visiting the town and escape reprisals by armed groups. They would put Matiacoali, Kantchari or any other place as their birthplace if they want to take the road to Tanwalbougou without risks”.¹⁴⁰

In Djibo, the possibility of flight to Ouahigouya has become tighter in 2023, compared to 2022, as the road between Mené and Ouahigouya is increasingly dangerous and subject to controls by VDPs. IDPs fleeing hunger and insecurity from Djibo sometimes take this road to their peril. “The situation is worse now compared to December. There are more and more killings, and sometimes they are clearly targeted. Impunity is rampant thus IDPs are very scared to take the buses because they can be taken out, at checkpoints, and executed, without any consequences. Now, they are tempted to flee to zones under Ansaroul Islam influence where they feel less targeted, but where they risk being bombed by the army.”¹⁴¹

According to civil society representatives, victims or witnesses to killings and other abuses on these roads would rather report these incidents to human rights organizations, associations, than to state authorities directly. The leader of a human rights organization told Amnesty International: “We are seeing a shrinking of the Burkinabè state, and where it is present, its credibility is not broad. In the West, Fulani civilians would rather go and complain to our local sections than go directly to the police and gendarmerie. I think that tells a lot about the trust in our state institutions. In Bondokuy, after threats against that community

[Fulani] they fled to our section, not to the security services. It was the same thing with the victims of Karma in May 2023".¹⁴²In view of this information, Amnesty International recommends the Burkinabe authorities to investigate on these alleged criminal acts and prosecute anyone – members of Islamist armed groups or VDPs - suspected of targeted killing against civilians in fair trials.

5.2.2 ABDUCTIONS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

In addition to the cases of unlawful killings against civilians, Amnesty International collected information on cases of abductions of women by armed groups in the context of besieged localities. The organisation has documented a case of abductions near the village of Liki, linked to restriction to food security due to siege tactics by Ansaroul Islam.

On 12 January 2023, 66 women, girls, and new-borns, were abducted by alleged members of Ansaroul Islam near the besieged village of Liki (Aribinda department, Soum province, Sahel region), while they were collecting firewood and gleaning wild fruits according to regional authorities.¹⁴³ There had been a delay in the supplying of the town due to the siege and ongoing military operations in the Yagha province, and the severe hunger had forced the women to go nearly 15 km away from the town to glean resources and collect firewood. These women were freed in Tougouri, on 16 January, during a routine road control of the truck in which they were parked in.¹⁴⁴ Some of the women interviewed by Amnesty International told the organization:

“We were around 20 women going near Liki to collect wild fruits. There was already a group of older women collecting firewood and wild fruits. There was nothing to eat in Arbinda and we were forced to forage for food. But on that day, armed men came near to our group near Liki and forced us to follow them to Dalla. They were many, mostly young men and they were speaking Fulfulde. One of them looked older and seemed to be their chief. Some of them seemed to be from villages near Arbinda. From Dalla, we trekked to Gaigagota and then to Tangasouka and then to other villages, some of which were deserted. During our captivity, some of them told us that Arbinda would never be supplied again and asked pointed questions about three residents of Arbinda, that we knew of. They were also speaking very ill of the VDPs. At one of the villages, one of their chiefs asked them why they had abducted us along with small children. After a few days, they took us on the road again, bidding us to be silent. We walked a long time until we reached the road going to Tougouri where they stopped a truck filled with sesame and told the driver to bring us to Kaya.¹⁴⁵ At Kaya, the gendarmes stopped the truck, took us out and flew us by helicopter to Ouagadougou.¹⁴⁶

A 15-year-old abductee told the organization:

“There was nothing to eat in Arbinda, so we went out to gather wild leaves and fruits for ourselves and our families. There was nothing at the market and nothing at the health and social centre. I am a displaced person

¹³⁴ Interview with deputy representative of UNHCR, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹³⁵ Amnesty International, “Burkina Faso: Perpetrators of Nouna killings must face justice”, 10 January 2023 [amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/burkina-faso-perpetrators-of-nouna-killings-must-face-justice/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/burkina-faso-perpetrators-of-nouna-killings-must-face-justice/)

¹³⁶ Médecins Sans Frontières, « MSF condamne l'assassinat brutal et délibéré de deux de ses employés au Burkina Faso », 16 février 2023, [msf.ch/nos-actualites/communiqués-presse/msf-condamne-l-assassinat-brutal-delibere-deux-ses-employes-au-burkina-faso](https://www.msf.ch/nos-actualites/communiqués-presse/msf-condamne-l-assassinat-brutal-delibere-deux-ses-employes-au-burkina-faso)

¹³⁷ Interview with leader of civil society organization, May 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹³⁸ Interview with humanitarian head of mission, active in Western Burkina Faso, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹³⁹ Interview with 21-year IDP from Kpentchangou, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with 25-year-old IDP from Tanwalbougou, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹⁴¹ Interview with customary figure and humanitarian worker, May 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹⁴² Interview with two board members of MBDHP May 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹⁴³ Région du Sahel/Gouvernorat de Dori. Communiqué administratif de Monsieur le gouverneur de la région du Sahel, no.2023-01/MATD/R-SHL/G/CAB, 16 January 2023,

[sig.gov.bf/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1394&cHash=6f4ea7c2b1f5f2a871b90ded907fa1db](https://www.sig.gov.bf/details?tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=1394&cHash=6f4ea7c2b1f5f2a871b90ded907fa1db)

¹⁴⁴ Jeune Afrique, 2023, « Au Burkina, 62 femmes libérées alors que les attaques jihadistes se multiplient » 21 January 2023, [jeuneafrique.com/1411228/politique/au-burkina-62-femmes-liberees-alors-que-les-attaques-jihadistes-se-multiplient/](https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1411228/politique/au-burkina-62-femmes-liberees-alors-que-les-attaques-jihadistes-se-multiplient/)

¹⁴⁵ The witnesses interviewed talk about 66 women abducted. A group of 20 and another group of 46. This number is slightly different from the one, announced by the governor of the Sahel in January 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with survivors of the Arbinda rapt, May 2023, Arbinda.

[Arbinda] and not familiar with the surrounding villages. We were out to collect jujube fruits to feed ourselves since there was nothing to eat.”¹⁴⁷

Abductions of civilians is prohibited under international humanitarian law. The abduction of these 66 women and girls by Ansaroul Islam constitutes the war crime of hostage taking.¹⁴⁸

According to several humanitarian actors active in the besieged town of Djibo, on 25 November 2022, alleged members of Ansaroul Islam also abducted a group of 30 women and children, who had left Djibo also to collect firewood and wild fruits. They were freed only on 10 and 11 December 2022, after a 16-day detention.¹⁴⁹

The circumstances and the purposes of these abduction are unclear. The armed group Ansaroul Islam, while tolerating in some place’s women and children’s gleaning of wild fruits in the besieged towns, has in certain cases abducted women and held them for days – possibly to exert pressure on their communities, or to use them as vehicles to pass messages and ultimatums to communities or even officials, or to extract information about the military and VDPs while interviewing these abducted women.

5.3 ATTACKS AGAINST FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOOD SYSTEMS

“Now, you cannot find a grain of salt in Pama.”

A humanitarian worker describing the critical situation in Pama, a town of 5,000 people under siege since July 2022

Ansaroul Islam has prohibited communities in besieged places from farming their fields or access to pasturelands for livestock grazing. Ansaroul Islam has also conducted attacks against supply convoys trying to reach besieged towns and villages, thus limiting residents’ ability to sustain their livelihoods, and forcing many into displacement. The restrictions of access to dozens of cities, towns, villages, and communes have had a serious impact on food security and livelihoods, with a disproportionate impact on children and elderly people.

5.3.1 PROHIBITION FROM FARMING AND GRAZING

To effectively implement the sieges of several towns, members of Ansaroul Islam have prohibited residents of Djibo and Titao among others from farming or grazing their livestock in the pasturelands surrounding these towns. These prohibitions have had a devastating impact on food security and livelihoods forcing many residents into leaving these towns for more southerly ones such as Ouahigouya, Pouytenga or Ouagadougou.

Amnesty International interviewed Internally displaced persons from Djibo who described a dire situation that has led to hunger and forced many to sell their livestock and to flee the besieged place. A 39-year-old IDP from Djibo interviewed in Ouagadougou told Amnesty International: “This year [in 2022], nobody farmed in Djibo due to pressure by armed groups. In 2021, we farmed but the rainfall wasn’t so good”.¹⁵⁰

Another IDP from Djibo told Amnesty International:

“The yimbe ladde¹⁵¹ have implemented checkpoints all around Djibo. I did not farm this year [2022] because they prohibit access to the fields and if you try to farm, they can come up to your house in Djibo to kill you. I do not

¹⁴⁷ Interview with 15-year-old IDP woman from Arbinda, victim of the January Arbinda rapt, May 2023, Arbinda.

¹⁴⁸ Rome Statute, article 8(2)(c)(iii).

¹⁴⁹ Interviews with several humanitarian actors active in Djibo, May 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with H.C. 39-year-old IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁵¹ Interview with B. D., November 2022, Ouagadougou. “Yimbe ladde” which mean “men in the wild” is an euphemistic local term to described Islamist armed groups in Mali/Burkina Faso and Niger.

know the reasons for these prohibitions. It's not clear to me but I know that they prohibit us from going to the fields or to the pastures".¹⁵²

A 52-year-old IDP explained to the organisation:

"The terrorists [sic] call us miscreants and prohibit us from farming our land. I couldn't farm this year [2022] nor have access to pasturelands for my livestock. At the beginning of the rainy season, they told us in Djibo that no one was allowed access to the farmlands. Besides, they come and take our livestock in the pasturelands without any consequence. Whoever defies their orders, runs the risk of being killed by them".¹⁵³

Amnesty International also interviewed Internally displaced persons from Titao, in the Loroum province (Northern region), a city mid-way between Ouahigouya and Djibo, and hosting a VDP unit, who faced a similar situation. As stressed by a humanitarian access negotiator active in Burkina Faso: "Titao is completely landlocked with armed groups surrounding it. The city has been targeted because there are VDPs based there. It has been under siege since November/December 2021."¹⁵⁴

Mahmoud*, an IDP who fled Titao due to the dire conditions of living in the city in the months preceding the December 2021 ambush against a supply convoy by Ansaroul Islam told Amnesty International:

"When I was in Titao, we had serious issues with armed people [i.e., Ansaroul Islam members] and they had asked us to leave the town, preventing us from getting access to our farmlands. It was two to three months after I left that they killed Ladji during the ambush. Since then, Titao is sieged, and the road is unsafe between here [Ouahigouya] and Titao. Just last week, I spoke with my relatives who stayed in Titao, wondering if I could return and they told me not to come, that they cannot move 1 km from the town without meeting the bandits. Furthermore, none of them farmed this year in Titao and they dare not go into the bush"¹⁵⁵.

The prohibition from farming sometimes goes with an ultimatum addressed by the armed groups to the residents to leave the villages/towns. In the department of Sebba, armed groups have restricted movement in the axis between Sebba and Solhan for over a year, cutting off several villages from Sebba, the provincial capital of Yagha province. Over the last four years, the number of residents of Sebba has doubled from 25,000 to 50,000 due to the mass influx of IDPs from neighbouring communes.¹⁵⁶ Residents of Dambini, a village 18 km distant of Sebba, told Amnesty International that they were given an ultimatum by the armed groups to leave their residence or face death.

"We left Dambini during the month of Layya¹⁵⁷ [June-July 2022] four months ago because terrorists [sic] ordered us to leave the village. If they don't think you are with them, they force you to leave your homes in short notice with the little you can carry. Previously, they have never forbidden us from farming or grazing our cattle although they used to take part of our livestock and call it zakat¹⁵⁸. When they came, they assembled us in the village and told us that we had two days to leave. Now, there is no one left in Dambini, and this is the case of 20 other villages in the Sebba department"¹⁵⁹.

Another 46-year old IDP from Dambini, added, in reference to the armed group who forced the villagers to leave their homes:

"I couldn't tell you whether they were members of JNIM or ISS in our zone. They were wearing turban and they ordered us to leave, along with many other surrounding villages, or face reprisals."¹⁶⁰

Another one described the ultimatum to leave or face reprisals:

"We left because of the ultimatum. We were living well in Dambini. When they came [in June-July 2022], they assembled all of the villagers. Those who were in the fields were asked to come to the mosque where the village's imam was already. They told us that no one will farm during this [2022] rainy season and gave us three days to depart the village. On the same day, people started to pack and leave, and by nightfall, there was nobody left in the village. We managed to take some millet, a few wares, and mats. Only essentials."¹⁶¹

¹⁵² Interview with 68-year-old IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁵³ Interview with IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with CIMIC officer, UN organization, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with IDP from Titao, December 2022, Ouahigouya.

¹⁵⁶ ECHO, "Burkina Faso: EU launches a Humanitarian Air Bridge to alleviate suffering of blockaded towns", 9 December 2022, reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-eu-launches-humanitarian-air-bridge-alleviate-suffering-blockaded-towns

¹⁵⁷ Layya is another name for the major Muslim festival, Eid el-Kebir, or Tabaski.

