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## **Mali: Coup heralds period of uncertainty on human rights**

Leaders of the military coup against President Amadou Toumani Touré's Mali government must release the prime minister and other politicians from custody and take steps to protect human rights, Amnesty International said today.

At least three members of the government including the prime minister, Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga, and the Minister of the Territorial administration, Kafougouna Koné, were arrested on Thursday.

It is thought they are being held at the military camp in Kati 20 km from the capital Bamako.

The president of the Economic and Social Council and the president of the High Council on Territorial Communities plus former prime minister, Modibo Sidibé, have also been arrested and are reportedly being held at the national police camp (camp de la police nationale).

As the country plunged into a period danger and uncertainty, Amnesty International's researcher on West Africa Gaëtan Mootoo said: "With the suspension of all the legal institutions and the curfew that has been imposed, all the basic safeguards for the respect of human rights have been put on hold."

Three people were killed by stray bullets fired by soldiers in the centre of Bamako and their bodies were taken to Gabriel Toure hospital where 28 people injured during the coup are also being treated.

Shops have been looted and vehicles have been seized by soldiers throughout Thursday.

The coup comes against the backdrop of a two month rebellion by Tuareg armed groups in the north of the country.

Since the outbreak of this conflict, some 200,000 people have fled their homes, including approximately 100,000 who found refuge in neighbouring countries including Niger, Algeria, Mauritania and Burkina Faso.

"We call on the soldiers who have staged this coup to release immediately the political leaders and to prevent any violation of human rights and to restore the rule of law", said Gaëtan Mootoo.

### **Notes to editors**

On the evening of Wednesday 21 March, a mutiny broke out in the military barracks in the town of Kati about 20 km north of Bamako. The trigger for this uprising was the soldiers' military discontent about the way the armed conflict in the North was being handled. The soldiers accused the government of failing to give them the means to fight the Tuareg armed groups.

The soldiers of the newly formed National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State

(CNRDR) have said they will hand back power back to a democratically elected president as soon “as the country is reunified and its integrity is no longer threatened”.