¹⁵⁸ Zakat is an annual tax payment under Islamic law on certain kinds of property, for people who have annual revenues above a certain living threshold and used for charitable and religious purposes. In the Sahel, armed groups, whether JNIM or the ISS have extorted "zakat" payments from villagers, often on livestock.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with 54-year-old IDP from Dambini, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with 46-year-old IDP from Dambini November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁶¹ Interview with 37-year-old IDP from Solhan, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

A similar situation was documented in Kantchari, in eastern Burkina Faso, where inhabitants were prohibited from farming in 2021 before they received an ultimatum to leave the place. An IDP from Bongomba, a village near Kantchari, and who fled the town in January 2023 after an ultimatum by Ansaroul Islam fighters told Amnesty International that 2021 was the last year where they farmed without fearing reprisals.

“After 2021, they came and told us to leave the town and to not go to the farms. On 7 January, they gave us another ultimatum to leave within three days or face the consequences. Our village is a mere 2 kilometres from Kantchari. After the ultimatum, everybody left.”¹⁶²

Furthermore, many of the IDPs had to sell their livestock, which is a form of capital in northern Burkina Faso, because otherwise the lack of access to grazing land would lead to many livestock deaths, and because armed groups tended to take livestock as a form of taxation (see below). This coping strategy has been documented also by the government in a report on the situation in Djibo.¹⁶³

A 52-year-old IDP from Djibo said: **«I had a cow and a veal, goats and sheep, that I had to sell before they died because I couldn't let them go and graze and I couldn't find enough fodder in Djibo. It is with the money made from selling my goats that I made the trip to Ouagadougou»¹⁶⁴**

A 68-year-old IDP added: **“Due to cattle theft [and hunger], everyone was trying to offload their livestock to have cash. Thus, many of us sold our livestock very cheaply in order to feed our families. There was no more millet in the town for quite a time before I fled Djibo”¹⁶⁵**

5.3.2 PILLAGING AND FORCED TAXATION

Amnesty International collected information and testimonies about members of armed groups pillaging livestock and goods from people in besieged towns/villages, sometimes justifying this by a form of taxation based on “zakat” by Ansaroul Islam; zakat being mandatory contribution to the community for well-off Muslims, according to Islamic law.¹⁶⁶

In some instances, members of armed groups collected the tax in livestock from the villagers, by interacting directly with the towns or village's leaders [customary and religious leaders] to gather the village's wealth in livestock at a fixed day, for the collection. IDPs from the village of Dambini in the Yagha province interviewed by Amnesty International described a much more brutal process, in which members of an armed group would collect massively the livestock, depriving the communities of the bare minimum, at times.

One IDP from Dambini told Amnesty International:

“They would come and give us commands about not trimming our beards, cutting our pants, or imposing the veil on women. [At times] they would gather the livestock and collect the zakat as they saw fit. We did not have anything to say about that. No one dares say a word about it. They would do it in the bush. In the neighbouring villages, they would collect it directly from the herdsman. Zakat would be collected once a year. They collected it twice in Dambini”.¹⁶⁷

Other IDPs said:

“When the bandits come to the village, they are almost always carrying weapons, rifles. They are not always violent, but they are armed and will give orders to the villagers. Often, they gather all the men and leaders to the mosque to give them orders.”¹⁶⁸

A group of women from Dambini also told Amnesty International:

“When they come to collect the livestock, they seldom talk but come in different groups. A month before their ultimatum to leave the place, they had come to collect all the livestock. Only the sheep and goats that were still

¹⁶² Interview with 27-year-old IDP from Bongomba/Kantchari, 3 June 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹⁶³ World Food Program Gouvernement of Burkina Faso/SERACOM 2022, “Évaluation rapide des moyens d'existence des nouvelles personnes déplacées internes (PDI) de Djibo, province du Soum, région du Sahel », Mars 2022 » (rapport d'évaluation), p.6.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with A.C. IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with B.D., IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou

¹⁶⁶ See footnote 159 on the definition of zakat.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with A.B., IDP from Dambini, November 2022, Komsilga.

¹⁶⁸ Focus group with IDP women from Solhan/Dambini, November 2022, Komsilga.

grazing in the bush escaped that day. Sometimes, they would attack shops too. They would come in cars and load everything that is in the shops. Other times, they would destroy water points, to deprive us of water.”¹⁶⁹

A 41-year-old IDP woman from Solhan told Amnesty International:

“The bandits came and took with them my brother. In the same incident, they took all our livestock”.

A 53-year-old woman from Solhan also denounced the loss of her property, forcefully taken by members of an armed group: « I lost everything. All that I needed to live, my shop, my sheep, my goats. They took everything, all the animals from me. I have nothing left. I had everything but now I am forced to beg to eat. It hurts me a lot.”¹⁷⁰


A 68-year-old IDP from Djibo told Amnesty International:

“The yimbe ladde took all our livestock. They have set up checkpoints at the exit of the town. People would use escort to come in, but armed escorts are becoming rarer”.¹⁷¹

5.3.3 ATTACKS AGAINST SUPPLY CONVOYS

Ansarul Islam and other armed groups have applied their siege tactics by disrupting access to the concerned cities, using the laying of IEDs, and destroying bridges (see the table below), and attacking convoys aiming to supply towns in northern and eastern Burkina Faso. In response, the government has imposed military escorts since August 2022 for the transportation of fuel and other essential products near the frontlines. Attacks continued with many civilians killed and contributed to increasing food insecurity in besieged cities.



 ↑ Pont de Naré, Bridge linking Kaya to Dori, after its sabotaging by alleged armed groups in July 2022. The Kaya-Dori axis links the Sahel to the Central Plateau and is one of the busiest commercial roads in Burkina Faso.¹⁷²

“There are irregular controls in all the roads, IEDs and bridges are systematically destroyed to limit vehicle movement to supply these towns and cities. In Dori, the situation has dramatically worsened in 2022 even though the army try to supply the city by providing escort every two to three months. Yet the convoys are less and less protected against attack and diversion”, said a humanitarian operations manager.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Focus group with IDP women from Solhan/Dambini, November 2022, Komsilga.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with D.L., IDP women from Solhan/Dambini, November 2022, Komsilga.

¹⁷¹ Interview with B.D., 68-year-old, IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁷² Nabi Bayala, “Axe Kaya-Dori : le pont de Naré dynamité à nouveau par des hommes armés », Actualités BF, www.actualite.bf/axe-kaya-dori-le-pont-de-nare-dynamite-a-nouveau-par-des-hommes-armes/

¹⁷³ Interviews conducted in Ouagadougou with a manager of humanitarian operations, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

In August 2021, a trader convoy trying to supply the besieged town of Arbinda and escorted by the military was attacked by alleged members of Ansaroul Islam near Boukouma, between Arbinda and Gorgadji. The 80-vehicle convoy composed of traders and civilians trying to bypass checkpoints imposed by armed groups had left Dori, when it was attacked between Arbinda and Gorgadji; at least 80 persons were killed during the ambush including 65 civilians and 15 members of the military.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ RFI, « Burkina Faso: le bilan de l'attaque de Boukouma passe à 80 morts », 20 August 2021 https://www.rfi.fr/fr/afrique/20210819-burkina-faso-le-bilan-de-l-attaque-de-boukouma-passe-%C3%A0-80-morts?ref=tw_i

A non-exhaustive list of sabotaging of bridge infrastructures by jihadist groups in Burkina Faso (October 2019-June 2023)

Region	Province	Bridge	Date of sabotaging act
Eastern	Tapoa	Bridge of Boudiéri (between Kantachari and Diapaga)	June 13, 2023
Eastern	Gourma	Bridge on the road between Tanwalbougou and Fada	June 2, 2023
Centre-Nord	Sanmatenga	Bridge of Gorballe between Taparko and Yalگو	May 31, 2023
Eastern	Gnagna/Gourma	Bridge between Ougarou and Matiacoli	May 12, 2023
Northern	Yatenga	Bridge between Nodin and Bangou	May 3, 2023
Eastern	Gourma	Bridge near Ganyela (Eastern)	1st April 2023
Eastern		Bridge of Oué linking Fada-Ngourma and Gayeri	January 5, 2023
Eastern	Gnagna	Bridge near Diabatou	August 23, 2022
Sahel		Bridge on the Djibo-Kongoussi road	August 22, 2022
Sahel	Soum	Bridge near Boukouma (linking Arbinda and Gorgadji)	August 22, 2022
Eastern	Tapoa	Bridge near Tawori/Niamouga	August 12, 2022
Eastern	Tapoa	Bridge near Paboanga	August 12, 2022
Sahel	Seno/Yagha	Bridge near Dynalaye (on Dori-Sebba road)	July 26, 2022
Centre-Nord	Sanmatenga	14. Pont de Gabou (Centre-Nord entre Kaya et Barsalogo)	July 12, 2022
Sahel	Yagha	Bridge near Diongodio (on Dori-Sebba road)	July 7, 2022
Northern	Yatenga	Bridge of Nomo (between Thiou and Yensé)	June 23, 2020
Sahel	Soum	Bridge on Arbinda/Koutougou road	October 17, 2019

Between August and September 2022, convoys going from Ouagadougou to the besieged town of Djibo were attacked 9 times by armed groups. “All of the attempts to supply Djibo [during this period] have been subject to attack.”¹⁷⁵

According to a humanitarian operations manager, alleged Ansaroul Islam members have also launched several other attacks to disrupt the supplying of besieged towns of Sebba or Arbinda.¹⁷⁶ On 11 and 24 November 2022, two supply convoys escorted by the army trying to reach Sebba, exploded on IEDs, delaying relief to the encircled town. On 5 December 2022, a supply convoy escorted by the military trying to reach Arbinda from Dori was also attacked by Ansaroul Islam members.¹⁷⁷ At least 4 civilians were killed and 3 injured during the ambush,¹⁷⁸ which targeted a commercial convoy, escorted by the military.

These attacks aiming to disrupt the supplying of the besieged cities do not discriminate between civilians under escort, and military. Thus, they constitute violations of international humanitarian law as the military objective is rarely proportional to the military damage. Furthermore, they deprived the population from the supplies that the convoys aimed at distributing or selling them.

THE GASKINDÉ AMBUSH AND ITS POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

“We have lost 6 trucks during the Gaskindé attack”¹⁷⁹

A humanitarian operations manager in Burkina Faso

On 26 September 2022, a 207-vehicle convoy, escorted by the military and VDPs, leaving Ouagadougou to supply Djibo with basic products (millet, sorghum, fuel, medications, etc) was ambushed in Gaskindé by Ansaroul Islam fighters, 25 km from Djibo, on the national road 22.

The attack caused the death of at least 27 soldiers and 10 civilians with almost 50 other civilians being unaccounted for in the days following the attack. Of the 207-vehicle convoy, only 36 reached Djibo at the end of that day¹⁸⁰. Geosatellite imagery by Bellingcat showed 95 vehicles burnt and left on the road almost two months after the deadly ambush.¹⁸¹

The attack against the supply convoy escorted by the military, disproportionately affected civilians, as most of the transporters were civilian traders, bringing necessities from Ouagadougou to Djibo, and as the assailants did not make a distinction between civilian and members of the military. The Gaskindé attack had immediate political consequences, as it triggered the coup d’Etat against Lt-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, four days later, by members of the Cobra elite unit of the Burkinabè army (see Chapter 3).

Hashtags such as #SauvonsDjibo¹⁸² in social media highlighted the plight of the city and its residents.

Following the Gaskindé attack, stronger mobilization ensued to supply besieged towns and cities. In Djibo, residents protested in the streets after the ambush, calling for all actors to relieve the beleaguered city. The following month, humanitarians delivered 141 metric tons of supplies to the Sahel (Arbinda, Gorgadji, Gorom-Gorom, Sebba) but also to besieged towns in the Est (Diapaga, Gayeri, Kompienga, Matiacoli, Pama) and Centre-Nord (Pensa, Silmangue), with almost 117 metric tons to Djibo through an airlift operation.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁵ Interview with humanitarian advocacy manager, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with humanitarian operations manager, working for NGO active in the Sahel region, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁷⁷ Confidential report by security actor.

¹⁷⁸ D. Siribié, Twitter post, 2 February 2023, twitter.com/Dsiribie/status/1621096073946079239 : “il n’y a plus de denrées alimentaires (...). Nos mamans sont obligées de faire bouillir les feuilles, mettre du sel faute d’huile pour que les enfants mangent (...). Si rien n’est fait les heures qui suivront, ce sera la catastrophe”, (ressortissants)

¹⁷⁹ Interview with ICRC Operations Manager, December 2022, Ouagadougou.


¹⁸⁰ Interview avec Head of Programs, DRC, December 2022.

¹⁸¹ Youri van der Weide. Five Kilometres of Destruction: Satellite Imagery Reveals Extent of Damage to Civilian Convoy in Burkina Faso », 18 November [bellingcat.com/news/2022/11/18/five-kilometres-of-destruction-satellite-imagery-reveals-extent-of-damage-to-civilian-convoy-in-burkina-faso/](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2022/11/18/five-kilometres-of-destruction-satellite-imagery-reveals-extent-of-damage-to-civilian-convoy-in-burkina-faso/)

¹⁸² See [web.facebook.com/hashtag/sauvonsdjibo/](https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/sauvonsdjibo/) and also https://twitter.com/search?q=%23SauvonsDjibo&src=typed_query

¹⁸³ OCHA, *Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot (As of 31 October 2022)*, 30 November 2022, reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-snapshot-31-october-2022



 ↑ *Burnt buses and trucks on the RN 22 following the Gaskindé attack. © Bellingcat¹⁸⁴*

When a supply convoy is escorted by military, under international humanitarian law the armed group attacking the military escort must take all feasible measures to minimize the impact of the attack on the supply truck and present civilians.¹⁸⁵ If the attacks do not discriminate between civilians under escort, and military, they constitute violations of international humanitarian law.

Moreover, under international humanitarian law, it is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs.¹⁸⁶ And the armed groups also have an obligation to facilitate the access of humanitarian relief to the population in need.¹⁸⁷

These attacks to supply convoys, the laying of IEDs and the destruction of bridges have for consequence that the population of the besieged towns are deprived of essential products such as cereals, fuel, medication humanitarian relief and further subjects to food insecurity.

5.3.4 IMPACT OF SIEGES AND ATTACKS ON LIVELIHOODS

The siege enacted by armed groups in at least 46 cities, towns and villages and towns of Burkina Faso has negatively impacted the livelihoods of the residents and created a food insecurity that has fuelled the overall negative humanitarian situation.

Given the attacks on supply convoys by armed groups and the prohibition on livestock grazing and farming in places like Djibo and Sebba, residents have become even more vulnerable to food insecurity and the consequent impacts on livelihoods.

Residents in besieged places take risks to provide for themselves and their families, by either gleaning from unattended fields or reaching out to areas outside of the control of the government, to buy foodstuff.

¹⁸⁴ Youri van der Weide. “Five Kilometres of Destruction: Satellite Imagery reveals extent of damage to civilian convoy in Burkina Faso”, 18 November 2022, [bellingcat.com/news/2022/11/18/five-kilometres-of-destruction-satellite-imagery-reveals-extent-of-damage-to-civilian-convoy-in-burkina-faso/](https://www.bellingcat.com/news/2022/11/18/five-kilometres-of-destruction-satellite-imagery-reveals-extent-of-damage-to-civilian-convoy-in-burkina-faso/)

¹⁸⁵ ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rules 6 and 10.

¹⁸⁶ ICRC, Customary international humanitarian law, Rule 54. Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), Article 14.

¹⁸⁷ ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rules 55 and 56.

A 21-year-old IDP from Djibo, interviewed in Ouagadougou, told the organization:

“The security and defence forces control and inspect those who are leaving Djibo. It’s very hard for elderly persons to make the trek in the woods due to lack of water and fatigue. So, they’d rather stay. Armed fighters [from Islamist armed groups] are another danger because sometimes they arrest people in the woods, forcefully enrol young men, or simply kill the men they accuse of collaborating with the security and defence forces”.¹⁸⁸

Oulo¹⁸⁹ leaves (scientific name cassia/senna obtusifolia) became a staple in Djibo due to the rarefaction of foodstuffs in the market, following the siege. Although long used by poorer families to complement their diet, it became an essential staple in the city following the siege, due to its growing in the wilderness.

“We had to eat those wild leaves to survive. Residents would do anything to feed themselves and their families. Sometimes, they would mix the oulo leaves with rice but recently as rice became rarer, we had to eat only the oulo leaves. These leaves were for poorer people before the siege but now they are a common staple and it’s even hard to find them in the wild”, said an IDP that fled Djibo after the beginning of the siege in 2022.¹⁹⁰



 ↑ Cooked oulo leaves¹⁹¹

The livestock market in Djibo, the largest in Burkina Faso, which also attracted buyers and traders originating from neighbouring countries during its weekly fair, has been severely impacted by the siege. Livestock tend to be traded to major cities such as Ouahigouya, Fada-Ngourma, Ouagadougou and even in neighbouring coastal countries (Benin, Togo, Ghana).

The sieges also affected other food markets:

“Now even if you have money, you cannot buy anything because the market is empty. You cannot even get a little biscuit, not to talk of a date. Death was slowly creeping on us in Djibo. With the supply convoy, you could receive two to three boxes per family, but this was barely enough. The best thing are the trucks plying the road, but they are very rare, and the stock is emptied very quickly despite being expensive”.¹⁹²

A 67-year-old IDP who fled to Ouagadougou depicted the dire situation in Djibo:

« When there was food to eat, we stayed in Djibo despite the fear. But then we were behind closed doors with nothing to eat. One could stay 2 months without much food; I weaved mats to support myself. When I stopped, my son went to the market and brought provisions. But now the market is closed and there is nothing to eat.”¹⁹³

¹⁸⁸ Interview with K.D., November 2022, 21 yo IDP woman from Djibo.

¹⁸⁹ Sometimes transcribed also as “uulo”, the scientific name is cassia/senna obtusifolia.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with 72-year-old IDP who fled Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁹¹ Nacambo et al., « Nomenclature locale et usages de Senna obtusifolia (L.) au Burkina Faso », Journal of Applied Biosciences 160: 16438 - 16453

¹⁹² Interview with 67-year-old IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁹³ Interview with IDP woman from Sector 6.

The same difficult conditions prevail in the town of Dori, the regional capital, which has received an influx of displaced persons, whose periphery has seen the encroachment by armed groups such as Ansaroul Islam and the Islamic State in the Sahel (ISS)

“In Dori, there is no water. People must go to Gorom [Gorom-Gorom] to buy freshwater. Nowadays the water bottle that used to cost 600 XOF (1 USD), has spiked to 1500 XOF (2,5 USD). Prices are increasing, especially for basic foodstuffs”.¹⁹⁴

Given the dire conditions, residents have had to depart the besieged places, sometimes risking their physical integrity by taking off roads and avoiding belligerents. But elderly persons are sometimes trapped in the besieged towns. IDPs who were able to flee to safety have told of instance where elderly persons were left in the town in such a dire condition, due to their health conditions, unable to make the flight. A 27-year-old IDP told the organization:

“My husband and my mother-in-law couldn’t leave Djibo; my mother-in-law is very old and couldn’t walk on her own, and we were not able to carry her with us. Several men who try to leave Djibo are arrested by the VDPs and GATs, so they’d rather stay”.¹⁹⁵

INFLATION OF THE PRICE ON ESSENTIAL GOODS

The substantial reduction of commercial traffic has severely impacted the livelihood conditions in cities/towns/villages under siege. The majority of IDPs interviewed and coming from said towns, whether in the west, north, Sahel or East have stressed the hike in the price of basic foodstuffs in those cities which has also severely impacted food insecurity.

The price of cereals such as millet which constitutes the food staple for the residents had increased. Humanitarian organization who monitors index prices in Djibo noted an increase of 25% of cereal prices, compared to the annual average. At the same time livestock prices have crashed by more than 50 per cent, between February 2021 and February 2022, as residents try to offload their herd¹⁹⁶. This is corroborated by interviews with IDPs from Djibo, who have stressed the high increase in the price of food items over the course of 2022 as the siege extended.

“Before the siege 2 kg of millet would cost us 750 XOF (USD 1.22) but now [October/November 2022], you couldn’t have the same weight for less than 2,500 XOF (USD 4). Sometimes you pay 3,000 XOF (USD 5) for 2 kg of millet in Djibo [USD 4.89] because there is no other choice. The World Food Program helps us and during food distribution, they provide 5 boxes of 1 kg of millet per household. The government, when they distribute food, provide 1 box (1 kg) per household. Sometimes it’s millet, sometimes rice and at times maize”.¹⁹⁷

In Tanwalbougou, one litre of fuel costs 1500 FCFA (USD 2,55) instead of 850 FCFA (USD 1,44), a plate of maize meal costs 1200 FCFA (USD 2,04) when before the restriction to access, it averaged between 250-350 FCFA¹⁹⁸ (USD 0,42-USD 0,59). The situation is similar in the besieged town of Diapaga, where the market also barely functions and where a 50-kgs rice bag went from 25.000 FCFA (USD 42,48) to 30.000 FCFA (USD 50,94), and a 20-liter oil can go from 18 to 20.000 FCFA (USD 30,56 to USD 33,96), to between 35-40.000 FCFA (USD 59,43-USD 67,92). “In Gayeri before the siege a 50 kg bag of rice could be bought for 22000 FCFA (USD 37,36), maize has doubled and is being sold at 50.000 FCFA (USD 84,90) at times. The kilogram of rice has also gone from 400 FCFA (USD 0,68) to 2000 FCFA (USD 3,40), and one measure of corn, has skyrocketed to 1700 FCFA (USD 2,89) from 550 FCFA (USD 0,93).”¹⁹⁹

Two other humanitarians supervising projects in Burkina Faso, told the organization: In Dori the price of 1-liter of water skyrocketed to 4,000 FCFA (USD 6,79) from 500 FCFA (USD 0,85) [an increase of 800%]. There is also speculation by traders which cause inflation Mangodara, basic foodstuff prices have also skyrocketed, sometimes reaching 80 per cent of their pre-siege prices”.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Dori-based humanitarian worker, by phone, on 2 May 2023.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with H. D. 27-year-old female IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁹⁶ Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO/Burkina Faso), *Évaluation rapide des moyens d’existence des nouvelles personnes déplacées internes (PDI) de Djibo, province du Soum, région du Sahel-mars 2022*, rapport d’évaluation, Mars 2022, fscluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/report_emergency_livehood_assessment_djibo_mars_2022.pdf, p. 5.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with A.C. IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with IDPs from Tanwalbougou, Pentchangou, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with 44-year-old IDP from Gayeri, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

²⁰⁰ Interviews with Safety Advisors, Action against Hunger, 1 June 2023, Ouagadougou.

Transport fares from besieged towns to regional capital have also increased according to IDPs and other key persons plying these roads; for example, the bus fare from Tanwalbougou to Fada went from 700 FCFA (USD 1,19) to 5,000 FCFA (USD 8,49).²⁰¹ A similar situation was also documented in several provinces of the Sahel region, where IDPs trying to reach Kaya or Ouagadougou must circumvent the direct road and pass by Pouytenga and paying 20,000 FCFA (USD 33,96) instead of the initial 5,000 FCFA (USD 8,49).²⁰²

These hikes, in a country where the average household monthly revenue was assessed at 123 167 FCFA (USD 203.5) in 2021, impoverishes even further the population of these besieged cities.²⁰³

5.3.5. ATTACKS AGAINST WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2022, there were so many attacks against water infrastructure by armed groups in their bid to siege the cities, that it first came to be computed by humanitarian actors. According to data collected by ACAPS, armed fighters destroyed more than 32 water points in Burkina Faso between January and May 2022, with most of the attacks occurring in Djibo, where residents have access to less than 3 litres of water per day and per head, for all of their needs (including washing, cleaning, cooking). In comparison, the minimum survival allocation in emergency situation is estimated at 7 litres per day, according to international standards.²⁰⁴ In non-emergency situations, 20 litres per day/per head is the minimum quantity of water required to attain essential levels of health and hygiene.²⁰⁵

According to the Water and Sanitation Hygiene (WASH) cluster in Burkina Faso, more than 10 attacks against water points²⁰⁶ were observed between January and March 2022, in the Sahel, Centre-Nord, and Boucle du Mouhoun regions, against five for the whole 2021 year.²⁰⁷ These, added to the afflux of IDPs in the main urban centres of the Sahel and Centre-Nord regions, heightened water scarcity, which affected around 223,000 persons in Djibo.²⁰⁸

Armed members of Ansaroul Islam attacked several water installations in Djibo in 2022 disrupting the water supply. Indeed, on 21 February they attacked and damaged the National Water and Sanitation Office (ONEA) facilities. Women who were collecting water from wells in Sector 5 of Djibo were chased by armed fighters two days later.²⁰⁹ On 28 February, members of Ansaroul Islam shelled the ONEA water plant in Djibo, which caused slight damage although no loss of life was reported.²¹⁰

The incursion in Sector 5 continued as fighters returned there on 11 March to disrupt a water distribution activity by humanitarian organizations.²¹¹ The water trucking in Sector 5 were severely damaged along with the electricity generator of a radio station. On the same day, in Sector 3 of the city, women collecting water from a well were also intimidated and forced to disperse by armed combatants. Four days later, women were also dispersed while fetching water in the Basnééré neighbourhood of Djibo.²¹²

Ansaroul Islam continued to target water infrastructure (water towers, polytanks) in Djibo, all along March 2022, where it sabotaged towers, destroyed polytanks and chased water gatherers especially in Sector 5 and 1, respectively on 17 and 27 March 2022.²¹³

²⁰¹ Interview with 25-year-old IDP from Tanwalbougou.

²⁰² Interview with customary figure from Djibo, May 2023.

²⁰³ Cash Working Group (CWG Burkina Faso), *Panier de dépense minimum au Burkina Faso*, novembre 2021, [humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/rapport_final_meb_burkina_faso_novembre_2021_1.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/rapport_final_meb_burkina_faso_novembre_2021_1.pdf), p.15.

²⁰⁴ ACAPS, “Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Overview of Djibo Town Surrounded by Armed Groups” (Briefing note), 19 October 2022, reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-overview-djibo-town-surrounded-armed-groups-briefing-note-19-october-2022

²⁰⁵ United Nations Office to support the International Decade for Action ‘Water for Life’ 2005-2015/UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication (UNW-DPAC), “The Human Right to Water and Sanitation media brief”, [un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/human_right_to_water_and_sanitation_media_brief.pdf](https://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/pdf/human_right_to_water_and_sanitation_media_brief.pdf)

²⁰⁶ Water points referring to all sites, natural or man-made, where residents can collect potable water; these includes wells, boreholes, standpipes, public fountains, ponds, and water trucking vehicles set up by third parties to provide water.

²⁰⁷ UNICEF, *Impact de la crise sécuritaire sur l'accès à l'eau au Burkina Faso* (Journée mondiale de l'eau), 2022, [unicef.org/burkinafaso/media/2751/file/Impact](https://www.unicef.org/burkinafaso/media/2751/file/Impact)

²⁰⁸ UNICEF, *Impact de la crise sécuritaire sur l'accès à l'eau au Burkina Faso* (Journée mondiale de l'eau), 2022, [unicef.org/burkinafaso/media/2751/file/Impact](https://www.unicef.org/burkinafaso/media/2751/file/Impact)

²⁰⁹ Interview with director and staff, humanitarian organization doing protection monitoring, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²¹⁰ Data from private database on security incidents in Burkina Faso.

²¹¹ Data from private database on security incidents in Burkina Faso.

²¹² Data from private database on security incidents in Burkina Faso.

²¹³ Data from private database on security incidents in Burkina Faso.

The attacks continued all yearlong and into 2023. On 11 March 2023, alleged members of Ansaroul Islam made a foray into Sector 4 of Djibo, destroying wilfully a water installation and the carts and properties belonging to women that were collecting water.²¹⁴

Several humanitarian actors interviewed during this research noted the systemic nature of the attacks against water infrastructure in Burkina Faso in 2022, which was not limited to Djibo, but also extended to Sebba and Barsalogho, in the Centre-Nord region. A senior humanitarian manager told Amnesty International:

“In Djibo, the combatants targeted systematically soldiers, VDPs and water infrastructure. This was a novelty in Burkina Faso and is part of the enforcement of the siege and the will to push residents away from these frontline cities. (...) Armed groups have destroyed infrastructures, disrupted the collection of water and intimidated civilians near water points especially women (...) The scale is unprecedented compared to previous years where data on this type of incident was seldom computed by actors on the ground. We have noted cases of water contamination when armed groups dropped dead animals in wells in northern Burkina Faso, the destruction of electric generators that sustain the provision of water and several cases of intimidation next to wells. More than 375,000 persons were affected by water scarcity at the end of 2022 and most of them resided in Djibo, where people have barely 3.5l of water per day”²¹⁵

Beyond the direct attacks to water infrastructure, the siege also affected the activity of humanitarian organizations who were supplying water in Djibo. One organization interviewed stressed that while their goal was to provide 200 m3 of water per day in Djibo, they were sometimes only able to provide between 80 and 100 m3 to residents, since they did not have enough fuel, as the siege prevented the steady supplying of the city.²¹⁶ Data collected by Amnesty International also show that water-related diseases were more noted as the scarcity endured in Djibo, especially cases of diarrhoea as residents were forced to use less secure sources of water.²¹⁷ Water scarcity also contributed to the increase of the price water as the demand soared. Residents who were able to escape the siege, interviewed by Amnesty International, said that 20l water can which used to cost 10 FCFA (USD 0,02) before the siege, soared to 100 FCFA (USD 0,17) during the siege.²¹⁸

Although water scarcity was a major issue for residents during the dry season, IDPs from Djibo highlighted that this plight was softened during the rainy season when water was easily collected, and the reservoirs around the city filled.²¹⁹

The siege against Djibo has rendered thousands of residents' food insecure according to the Famine Early Warning Systems Network²²⁰, while access to water has become difficult for the population as armed groups sabotage water infrastructure and disrupt water provision by humanitarian actors.

Under international humanitarian law, it is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless, objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works.²²¹ More generally, civilian objects should not be attacked during an armed conflict.²²² Objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population must be particularly respected and protected.²²³

²¹⁴ Data from private database on security incidents in Burkina Faso.

²¹⁵ Interview with advocacy manager, human rights organization, Burkina Faso, December 2022, Ouagadougou. This is echoed by other humanitarian actors present in Djibo, such as Doctors without Borders.

²¹⁶ Interviews with staff members supervising operation in Djibo for a humanitarian NGO, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²¹⁷ Interviews with staff members supervising operation in Djibo for a humanitarian NGO, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²¹⁸ Interviews with IDPs from Seeno Baali/Sector 1 Djibo, December 2022, Ouahigouya.

²¹⁹ Interview with IDPs from Djibo and Holdé in December 2022, Ouahigouya.

²²⁰ ACAPS. *Burkina Faso: Humanitarian overview of Djibo town surrounded by armed groups - Briefing note*. 19 October 2022, reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-overview-djibo-town-surrounded-armed-groups-briefing-note-19-october-2022. See also UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water (Arts. 11 and 12 of the Covenant), 20 January 2003, E/C.12/2002/11.

²²¹ ICRC, Customary international humanitarian law, Rule 54; Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, Article 14; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II).

²²² ICRC, Customary international humanitarian law, Rule 7.

²²³ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water (Arts. 11 and 12 of the Covenant) Adopted at the Twenty-ninth Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 20 January 2003, (Contained in Document E/C.12/2002/11), refworld.org/pdfid/4538838d11.pdf

The attacks directed against civilian installations, such as water facilities (water tower, wells, polytanks) by the armed groups constitute violations of international humanitarian law, as water infrastructure belong to the categories of “objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”.²²⁴

Whatever the intent of the siege tactics by armed groups and their military objectives, in effect, direct attacks against civilians and livelihoods and the disproportionate effect of the siege on civilians, has been to render civilian residents' food insecure, starving, and forced to flee in order to survive when they are not ordered to leave following ultimatum by armed groups.

An actor, working as a security manager for a humanitarian organization told Amnesty International:

“[Civilians in besieged communities] face many constraints, such as mines/IEDs with the blockades. Armed groups also destroy civilian infrastructure such as bridges, telecommunications pillars, and wells, and prohibit them from farming to make conditions unbearable for them. Their [armed groups] intention is to drive these communities out [of their homesteads]”.²²⁵

These forced displacements resulting from the difficult living conditions in besieged towns, and to the threats of violence made by armed groups to residents if they do not leave, may fall under the definition of forcible transfer of population, according to international law.²²⁶

5.4 REDUCED ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The sieges have contributed to heightening restrictions to the right to education in Burkina Faso²²⁷ with the massive flight of schoolteachers and administrators and the forced closures of many of the schools due to the armed conflict.

As of June 2023, there were 6,100 schools closed or rendered non-operational in Burkina Faso, with more than 1 million students affected.²²⁸ The number of school closures has doubled between March 2020 and April 2023, going from 2,512²²⁹ to 6,100, in 3 years. The most affected regions were the East region (1,071 schools rendered non-operational, 61% of schools, and 182,000 students affected) followed closely by the Sahel (1,058 schools rendered non-functional, accounting for 88%, with 127,000 students affected). To alleviate this crisis, the government of Burkina Faso, with the support of UNICEF, has launched broadcast programs to provide education courses, for those unable to attend school due to the conflict.²³⁰

Closure of schools may be explained by attacks by armed groups targeting or affecting schools,²³¹ abductions or killings of teachers or fear thereof. Sometimes schools are also closed because armed groups controlling the area prohibit communities from sending their children to what they consider Western-education style systems.

²²⁴ ICRC, Customary international Humanitarian law, Rule 54. (Attacks against objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population), ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule54

²²⁵ Interview with security manager, humanitarian organization, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

²²⁶ International Criminal Court, *Elements of Crimes*, 2013, [icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf](https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/Elements-of-Crimes.pdf), Article 7 (1) (d).

²²⁷ HRW, « *Leur combat contre l'éducation* » : *Attaques commises par des groupes armés contre des enseignants, des élèves et des écoles au Burkina Faso*, 26 mai 2020, [hrw.org/fr/report/2020/05/26/leur-combat-contre-leducation/attaques-commises-par-des-groupes-armes-contre-des](https://www.hrw.org/fr/report/2020/05/26/leur-combat-contre-leducation/attaques-commises-par-des-groupes-armes-contre-des)

²²⁸ UNOCHA, *Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot (As of 30 June 2023)*, www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-humanitarian-snapshot-30-june-2023

²²⁹ Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Alphabétisation et de la Promotion des Langues nationales (MENAPLN), *Plan de réponse du MENAPLN pour la continuité éducative dans le contexte du COVID-19*, avril 2020.

²³⁰ Le Faso.Net, « Programme éducation par la radio (PER) : Pour assurer le droit à l'éducation dans les zones à haut risque » 6 June 2020, [lefaso.net/spip.php?article97290](https://www.lefaso.net/spip.php?article97290)

²³¹ Net Afrique, « Burkina Faso: L'école primaire Djibo « C » incendiée par des individus armés » 14 mars [netafrique.net/burkina-faso-lecole-primaire-djibo-c-incendiee-par-des-individus-armes/?amp=1](https://www.netafrique.net/burkina-faso-lecole-primaire-djibo-c-incendiee-par-des-individus-armes/?amp=1)

6.1K

CLOSED SCHOOLS

1M

AFFECTED STUDENTS

Region	# closed schools	% of closed schools	# students affected by school closure	% of students affected by school closure
Boucle du Mouhoun	1 247	55%	253K	27%
Cascades	188	19%	28K	7%
Centre-Est	334	17%	48K	6%
Centre-Nord	927	44%	160K	20%
Centre-Ouest	103	5%	19K	2%
Centre-Sud	1	0%	0K	0%
Est	1 071	61%	182K	21%
Hauts-Bassins	286	11%	51K	5%
Nord	832	33%	161K	21%
Sahel	1 058	88%	127K	20%
Sud-Ouest	102	9%	13K	3%

 OCHA: Snapshot of the Education Sector in Burkina Faso

While most of schools are closed in the Soum province, some schools continue to function in the town of Djibo, albeit with greater difficulty due to the siege. Indeed, IDPs and other local respondents have highlighted the massive flight of teaching personnel from the city, due to the siege.

A 24-year-old IDP who have fled Diapaga, a town under siege in the Tapoa (Eastern region), told Amnesty International: “At the beginning, it was in the villages around Partiaga that the schools were closed. But four months ago, armed bandits attacked Partiaga, after which all of the teachers fled the town. Now the school has died.”²³²

In some communities, teachers were recruited at the local level and trained, to respond to the needs of the remaining schoolchildren. “In Djibo, there is a strong community resilience to keep the schools open and the students keep going without much food [to sustain them]”, noted one humanitarian to Amnesty International.

5.5 REDUCED ACCESS TO HEALTH

The national health picture is bleak. Across Burkina Faso, 373 health centres were closed across the country due to the conflict, affecting access for 3.5 million persons according to the UNOCHA as of June 2023²³³. In the Sahel region, more than 84 health centres were forced to close with more than 964,000 persons affected by the reduction in health services.²³⁴

²³² Interview with a 24-year-old IDP from Diapaga, 3 June 2023, Ouagadougou.

²³³ UNOCHA, *Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot (As of 30 June 2023)*, 31 July 2023, Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 30 June 2023) | OCHA (unocha.org)

²³⁴ UNOCHA, *Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot/Health as of 30 June 2023, 31 July 2023*, Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot (as of 30 June 2023) | OCHA (unocha.org)

373 HEALTH CENTRES (HC) CLOSED

3.5M PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HC CLOSURE

Region	closed HC	% of HC closed	% HC with reduced services	People without health services	% People without health services
Boucle du Mouhoun	72	26%	5%	449K	13%
Cascades	17	13%	10%	305K	8%
Centre-Est	24	12%	0%	202K	5%
Centre-Nord	100	53%	15%	842K	22%
Centre-Ouest	3	1%	0%	63K	2%
Est	34	18%	2%	331K	12%
Hauts-Bassins	1	0%	0%	0K	7%
Nord	30	11%	10%	247K	7%
Sahel	84	63%	10%	964K	28%
Sud-Ouest	8	6%	0%	71K	2%

 ↑ Snapshot of Health in Burkina Faso²³⁵

Health centers are also impacted in the context of besieged towns. The health district²³⁶ of Djibo has long been a priority for the government and NGOs prior to the siege by Ansaroul Islam. Yet, health needs have skyrocketed since February 2022, due to increased food insecurity and other impacts of the conflict, whilst at the same time medical supplies have been impacted combined with the difficulty in maintaining health structures operational, in a context of insecurity.

A senior humanitarian operations manager told the organization: “Health issues are becoming more and more important across the country due to the conflict and the sieges. Health personnel tends to leave besieged cities due to the hardships, and it’s very hard to keep them in post due to the risks”²³⁷

In the health district of Djibo which includes more than 25 secondary health structures (CSPS) across the different communes of the Soum province, along with smaller operations in remote villages, 65 per cent of

²³⁵ UNOCHA, *Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot/Health (as of 30 June 2023)*, 31 July 2023, [Burkina Faso: Humanitarian Snapshot \(as of 30 June 2023\)](#) | OCHA ([unocha.org](#))

²³⁶ Health districts are administrative formations tasked with the implementation of the government’s health policy across the country. As of 2023, there were 63 health districts across Burkina Faso.

²³⁷ Interview with ICRC Operations Manager, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

health structure were either shut down or only partly functional as of June 2022.²³⁸ Access to health for the residents is reduced because many have been partly shut down due to the conflict, lack of proper materials and medications to cater to the health needs, or are only partly staffed due to conflict-related displacement. The most important one, the CMA (medical center with surgical capacities) of Djibo, includes a surgery antenna, and has been operating at a minimum capacity over the last 18 months.

According to ACAPS, as of October 2022: **“Dozens of health workers have left their posts because of attacks and intimidation by armed groups, further reducing the availability and quality of healthcare. People without access to healthcare in Djibo cannot go to referral health centres outside the town for specialised healthcare because of the JNIM siege”**.²³⁹

Health practitioners along with humanitarian workers are forced to take the long road, and to rely on costly and infrequent air traffic to maintain their ongoing operations in the northern regions. One senior humanitarian told Amnesty International, “we are present in two hospitals in Djibo, and we try to make them operational, but it is hard. Supplying must be done via UNHAS helicopter and it’s exceedingly expensive. There are only two helicopters for cargo to supply besieged towns such as Djibo, Barsalogho, Titao, Pama or Sebba and, and everybody depends on the rotation of these two helicopters.”²⁴⁰

Beyond the Sahel region, the situation in besieged cities and towns is not much different. Pama, a town of 5,000 persons²⁴¹ that has been besieged by Ansaroul Islam since February 2022, has also seen a drastic reduction of activities along with a massive flight of the population, to nearby Kompienga among other locations. Limited supply of basic foodstuff, medication, and fuel have drastically impacted the conditions of the besieged population.

“Here, the food and health needs have become important. We used to focus only on children (under 15), but now we attend to the needs of all demographics. There are only three health workers in the hospital and the maternity is barely operating. We have had to buy solar panels to be able to continue operating surgeries, because electricity is scarce and fuel for generators is scarcer”, said a health humanitarian worker based in Pama.

In other areas of the Sahel, IDPs who have fled sieges have also witnessed a reduction of health services, and even cases of attacks against health professionals. Such is the case in Solhan, (commune of Sebba, Yagha province), where on the night of 4-5 June 2021, armed fighters alleged to be members of Ansaroul Islam, attacked a position of the VDPs and then went from house to house, killing at least 130 civilians and other residents.²⁴² The assailants also looted property belonging to the villagers and destroyed several buildings in the village. The attack caused people to move to the town of Dori, the capital of Seno province, and Sebba, the nearest town, the next day. Following the attack, the encirclement against neighbouring villages became stronger. Residents of Dambini, a village 6 kms distant from Solhan, who were ordered to leave by alleged Ansaroul Islam members told Amnesty that following the attack, the nurse that worked at the health district of Solhan, was arrested and killed by armed fighters.²⁴³

“They arrested him while he was supplying medication to Solhan from Sebba and executed him. It’s hard to know if he was targeted because he was the nurse, but following his death, all the doctors fled Solhan for Sebba. The health structure was still operating when we left [in July 2022] but medications is lacking because of the siege against Sebba, and health services are at a minimum because doctors are not working every day.”²⁴⁴

The case of Solhan is not unique. On 8 February 2023, Ansaroul Islam fired at the vehicle of MSF plying the road between Dedougou, and Tougan, where Ansaroul Islam had just enforced a siege, killing two MSF staff

²³⁸ MSF, « À Djibo, les populations civiles paient le prix d’une crise qui dure depuis quatre ans » 27 June 2022: msf.ch/nos-actualites/articles/djibo-populations-civiles-paient-prix-dune-crise-qui-dure-quatre-ans

²³⁹ ACAPS, *Burkina Faso: Humanitarian overview of Djibo town surrounded by armed groups*, Briefing note (19 October 2022) acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/products/files/20221019_acaps_briefing_note_burkina_faso_humanitarian_overview_of_djibo_town_surrounded_by_armed_groups.pdf

²⁴⁰ Interview with humanitarian head of mission in Eastern Burkina Faso, Burkina, December 2022, Ouagadougou. As of April 2023, UNHAS operates three helicopters across Burkina Faso to cater for humanitarian operations

²⁴¹ Interview with humanitarian worker, November 2022. The population of Pama was drastically reduced with the displacement of peoples looking for better conditions due to the siege, going from 16000 (before the siege) to 5000 (at the end of 2022).

²⁴² Amnesty International, *Burkina Faso: Après le massacre de Solhan, la protection de la population doit être la priorité*, (Index Number: AFR 60/4249/2021), 7 June 2021.

[amnesty.org/fr/documents/afr60/4249/2021/fr/](https://www.amnesty.org/fr/documents/afr60/4249/2021/fr/). Fifty people were also reportedly injured in the attack, according to media sources.

²⁴³ Interview with 54-year-old IDP from Dambini, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁴⁴ Interview with 54-year-old IDP from Dambini, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

members, while two others managed to flee.²⁴⁵ The incident led to the suspension of MSF activities in Burkina Faso, except for vitally urgent aid,²⁴⁶

In 2022, 65 incidents of violence against or obstruction of health care perpetrated by all parties to the conflict were documented by the NGO MSF in Burkina Faso.²⁴⁷

Under international humanitarian law, health facilities and personnel are under special protection, which must be respected and protected by all belligerents who are prohibited from directing attacks against health centers or medical personnel.²⁴⁸ Attacks against health workers, the siege against the supplying of these health centres constitute violations of international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes.

IMPACT ON VULNERABLE POPULATION

The reduction of operations due to closure of health centres and lack of medicines has impacted those parts of the population that are in a particular vulnerable situation such as children, elderly and sick people, whose needs cannot be fully attended.

In Djibo, access to medical supplies have become increasingly limited for health operations and the ability to take care of malnourished children has been substantially reduced due to the lack of ready-to-use therapeutic foods. Furthermore, many health workers have departed the city due to the dire conditions, further restricting the capacity of rendering health services to the residents in a time where they became most severe due to the siege.

Between January and September 2022, Médecins Sans Frontières cared for 40,000 patients in the city including 678 undernourished children, ranging from moderate (389) to severe (289).²⁴⁹ Although MSF has not documented cases of children dying of hunger between February and December 2022, testimonies from IDPs and local organizations show that it's a reality in the besieged town.

A 39-year-old IDP who fled the siege in Djibo told the organization: «I have personally witnessed this. I have seen seven children die of hunger in Djibo. These children were fed with the “Oulo” leaves because there was no millet, or other cereals to feed them with. I saw their stomach bulge and their death due to poor nutrition. My own niece was among those seven children who died this way. This was in September 2022, near to the ambush against the supply convoy in Gaskindé. She was seven years old and was named Hawa.”²⁵⁰

« Hunger is rife in Djibo and the weaker are most exposed. I have gradually lost my sight this year. I used to be able to see a little bit but now I can't see much. We used to eat to our full before the siege, but not anymore. I have heard of many persons who died of hunger in Sector 5 during the siege and I can tell you, they were mostly elderly like me or small infants », a 65-year IDP who fled Djibo in November 2022 told Amnesty International²⁵¹.

²⁴⁵ MSF, “MSF condemns the brutal and deliberate killing of two staff in Burkina Faso”, 9 February 2023, msf.org/msf-condemns-brutal-and-deliberate-killing-two-staff-burkina-faso

²⁴⁶ Le Monde/AFP, « Burkina Faso : MSF suspend ses activités après la mort de deux employés dans une attaque », 17 February 2023, www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/02/17/burkina-faso-msf-suspend-ses-activites-apres-la-mort-de-deux-employes-dans-une-attaque_6162325_3212.html

²⁴⁷ Insecurity Insight, “MSF Ambush in Burkina Faso Social Media Monitoring “March 2023 insecurityinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/MSF-attack-Burkina-Faso-Social-Media-Monitoring-March-2023.pdf”

²⁴⁸ Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field (First Geneva Convention), Articles 1-3, 19; Hague Convention (1907), Articles 15 and 27; Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), Article 18; Protocol II, Article 11; ICRC, Customary International Humanitarian Law, Rules 25 and 28.

²⁴⁹ Interview with MSF Operations Manager, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁵⁰ Interview with 39-year-old male IDP from Djibo, 29 November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁵¹ Interview with 65-year-old female IDP from Djibo, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

6. BURKINA FASO'S RESPONSE TO THE SIEGE SITUATIONS

Protection of the population and humanitarian assistance are real challenges for Burkinabè authorities in a country where large parts of its territory are under influence of armed groups and where dozens of localities are under siege. In this context, the army including the VDPs, have committed serious crimes against civilians.

Also, despite efforts to respond to humanitarian needs, the Burkinabè government has put measures in place which have created difficulties for the work of humanitarian organizations, and in the access of civilians in need to humanitarian relief - by imposing military escorts to humanitarian convoys plying the road, banning the circulation of motorbikes in frontline towns and areas, and prohibiting cash transfer to civilians by humanitarians. These measures have hindered freedom of movement of civilians and impacted on humanitarian assistance to IDPs, further causing distress.

“We left Djibo because we feared the army, the VDPs, and the jihadists. Each actor is violent towards us”,²⁵²

A 40-year-old IDP

6.1 ATTACKS AGAINST CIVILIANS

6.1.1 THE ATTACK AGAINST CIVILIANS OF HOLDÉ

Amnesty International has collected information and testimonies on crimes committed by the army forces in the village of Holdé, in the context of the siege of Djibo.

On 9 November 2022, following a visit to the 14th RIA (14e regiment inter-armes) cantonment in Djibo by the newly installed president, Capitaine Ibrahim Traoré, soldiers accompanied by Djibo-based VDPs attacked the

²⁵² Interview with male 40-year-old IDP from Djibo, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

village of Holdé, located 7km north of Djibo. This seemed to be reprisals²⁵³ for an attack by Ansaroul Islam against that same army regiment which had happened two weeks earlier, on the dawn of 24 October 2022.²⁵⁴

The attack against the village of Holdé²⁵⁵ caused the death of 49 civilians, most of them being women and children, according to witnesses interviewed by Amnesty International and a list of victims provided to the organisation by local sources,²⁵⁶ Holdé, which used to be a temporary farming hamlet for residents of Sector 1 of Djibo, became over the last decades a permanent settlement, and over the last 3 years, an area where fighters from Ansaroul Islam regularly came to collect zakat in the form of money or livestock from the residents.²⁵⁷

Eyewitnesses of the incident interviewed by Amnesty International stated that the attack was conducted by the military accompanied by VDPs. They recognized the military uniforms of army forces.

One relative of several of the deceased women told Amnesty International:²⁵⁸

I had left Holdé since Tabaski²⁵⁹ because it was becoming very unsafe to stay there. Holdé is not far from Djibo: when you shoot from there, it can fall in Holdé. It's just 7 km. And it is not the first time that they [the army] shelled my village. The first time they fired from Djibo to Holdé was during Ramadan. I remember that the impact fell in our field.

Hassimi*, a witness/survivor of the attack told Amnesty International:²⁶⁰

"I was at the outskirts of the village, next to the farms, when the attack occurred. I could see the assailants but from a distance. I was afraid and climbed a tree in the bush to hide. From the top of the tree, I could see the parade of cars and motorcycles which were innumerable. There were one or two people per motorcycle. I cannot tell you how many people had attacked Holdé on that day, but I counted eight pick-up vehicles and several motorcycles that I cannot number. They were large and unusual vehicles. One of the vehicles had a rifle/gun mounted on it.

After a time, I decided to climb down and check in but, on the road, I met my cousin Amina*, who was fleeing the village and told me not to go there because they had killed everyone. Amina* was fleeing with other women.

All the people who were in Holdé are from Djibo, but it was the famine that made them leave the city. That's how the attack caught them there.²⁶¹

First the assailants burned the fallow fields around the village. They were dressed in black and in uniform. The attack started around 9 am when I saw them going into the village. It only ended around the Salli fana prayer,²⁶² around 2 pm when they departed."

Arzika*, who lost several relatives during the attack, told Amnesty International:²⁶³

"From what I know, the attackers came heavily armed on motorcycles to attack our village. A child had died in the early morning and I, along with other men, went to bury him in the cemetery. It was from the cemetery that we heard the shots and we preferred to wait rather than return immediately.

²⁵³ A government's communiqué pointed out that there were mop-up operations in the vicinity of Djibo following the 24 October attack against the 14th Joint Army Regiment. Spokesperson of the government of Burkina Faso, Communiqué, 12 November 2022. (Ouagadougou), sig.bf/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Communique-du-Gouvernement-du-12-novembre-2022.-1.pdf

²⁵⁴ On the dawn of 24 October 2022, alleged combatants of Ansaroul Islam attacked the cantonment of the 14th Mixed Arms Regiment [regiment inter-armes] (RIA) in the town of Djibo with shells/rockets at an advanced position and automatic weapons (Ak-47), causing significant damage and creating panic in the city. The attack, which was the sixth over 2022, at the 14th RIA cantonment in Djibo, was repelled but caused the death of 10 soldiers, with another 50 wounded. 18 "terrorists" were killed during the attack according to a communiqué of Joint Army Staff. AFP/VOA. « Le GSIM, proche d'Al-Qaïda, revendique l'attaque de lundi à Djibo, au Faso » 28 October 2022, voaafrique.com/a/burkina-le-gsim-proche-d-al-qa%C3%AFda-revendique-l-attaque-de-lundi-%C3%A0-djibo/6809342.html

²⁵⁵ The hamlet of Holdé depends on Yaté, from which it is separated by a school. See Cluster Protection. 2022. « Note de plaidoyer : tirs sur les civils dans la localité de Holde, commune de DJIBO, province du soum », 14 novembre 2022.

²⁵⁶ Interviews with survivors and relatives of Holdé attack, November 2022, Ouahigouya.

²⁵⁷ Cluster Protection, « Note de plaidoyer : tirs sur les civils dans la localité de Holde, commune de DJIBO, province du Soum », 14 novembre 2022.

²⁵⁸ Interview with Sambo*, IDP from Holdé, who lost relatives during the attack, conducted in December 2022, in Ouahigouya.

²⁵⁹ Eid al-Adha, the feast of sacrifice.

²⁶⁰ Interviews conducted with survivors of the Holdé attack in Ouahigouya, November 2022.

²⁶¹ While in an area under the control of Ansaroul Islam, Holdé was not subject to a siege as it was and is still the case for Djibo. From interviews with survivors of the attack, many residents of Djibo, to survive hunger, would trek to Holdé to buy foodstuffs, where it was more abundant and cheaper.

²⁶² Zuhr prayer, the second of the five daily prayers in Islam.

²⁶³ Interview with Arzika*, survivor of the Holdé attack, December 2022, Ouahigouya.

When we returned, we saw that they had killed quite a few people in three large courtyards in a row. In two of the courtyards, all the people killed were women and children and in the third, there was an 87-year-old man.

All these victims are my relatives. The two compounds where the women were killed are our family's. In the first yard, there was my mother, my three children, my sister-in-law and two of her children. Also, my wife. They were 31 victims there.

In the second yard, there were Kadourou and Moumouni. As well as the children of my little sister who were in the 1st and second grade. They killed 48 members of my family. The 49th person killed was Hussein Tamboura. Some of the women had their ID cards next to them, as if they expected to be controlled. Only soldiers would ask for IDs.”

The youngest victim was a 20-day-old baby, Salifou*. Salifou*'s father lives in Djibo. This is the first attack in Holdé. Our people had never been arrested and we were not worried at all until the attack. We left Holdé for Mehena from where we took cars to Ouahigouya.”

A 12-year-old girl from Djibo, who went to Holdé among her relatives to buy foodstuffs and return to Djibo, was trapped by the attack which she survived, and fled subsequently to Ouahigouya with other survivors. She told Amnesty International:

“It was hunger that made us leave Djibo to buy foodstuff in Holdé. I went there with my young cousin who is three. In Djibo, a cup of millet cost 3,000 CFA francs (USD 5,10), whereas in Holdé it cost 300 CFA francs (USD 0,51). I am from Sector 1. I was sent to buy millet from Holdé and return the next day. I would sleep in Holdé amongst relatives and then return afterwards to my mother, the next day. I was in a house when the attack took place. I didn't have time to buy the 8 kg of millet. I had to hide like all the others. And I fled here to Ouahigouya with my mother's little sister. I brought my little brother Adama [3-year-old] with me because I had brought him to Holdé with me to buy food and sleep. In Djibo, there was water but there was nothing to eat. When we ate, it was once a day, often a little rice, often a little millet”²⁶⁴

One of the victims, a 21-year-old woman, who lost her two children during the attack, and was herself wounded by bullets fired at her and left for dead among the victims, told Amnesty International:

“We were attacked in the morning, sometime between 9 and 10 am. I immediately fled to my house along with many other women. I had my child behind my back. When I entered my room with my two children, one of the assailants followed us and pulled me out into the courtyard and shot at me. I fainted and when I woke up, I was lying in the hospital in Ouahigouya. They told me that my two children, Fatimata (5 years) and Hannatou (3 years) who was on my back, were killed during the attack and that my brother Hassimi* had buried them”²⁶⁵.

Following the attack, Holdé was deserted, with most survivors fleeing north to Baraboullé, or west to Ouahigouya.

In response to a note by the national office of the OHCHR in Burkina Faso on the killings in Holdé, the government, without denying operations in the area, denounced the potential manipulation of public opinion by armed groups through misinformation and promised to investigate on the incidents.²⁶⁶

Intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population or against individual civilians not taking direct part in hostilities constitutes a war crime.²⁶⁷ Under international humanitarian law, all parties to a conflict, including non-state armed groups, have an obligation to protect civilians (see Chapter 4 on legal framework). In this instance, the Burkinabe army perpetrated the war crime of an attack against a civilian population.

²⁶⁴ Interview conducted with survivors of Holdé, December 2022, in Ouahigouya.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Khaira*, a 21-year-old survivor of the Holdé attack, December 2022, Ouahigouya.

²⁶⁶ Spokesperson of the government of Burkina Faso, Communiqué. 12 November 2022, (Ouagadougou): <https://www.sig.bf/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Communique-du-Gouvernement-du-12-novembre-2022.-1.pdf>. The note of the OHCHR was not shared with the public but with the government. It is only through the public rebuttal by the government of the OHCHR's observations that the note became partly public.

²⁶⁷ Rome Statute, article 8(2)(e)(i).

6.2 RESTRICTIONS TO FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Insecurity due to the armed conflict in large part of the territory, including in areas of besieged localities, impacts the ability of individuals to move in conflict zones and the humanitarian response in Burkina Faso. In Djibo, the UNHCR office was evacuated over 2022, leaving only one staff member there.²⁶⁸

Authorities have organized humanitarian assistance to people in need notably in besieged places, through road supply convoys under military escort (See Chapter 6.2.3) and sometimes by airlift. Since 2017, the government of Burkina Faso has established a strategy for the protection of IDPs whose purpose is to provide a multidimensional support to IDPs that includes shelter, food assistance, protection, and WASH among others, by coordinating action with UN organizations.²⁶⁹ In December 2022, the government outlined its objectives and approach to the humanitarian situation through the National recovery strategy for internally displaced people and host communities SNR-PDICA (2023-2027) and government's humanitarian response plan. The SNR-PDICA prioritized more durable solutions to the needs of IDPs and host communities²⁷⁰, that went beyond emergency relief to populations in need. The stated goal being that “by 2027, people affected by the security crisis live in peace in more peaceful environments and have access to basic social services and sustainable livelihoods to strengthen their resilience”.²⁷¹It revolves around 4 pillars:

- Improving access to basic social services and promoting decent living conditions in areas of return, integration, and resettlement
- Revitalizing the local economy and empowering affected populations, particularly young people and women
- Preventing community conflicts and consolidating peace in areas of reception and return
- Steering the strategy

Funding this strategy is one of the key challenges of the government. The triennial plan of the SNR-PDICA requires 810.79 billion XOF (USD 1,345,109,528.69).²⁷²According to humanitarian actors, less than 2 per cent of the yearly budget is earmarked for the humanitarian response,²⁷³ the government relying essentially on international and national actors, along with local initiatives, to contribute to the response. The government has often prioritized immediate security imperatives to its humanitarian response. CONASUR, the national humanitarian coordinator, has several gaps in its approaches, related to its limited operating budget (200.000 000 XOF or USD 331802.20), the limited capacities in providing shelter to IDPs, and the non-disaggregated approach to needs, based on gender, age, health or disability.²⁷⁴

Furthermore, the government of Burkina Faso has enacted several measures restricting the transportation of fuel and other dangerous materials, in areas where armed groups are present.²⁷⁵Due to the absence of humanitarian exemption, this ministerial order affects the delivery of humanitarian assistance and relief, since the obligation of military escorts contradict the principle of humanitarian neutrality.

²⁶⁸ Interview with protection officer for a humanitarian organisation November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁶⁹ Ministère de la Femme, de la Solidarité Nationale, de la Famille et de l'Action Humanitaire/CONASUR. *Stratégie de prise en charge des personnes déplacées internes au Burkina Faso*, humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/strategie_de_prise_en_charge_des_pdi.pdf

²⁷⁰ Burkina Faso, *Stratégie nationale de relèvement des personnes déplacées internes et des communautés d'accueil (SNR-PDICA) 2023-2027*, (December 2022).

²⁷¹ Burkina Faso, *Stratégie nationale de relèvement des personnes déplacées internes et des communautés d'accueil*, page 59.

²⁷² Burkina Faso, *Stratégie nationale de relèvement des personnes déplacées internes et des communautés d'accueil*, page 13.

²⁷³ Interview with senior humanitarian executives, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

²⁷⁴ Burkina Faso, *Stratégie nationale de relèvement des personnes déplacées internes et des communautés d'accueil*, pp.46-48.

²⁷⁵ Burkina Faso, Arrêté ministériel no.2022-00036/MTMUSR/MDAC/MATDS/MJDHRI/MEFP/MDICAPME portant sécurisation des véhicules de transport d'hydrocarbures et autres matières ou marchandises dangereuses et de transport de marchandises divers dans les zones touchées par le terrorisme, 2022.

6.2.1 RESTRICTED FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT IN CERTAIN AREAS

Since January 2019, the state of emergency was declared by the government in 6 regions (see chapters 3.3 and 4.2.2). It has been extended regularly and strengthened with administrative measures banning the use of motorbikes and establishing night-time curfews.

These measures have a direct impact on civilians, restricting their capacity to move and infringing their enjoyment of economic and social rights.

“In the East, it is forbidden since June 2022 to use motorbikes and tricycles. This affects a lot of civilians, who tended to go to the market or hospitals, using motorbikes. Bikes were also used to do business and sustain one’s family”, a humanitarian told Amnesty International.²⁷⁶

Reflecting on the impact of this measure, a CSO leader opined that prohibiting “motorcycles (...) in a context where all the population moves every day even at night to make the trade, to make their activity, (...) will not have effect and precisely it is to deprive the population of their sources of income”.²⁷⁷

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “access is one of the biggest challenges in [Burkina Faso]. The number of hard-to-reach areas has more than doubled in the last 12 months. The vulnerability of populations has increased, particularly in hard-to-reach areas where the movement of civilians in and out of the country is restricted, and humanitarian aid workers are restricted”²⁷⁸

IMPOSITION OF MILITARY ESCORTS

Over the course of 2022, the government of Burkina Faso imposed military escorts to all convoys, including humanitarian, plying by road some of the towns under siege, including Djibo, Sebba, Titao, Aribinda and Pama. The military escorts are imposed based on an inter-ministerial decree regulating “transportation of fuel, cargo and other hazardous materials”.²⁷⁹ The authorities have justified the obligation for humanitarians to be escorted by the military on the risks of supply diversion by the armed groups.²⁸⁰ Furthermore, the acceptance of armed escorts by some humanitarian organizations in neighbouring countries might have induced the Burkinabè authorities to implement it in their jurisdiction.²⁸¹

The imposition of military escorts has led to a substantial reduction of humanitarian convoys going to populations in need in the affected regions; indeed, many humanitarian organizations reduced their activities due to this imposition, which undermines the principle of neutrality, one of their core principles. “Many NGOs have reduced their operations due to the obligation of military escorts. Humanitarians do not want to be escorted by the military as it undermines their work and exposes them to other belligerent groups”²⁸² a humanitarian coordinator told Amnesty International

Since January 2022, humanitarian organizations have been increasingly dependent on UNHAS flights to meet the needs of target populations since the road is no longer usable. “We refuse [escorts] and rely on UNHAS flights”, said an MSF staff member. Yet the reliance on UNHAS flights, besides being costly compared to the traffic by road, is also very limited as UNHAS has only two helicopters to cater for all humanitarian organizations’ operations and reach besieged cities such as Djibo, Barsalogho, Titao, Pama or Sebba.²⁸³ Furthermore, several actors have pointed the impact of the government’s attitude on the reach of UNHAS air supply convoys, which are only going in areas controlled by the government, and not in the 40 to 60 percent of the territory where the control of the government is shaky. “UNHAS only goes in areas firmly controlled by the State and never in the areas held by armed groups. But us humanitarians must go there and meet the needs of the populations living there”²⁸⁴, said one humanitarian coordinator. The ability of humanitarian organizations to move in Burkina Faso and reach populations in need is thus severely hampered.

The risk of supply diversion exists. Several cases of diversion have been documented by Burkinabè media. On 2 May, a truck belonging to UN World Food Programme (WFP) was diverted by armed groups between

²⁷⁶ Interview with head of mission, humanitarian organization active in the Eastern region, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁷⁷ DW, “Interdiction de circuler à moto, mesure peu efficace”, 8 juin 2021), [dw.com/fr/burkina-faso-interdiction-moto/a-57819943](https://www.dw.com/fr/burkina-faso-interdiction-moto/a-57819943)

²⁷⁸ UNOCHA, Analysis of the restrictions to humanitarian access, March 2023.

²⁷⁹ Burkina Faso, Arrêté ministériel no.2022-00036/MTMUSR/MDAC/MATDS/MJDHRI/MEFP/MDICAPME portant sécurisation des véhicules de transport d’hydrocarbures et autres matières ou marchandises dangereuses et de transport de marchandises divers dans les zones touchées par les actes de terrorisme, 19 August 2022.

²⁸⁰ Interview with program director, humanitarian organization, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁸¹ The case of Niger has been used as an example.

²⁸² Interview with humanitarian coordinator, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁸³ Interview with senior operation manager, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁸⁴ Interview with humanitarian coordinator, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

Ougarou and Matiacoali, in eastern Burkina Faso.²⁸⁵ A month earlier, in the same region, 14 trucks carrying fuel were diverted between Matiacoali and Kantchari by alleged armed members of Ansaroul Islam.²⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Rule 55 of International humanitarian customary law states that all parties to a conflict must allow and facilitate “rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control”.²⁸⁷ The authorities of Burkina Faso should make more efforts to ensure that access to humanitarian relief is allowed and facilitated for all civilian populations in the country, including in areas where armed groups are active. This should include regularly re-assessing whether military escorts are imperative military necessity. If these military escorts put humanitarian workers and transport in increased danger of attack and lead in practice to a significant reduction in the number of humanitarian convoys, the authorities should consider removing the obligation of military escort.

A staff from a humanitarian NGO told the organization:

“The real solution to these besieged towns is the resumption of supply convoys by road, without the obligation of being escorted by the army. Officially there is no legal basis for the escort, but humanitarians and traders are pressured to accept the escort.”²⁸⁸

6.2.2 PROHIBITION OF CASH TRANSFERS

Beyond the imposition of military escorts, humanitarian assistance has been further complicated by the prohibition of cash transfer to target populations, in some of the regions under state of emergency, including where towns and villages are under siege. This prohibition was first decided by the governor of the Sahel region, effective on 1 January 2023, who justified it on the negative impact of this type of assistance, on society, social cohesion in the region, and on the necessity of weaning target populations from humanitarian dependency and the need of building resilience through development projects.²⁸⁹ In March 2023, the governor of the Est region also suspended temporarily cash transfers in his jurisdiction, effective from 15 April.²⁹⁰

“The governor thinks that humanitarian aid enslaves the population and that there is a risk of diversion by armed groups”, said one humanitarian to the organization, following the announcement.²⁹¹

Cash transfers had been particularly used by humanitarian organizations, in the context of the sieges. As the possibility of supplying besieged towns with foodstuffs became harder, they increasingly relied on cash transfer towards target populations, to support them.²⁹²

Beyond the administrative authorities, military authorities were also wary of cash transfers and did not hesitate to communicate it to humanitarian actors. “Before the coup [of 30 September 2022], the commander of Djibo had gathered all humanitarians and prohibited all cash transfers within the city. There were whispers that some of the transfers were ending with members of armed groups and there was also speculation by traders with humanitarian vouchers during the sieges. The governor had denounced that beforehand”, said another humanitarian worker.²⁹³

Given that the list of beneficiaries is highly dependent on the enrolment of IDPs by government authorities, the accusation of disrupting social cohesion has been met with scepticism as humanitarian’s role in selecting the beneficiaries is secondary. Humanitarians have pointed out that the list of beneficiaries for humanitarian

²⁸⁵ Rose Tapsoba, “Région de l’Est : un camion contenant des vivres et des médicaments détournés par des terroristes”, 2 May 2022 actualite.bf/region-de-lest-un-camion-contenant-des-vivres-et-des-medicaments-detourne-par-des-terroristes/

²⁸⁶ Le Faso, « « Insécurité au Burkina : Quatorze camions citernes détournés dans la région de l’Est », 15 June 2022, lefaso.net/spip.php?article114040

²⁸⁷ ICRC, Customary international humanitarian law, Rule 55. Rule 56 also states that the parties to the conflict must ensure the freedom of movement of authorized humanitarian relief personnel essential to the exercise of their functions. ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl/v1/rule55#:~:text=receive%20humanitarian%20relief-.Rule%2055..to%20their%20right%20of%20control.

²⁸⁸ Interview with humanitarian advocacy manager, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁸⁹ LeFaso.Net, « Burkina : Le gouverneur du Sahel ordonne l’arrêt de toutes les modalités de distribution du cash » 30 November 2022 lefaso.net/spip.php?article117731; Interview with humanitarian affairs advisor, December 2022, Ouagadougou. Interview with security manager and operations manager, humanitarian organization, December 2022.

²⁹⁰ AIB, « Burkina/ Humanitaire : Le gouverneur de la région de l’Est suspend les cash transfert à compter du 15 avril » 15 March 2023; aib.media/2023/03/19/burkina-humanitaire-le-gouverneur-de-la-region-de-lest-suspend-les-cash-transfert-a-compter-du-15-avril/#:~:text=Information%20du%20Burkina-Burkina%2F%20Humanitaire%20%3A%20Le%20gouverneur%20de%20la%20r%C3%A9gion%20de%20l%20nord%20de%20la%20région%20de%20l%20est%20suspend%20les%20cash%20transfert%20à%20compter%20du%2015%20mars%202023,2023%20jusqu'au%2015%20avril&text=Fada%20Gourma%2018%20mars%202023,2023%20jusqu'au%2015%20avril

²⁹¹ Interview with security manager for a humanitarian organization, December 2022.

²⁹² Interview with humanitarian affairs advisor, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁹³ Interview with security manager and operations manager, humanitarian organization, December 2022.

relief is heavily dependent on the enrolment of IDPs by CONASUR, a governmental organization, and not by humanitarian actors themselves; the implication being that they are not involved in that selection and should not be faulted for it.²⁹⁴

6.3 TENSIONS WITH HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

“You the humanitarians, you are the ones feeding the jihadists.” *

*Alleged words said by soldiers to humanitarian workers in Djibo.²⁹⁵

Humanitarian workers have also expressed the risks faced in this context of complex interaction between authorities and the humanitarian community. Illustrative of this, the ICRC and the Burkinabè Red Cross Society called in May 2023, for a respect of international humanitarian law and expressed their concerns regarding the disinformation against humanitarian workers in Burkina Faso.²⁹⁶

According to humanitarian managers interviewed by Amnesty, in Kaya, Djibo, Barsalogo and Sebba, humanitarian workers have been intimidated and physically beaten by members of army forces/VDPs during their activities.²⁹⁷ A humanitarian operations manager told Amnesty International: “There is a strong suspicion on humanitarians and the work we do. In Kaya, humanitarian workers have been arrested and detained by security forces. We are a target, and have seen colleagues arrested, intimidated, and even killed. Perpetrators can be volunteers [VDPs], armed fighters, and soldiers. If I dare say, prospects are very bleak.”²⁹⁸

Humanitarians operating in Burkina Faso and interviewed for this research have told Amnesty International about the strong suspicions by government authorities and VDPs about their operations, and the lack of understanding of humanitarian principles, which have often led to violence or intimidation against staff. This suspicion is sometimes driven by disinformation campaigns targeting humanitarian operations in Burkina Faso. Humanitarian executives also told the organization that: “Suspicion [has become] rampant, and we haggle with administrative authorities about escorts, about the terminology of armed groups. These days, they want to force us to describe armed groups as “terrorists” and cease from using the term “non-state armed group”. All of this is rooted in skepticism about our operations”.²⁹⁹ One example of this distrust is the government’s temporary halting of UNHAS/WFP flights to supply besieged towns in January 2023, and the expulsion of the Humanitarian Coordinator, Barbara Manzi, by the authorities for her positions on the security situation in Burkina.³⁰⁰ If the UNHAS/WFP flights resumed after a few days, all the cargo being transported were from then scanned by the authorities, which was not the case before.³⁰¹

Several humanitarian operations managers described the situation to Amnesty International: **In Kaya, a humanitarian worker for an international NGO was beaten by soldiers recently before being auditioned by the intelligence services. The same thing happened to another staff member of another international organization in Barsalogo. When he was released after his detention, he had a broken arm**.³⁰²

²⁹⁴ Interview with humanitarian coordinator, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

²⁹⁵ Interview with several humanitarian operations managers, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁹⁶ CICR, “Burkina Faso : le CICR et la Croix-Rouge Burkinabè appellent au respect du droit international humanitaire”, 8 May 2023, [icrc.org/fr/document/burkina-faso-cicr-et-croix-rouge-burkinabe-appellent-respect-droit-international-humanitaire](https://www.icrc.org/fr/document/burkina-faso-cicr-et-croix-rouge-burkinabe-appellent-respect-droit-international-humanitaire)

²⁹⁷ Interview with several humanitarian operations managers, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁹⁸ Interview with national operations manager, humanitarian organization, November 2022, Ouagadougou.

²⁹⁹ Interview with senior UN humanitarian executives, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

³⁰⁰ La Rédaction, “Burkina Faso : la représentante de l’ONU, Barbara Manzi, expulsée pour avoir critiqué le dispositif de sécurité à Ouagadougou”, 28 Décembre 2022, [africa24tv.com/burkina-faso-la-representante-de-lonu-barbara-manzi-expulsee-pour-avoir-critique-le-dispositif-de-securite-a-ouagadougou/](https://www.africa24tv.com/burkina-faso-la-representante-de-lonu-barbara-manzi-expulsee-pour-avoir-critique-le-dispositif-de-securite-a-ouagadougou/)

³⁰¹ Interview with senior UN humanitarian executives, June 2023, Ouagadougou.

³⁰² Interview with several humanitarian executives, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

Another humanitarian advocacy manager told Amnesty International: **“One of our local staff members was detained for three weeks by the soldiers at Sebba. He was accused of being in contact with armed groups. No evidence was put forward, but he was still detained”**.³⁰³

Sometimes the violence has been lethal against humanitarian workers. In October 2022, a SERACOM³⁰⁴ employee was abducted during a food distribution in Djibo by alleged VDPs. The employee's corpse was found days later in the vicinity of the city by residents.

Under international humanitarian law, humanitarian workers must be protected.³⁰⁵ Furthermore, attacks against humanitarian personnel, installations, material, units, or vehicles involved in a humanitarian assistance, are prohibited.³⁰⁶

³⁰³ Interview with senior advocacy manager, humanitarian organization, December 2022, Ouagadougou.

³⁰⁴ SERACOM is an implementing organization that works with WFP in Djibo, among others.

³⁰⁵ ICRC, Customary international humanitarian law, Rule 31. Additional Protocol I to the Geneva conventions, Article 71.

³⁰⁶ ICRC, Customary International humanitarian law, Rules 25, 28, 29, 31, 32 and 35.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All we want is peace, and to be able to return home. Life as an IDP is very difficult. I lost everything when I left Titao, and here we have worries and hunger as companions.

An IDP from Titao, talking about his desires after 1-year of forced displacement.

Since the attack of Ansaroul Islam against army positions in Nassoumbou, in December 2016, the conflict has expanded to almost all the country's border regions, with a dramatic humanitarian situation.

From Tin-Akoff in the north to Kompienga in the south, to Sebba in the northeast, Mangodara in the southwest and Nouna in the northwest, civilians are bearing the brunt of the armed conflict, with thousands of them killed and millions of them affected by food insecurity, prohibited from farming and grazing, denied education and health, and taxed by armed groups such as Ansaroul Islam and the Islamic State of the Sahel.

Ansaroul Islam and other armed groups have put under siege at least 46 locations in Burkina Faso as of July 2023, encircling the army but also in some instances attacking its residents, exposing them to IEDs, abducting women, prohibiting civilians from access to farmland and disrupting the flow of trade and relief supply to these cities and villages as part of its strategy in the armed conflict. That threat was made even more explicit in November 2022, when a commander of the armed group announced reprisals against communities who would welcome VDPs in their midst, following the announcement of a recruitment drive of 50.000 VDPs by the authorities.

In response to the siege by armed groups, the Burkinabè defence and security forces have committed serious crimes during the attack in Holdé (November 2022). Moreover, measures taken under the state of emergency, such as the bans on the use of motorcycles, the obligation of military escorts for supply convoys and the ban of cash transfer, have limited movement by civilians and interfered with humanitarian assistance to civilians in need and widened the misunderstandings and mistrust between the government and humanitarian actors.

As the conflict nears its eighth year, all parties to the conflict must immediately reverse the current course and take all measures to protect civilians and respect their rights to food, water, shelter, health, education, including through facilitating access to humanitarian relief.

7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1.1 TO ALL PARTIES TO THE ARMED CONFLICT

- Immediately cease all attacks directed against civilians or directed against means of survival for the civilian population, such as water infrastructure.
- Ensure that all attacks are directed only at military objectives and take all feasible precautions to protect civilians and civilian facilities against the effects of attacks.
- Ensure that all attacks against military targets are proportionate, in that they do not lead to excessive damage to the life and physical integrity of civilians in relation to concrete military advantage.
- Allow rapid and unimpeded access of humanitarian relief personnel and objects to the civilians in need.
- Ensure the full respect of all rules of international humanitarian law.

7.1.2 TO THE BURKINABÈ GOVERNMENT

ENSURE HUMANITARIAN ACCESS AND AID

- Foster the continued collaboration with the UN bodies in Burkina Faso and other international, and national humanitarian organizations to help to establish humanitarian corridors and alternatives to military escorts, allowing those organizations to assess and monitor the needs of conflict-affected civilians and to deliver assistance to them.
- Work with relevant stakeholders in taking urgent steps to ensure that all displaced persons, including children, have access to sufficient food, health care, education, and shelter.
- In coordination with relevant stakeholders, assess the possibility of resuming cash transfers to IDPs and host populations, in the Sahel and Eastern regions.

PROTECT THE RIGHTS TO HEALTH AND EDUCATION AND ACCESS TO WATER AND FOOD

- Prioritize and fund measures to expand support for health services in provincial/regional capitals forcibly displaced populations and besieged towns, especially for vulnerable populations such as children and elderly persons.
- Ensure, to the maximum extent feasible, that sufficiently trained health workers are deployed across the country and that they are supported and protected, including through providing better security, to maximize their operational presence.
- Prioritize and fund humanitarian relief, especially on medication and medical products, that will support the right to health of residents in besieged towns and cities, in coordination with humanitarian and other relevant actors.
- Prioritize and fund measures to expand support for schools in communities hosting forcibly displaced persons.

- Where access to schools is not feasible due to security reasons, develop and promote innovative alternatives for continued educations in settlements hosting sizeable forcibly displaced populations and besieged towns, via education programs on radio, broadcast in local languages.
- Ensure, to the maximum extent feasible, that sufficiently trained teachers are deployed to schools across the region, including for displaced children, and that those teachers are supported and protected, including through providing better security, to maximize their attendance.
- Strengthen and support the implementation of the Safe Schools Declaration to better protect the civilian character of schools and to help reduce attacks and threats of attacks against students, teachers, and educational facilities.
- Identify the areas and people affected by the attacks on water points, assess its impacts, and take appropriate measures to ensure effective access to sufficient water for the populations already fighting against famine and food insecurity.
- Respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law – beyond the issue of humanitarian access – to reduce the risk of food insecurity and famine.
- In collaboration with humanitarian actors, and other relevant stakeholders prioritize tailored supports to individuals or groups, such as IDPs, who are more vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition.

ENSURE ACCOUNTABILITY, REPARATIONS, AND NON-REPETITION OF VIOLATIONS

- Genuinely Investigate and prosecute crimes of international law and other human rights abuses and violations committed by all parties to the conflict, detailed in this report, pursuant to international investigative and human rights standards, including investigations into chains of command and senior civilian and/or military leadership.
 - In cases of inability to genuinely investigate and prosecute said crimes under international law, seek international assistance, including engaging the ICC Office of the Prosecutor, and to consider the ICC as an appropriate international mechanism for justice and accountability.
- Ensure that members of Ansaroul Islam, ISS, and other armed groups suspected of war crimes and other serious human rights abuses, including attacks against civilians, and humanitarian structures and personnels, are investigated and, where there is sufficient evidence, prosecuted in fair trials not subject to the death penalty before ordinary criminal courts.
- Ensure that members of the military including VDPs suspected of war crimes and other serious human rights violations, including during the attack in Holdé, are investigated and, where there is sufficient evidence, prosecuted in fair trials not subject to the death penalty before ordinary criminal courts.
- Ensure these crimes are prosecuted as war crimes, or other legal qualifications under the Penal code such as murders, direct attacks on civilians, the shelling/bombardment of undefended cities, villages, housing, buildings, which are not military objectives, to enable victims of these crimes to get justice. Ensure they are not prosecuted as terrorism-related offenses under the 2015 law.

REDUCE RESTRICTIONS ON THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

- Strongly consider more targeted restrictions instead of a blanket ban on motorbikes, given the impact the ban has on livelihoods and access to health care and education among other rights.

ENSURE PROTECTION/PREVENTION OF IDPS

- Expedite the domestication process of the African Union Kampala Convention, to respect the response to forced displacement in Burkina Faso and identify gaps that can be filled by international partners.

- Ensure that all IDPs in Burkina Faso are accounted and their needs assessed, irrespective of their origin or localization in Burkina Faso, especially for those in Ouagadougou.

7.1.3 TO THE BURKINABÈ DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES

- Ensure pre-deployment training for all soldiers and VDPs including training on the basic principles of international humanitarian and human rights law.
- Allow unfettered access to areas under their control and besieged places by independent humanitarian agencies to assist the civilians suffering by providing food, water, medicines, and medical aid, and by safely evacuating the sick, elderly, families with children and other civilians who lack shelter or wish to leave the area.
- Immediately cease all attacks targeting civilians or having a disproportionate impact on civilian populations and instruct all military and security personnel to afford appropriate protection at all times, to medical and humanitarian personnel.
- Cease from enrolling as VDPs people who are not medically fit or suffer from disabilities or with the objective to sanction people from criticizing the authorities or denouncing human rights violations.

7.1.4 TO ANSAROUL ISLAM AND THE ISLAMIC STATE IN THE SAHEL

- Commit publicly to the respect of international humanitarian rules and condemn abuses by their members.
- Allow unfettered access to areas under their control and besieged places by humanitarian agencies to assist the civilians in need; and facilitate the safe evacuation of the sick, elderly, families with children and other civilians who wish to leave the area.
- Ensure that “siege” strategies do not infringe the rights of the civilian population living in these areas. Armed groups blocking villages and cities must ensure that they still allow and facilitate access for humanitarian relief and that the civilian population still has access to water, food, and other necessities.
- Immediately cease attacks targeted against civilians, abductions of women, the prohibition from farming/grazing, attacks against water points, and the restriction of access to education and health.

7.1.5 TO THE AFRICAN UNION

- Condemn crimes of international law and human rights abuses and violations committed by all parties to the conflict.
- Call the Burkinabe authorities to fully support humanitarian access and relief to populations in need.
- Document the impact of the conflict in Burkina on civilians, by mandating a visit of Special Rapporteur on Refugees, Asylum Seekers, Internally Displaced Persons, and Migrants in Africa, to support Burkina Faso in the domestication process of the Kampala convention.

7.1.6 TO INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

- Condemn crimes of international law and human rights abuses and violations committed by all parties to the conflict.

- Significantly increase assistance to the humanitarian response in Burkina Faso and ensure pledges are met, with urgent support for shelter, protection, water, hygiene, and sanitation.
- Provide more support to the delivery of humanitarian aid to peoples in need in Burkina Faso, by facilitating air transport, and other forms of technical and financial assistance.
- Encourage and support the government to respect the principle of humanitarian neutrality by finding alternatives to military escorts for humanitarian organizations and to promote unfettered humanitarian access.
- Call for accountability for crimes of international law and human rights abuses and violations committed by all parties to the conflict.

APPENDIX

Towns and cities under siege in Burkina Faso (as of July 2023)

	Région	Province	Commune	Villes	Population	Beginning
1	Sahel	Soum	Baraboullé	Baraboullé	26 465	Jan, 2020
2	Sahel	Yagha	Mansila	Mansila, Burkina Faso	25 065	Jan, 2020
3	Cascades	Comoé	Mangodara	Mangodara, Burkina Faso	9 126	Jan, 2023
4	Boucle du Mouhoun	Sourou	Tougan	Tougan, Boucle du Mouhoun, Burkina Faso	89 181	Jan, 2023
5	Eastern	Komondjari	Gayeri	Gayeri, Gayéri, Burkina Faso	76 218	Jan, 2023
6	Eastern	Tapoa	Diapaga	Diapaga, Burkina Faso	15 515	Jan, 2023
8	Eastern	Kompienga	Kompienga	Kompienga, Burkina Faso	13 579	Jan, 2023
9	Sahel	Soum	Djibo	Djibo, Soum, Burkina Faso	83 211	Feb, 2022
10	Sahel	Soum	Tongomayel	Diguel, Tongomayel, Burkina Faso	7 372	Feb, 2022
11	Sahel	Soum	Pobe-Mengao	Pobe, Pobe-Mengao, Burkina Faso	18 312	Feb, 2022
12	Sahel	Soum	Nassoumbou	Nassoumbou	18 013	Feb, 2022
13	Center-North	Bam	Rollo	Rollo, Bam, Burkina Faso	42 191	Feb, 2023
14	Center-North	Bam	Rollo	Gondékoubé, Bam, Burkina Faso	4 191	Feb, 2023
15	Sahel	Oudalan	Markoye	Markoye, Burkina Faso	28 486	Feb, 2023
16	Center-North	Bam	Rollo	Kiella, Bam, Burkina Faso	2 814	Feb, 2023
17	Center-North	Namentenga	Bouroum	Boulwogda	2 344	Feb, 2023
18	Center-North	Bam	Rollo	Lourfa, Bam, Burkina Faso	2 236	Feb, 2023
19	Center-North	Bam	Rollo	Kangaré, Bam, Burkina Faso	4493	Feb, 2023
20	Sahel	Seno	Gorgadji	Gorgadji, Burkina Faso	34 005	Mar, 2021
21	Eastern	Tapoa	Partiaga	Partiaga, Tapoa, Burkina Faso	6 000	Mar, 2023
22	Boucle du Mouhoun	Kossi	Nouna	Nouna, la Kossi, Burkina Faso	32 428	Mar, 2023
23	Sahel	Soum	Arbinda	Arbinda, Burkina Faso	45000	Apr, 2019
24	Sahel	Seno	Dori	Bani	9015	Apr, 2023
25	Sahel	Yagha	Solhan	Solhan, Burkina Faso	35 975	Jun, 2021
26	Sahel	Yagha	Solhan	Dambini, Solhan, Burkina Faso	1 914	Jun, 2021
27	Eastern	Kompienga	Pama	Pama, Burkina Faso	61 722	Jun, 2022
28	Center-North	Namentenga	Bouroum	Bouroum, Namentenga, Burkina Faso	6 481	Jun, 2022
29	Center-North	Namentenga	Barsalogo	Samba, Burkina Faso	5 722	Jun, 2022

29	Center-North	Namentenga	Barsalogo	Samba, Burkina Faso	5 722	Jun, 2022
30	Sahel	Yagha	Sebba	Helga, Sebba, Burkina Faso	3 552	Jun, 2022
31	Center-North	Namentenga	Silmangué	Silmangué, Namentenga, Burkina Faso	2 677	Jun, 2022
32	Sahel	Yagha	Sebba	Sebba, Burkina Faso	11 298	Jun, 2022
33	Sahel	Yagha	Sebba	Bambori, Sebba, Burkina Faso	1 372	Jun, 2022
34	Sahel	Yagha	Sebba	Tambondi, Sebba, Burkina Faso	1 372	Jun, 2022
36	Sahel	Yagha	Sebba	Sago, Sebba, Burkina Faso	318	Jun, 2022
37	Center-North	Namentenga	Barsalogo	Barsalogo, Sanmatenga, Burkina Faso	98 553	Jul, 2022
38	Eastern	Gourma	Tanwalbougou	Tanwalbougou, Gourma, Burkina Faso	4 991	Sep, 2020
39	Sahel	Oudalan	Tin-Akoff	Tin-Akoff, Burkina Faso	8 831	Oct, 2021
40	Center-North	Namentenga		Damkarko, Namentenga, Burkina Faso	9295	Oct, 2022
41	Eastern	Gourma	Fada Ngourma	Natiaboani	16 640	Nov, 2021
42	Sahel	Soum	Kelbo	Kelbo, Burkina Faso	12 043	Dec, 2020
43	Eastern	Komondjari	Foutouri	Tankoulou, Bartiébugou, Burkina Faso	1 896	Dec, 2020
44	Northern	Loroum	Titao	Ouindigui, Loroum, Burkina Faso	4 378	Dec, 2021
45	Northern	Loroum	Titao	Titao, Loroum, Burkina Faso	104 977	Dec, 2021
46	Eastern	Tapoa	Kantchari	Kantchari, Burkina Faso	13 551	Dec, 2022

Source: Amnesty International

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“DEATH WAS SLOWLY CREEPING ON US”

LIVING UNDER SIEGE IN BURKINA FASO

This report focuses on war crimes and other human rights abuses committed by belligerent parties to the conflict against civilians in besieged localities of Burkina Faso, especially in the Sahelian, Northern, Eastern and Boucle du Mouhoun regions, in the period from 2020 until July 2023. Ansaroul Islam and the Islamic State in the Sahel (ISS) have directly attacked civilians, their livelihoods systems by prohibiting access to pastures and farmlands, and abducted women and girls living in besieged cities, among many war crimes and abuses. This situation has pushed many of the residents of the places under siege to flee their homes. The report also addresses the Burkinabe authorities' response to the expanding armed conflict, including war crimes and other human rights violations such as attacks against civilians, restrictions to freedom of movement and humanitarian assistance.

INDEX: **AFR 60/7209/2023**
SEPTEMBER 2023
LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

amnesty.org

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INTERNATIONAL

