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Recent developments in Mali and Algeria and the threat to security and human rights in the Mediterranean region

Report[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
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Summary

The deterioration of the human rights and security situation in Mali in recent months and the very real risk of having a regime based on terrorism, hostage taking and arms and drug-trafficking established in the Sahel clearly represent a serious threat to the stability of the Mediterranean region, Europe as a whole and the international community at large. The recent French military intervention on the ground is aimed at halting such developments. However, to achieve this purpose, there is a need for greater involvement of, and solidarity by, the international community.

The report condemns the recent terrorist attack on the Algerian gas plant in In Amenas and deplores the deaths of dozens of hostages, including nationals of Council of Europe member and observer States. This tragedy reminds us of the need for an efficient international response to the scourge of terrorism. The report calls on member and observer States to make full use of relevant Council of Europe legal instruments in combating terrorism and suppressing the sources of its financing.

1. Reference to committee: Reference 3930 of 21 January 2013.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is deeply concerned about the human rights and security situation in Mali and the recent crisis into Algeria, a country in the Council of Europe's immediate neighbourhood, where, on 16 January 2013, hundreds of Algerian and foreign nationals were taken hostage by radical Islamist terrorist groups.

2. The Assembly notes that the recent French military intervention in Mali, in response to a specific request from the Government of Mali, endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, is aimed at halting the radical Islamist Al-Qaida-linked armed groups who were rapidly advancing towards the capital, perpetrating grave human rights violations and threatening the stability of the whole region and the African continent as a whole. These groups, armed with heavy weapons partly originating from the war in Libya, gradually seized control of northern Mali, after fighting between government troops and Tuareg rebels broke out in the north of the country in January 2012 and after a military coup in the capital, in March 2012, caused further political instability.

3. The Assembly notes that the traditionally nomadic Tuareg people have aspired to independence for decades in northern Mali. However, their renewed rebellion in January 2012 can be seen as a domino effect of the recent war in Libya, as Tuareg, settled in Libya or recruited as mercenaries by Gaddafi, returned to Mali after his defeat having acquired both arms and training. In this respect, the Assembly calls on the Libyan authorities to further enhance their efforts to collect the weapons remaining from the 2011 war, which pose a threat to the security of the whole region.

4. The Assembly welcomes the fact that Tuareg rebels have recently renounced their independence aspirations in favour of political autonomy within Mali, declaring their readiness to help their former opponents in the fight against the terrorists.

5. On the other hand, the Assembly is concerned that terrorist cells which have infiltrated Mali in recent months reportedly originate from all over the world.

6. The Assembly calls for the rapid implementation of Resolution 2085 on Mali, adopted by the United Nations Security Council in December 2012, which provides for the deployment of an African-led international support mission in Mali, in co-ordination with other partners, including a time-limited European Union-led training mission.

7. The increased involvement of, and solidarity by, other European and African States, the European Union and the United States of America, in support of French and Malian forces on the ground, are necessary to put an end to the establishment of a regime based on terrorism, hostage taking and drug and arms-trafficking in the Sahel – with all the consequences this might have for the Mediterranean region, Europe as a whole and the international community at large – and restore Mali's constitutional order and territorial integrity.

8. The Assembly condemns the terrorist attack on the Algerian gas plant in In Amenas in January 2013 and deplores the deaths of dozens of hostages, including nationals of Council of Europe member and observer States. This tragedy reminds the international community of the continuing threats posed by the scourge of terrorism, and the need for an efficient international response, including the suppression of the sources of financing of terrorist groups.

9. The Assembly recalls that the Council of Europe has drawn up a comprehensive set of legal instruments to be used in combating terrorism and its financing, including in particular the Revised European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (ETS No. 90 as revised by ETS No. 190), the Council of Europe Convention for the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196), the Council of Europe Convention on the Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS No. 198), as well as the Guidelines on Human Rights and the Fight against Terrorism and the Guidelines on Victims of terrorism. It calls on Council of Europe member and observer States to make full use of these instruments in co-ordinating their actions against terrorism.

10. The Assembly strongly condemns the continuing and shocking human rights violations perpetrated by the radical Islamist rebels in northern Mali, including extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, amputations, arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances and recruitment of child soldiers. It notes that human rights violations have also been committed in government-controlled areas and urges the Malian army and its supporters to refrain from any violent reprisals when they start regaining control in the north.

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 22 January 2013.

11. It notes that a report recently published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) stresses that women and young girls in particular have undergone degrading treatment in the north, including harassment, abuse and sexual violence by radical Islamist rebels, often perpetrated in front of family members, based on accusations of being improperly veiled or dressed.

12. The Assembly welcomes the recent decision by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court formally to open an investigation into alleged crimes in Mali – including murder, rape and torture – with a focus on the northern part of the country, having determined that some acts of brutality and destruction may constitute war crimes. Following a thorough and impartial investigation, perpetrators must be brought to justice and held accountable for the crimes they have committed.

13. The Assembly is also concerned about the humanitarian consequences of the conflict in Mali: hundreds of thousands of civilians have fled Mali to neighbouring countries or have been internally displaced throughout 2012. Further displacements took place in January 2013. The Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States to provide concrete support to the relief efforts by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Mali and neighbouring countries.

14. Noting that the conflict escalated after a military coup and the collapse of democratic institutions, the Assembly joins the United Nations Security Council in calling on the transitional authorities in Mali to finalise a transitional roadmap, through inclusive political dialogue, in order to restore constitutional order and the country's national unity, including through the holding of peaceful, credible and inclusive presidential and legislative elections, as soon as technically feasible. The Assembly believes that only a reconciliation process can ultimately provide the response not only to the current human rights, humanitarian and security challenges in Mali, but also to the longstanding and unresolved problems in the region.

15. Finally the Assembly notes that the terrorist attacks in Mali and Algeria are part of a wider swathe of Islamic terrorism in the Sahel which extends as far as Nigeria, with the atrocities committed by Boko Haram in northern Nigeria. Although there are different national characteristics, the root motivation is similar throughout the region. The Council of Europe member and observer States, and States whose parliaments enjoy partner for democracy status, should be ready to assist countries in the region, when requested, to combat this scourge.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Woldseth, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. During the Assembly 2012 October part-session, the conflict in Mali and the serious human rights and security concerns it raised for the Sahel and North African regions were discussed in the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, upon the proposal notably of the Moroccan partner for democracy delegation. The latter insisted on the gravity of the situation and the consequences it could have for the Mediterranean region as a whole, as well as on the need for greater involvement of the international community.

2. Following this discussion and as agreed by the committee, the Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Pietro Marcenaro, made a statement in which he condemned the "shocking human rights violations, including extrajudicial executions in public, floggings, amputations and stoning to death" inflicted on persons accused of crimes, outside any legal framework, by the armed radical Islamist groups operating in northern Mali, who appeared to be taking advantage of the destabilisation caused by recent events in the region, in particular the war in Libya. Referring to witness accounts not only of horrific physical punishments but also of sexual violence against women and the use of child soldiers, he urged "all groups present in the region to put an end to these barbaric practices which are unacceptable in the 21st century". He also drew attention to the fact that the situation in Mali represented a real threat to the stability of the region, including the Maghreb countries. He supported the efforts of the transitional government of national union in Mali to preserve the territorial unity and hold free and democratic elections as soon as possible.

3. Some members of the committee had at the time raised doubts as to whether the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly was competent to discuss the conflict in Mali, noting that our action should have some geographic limits.

4. Today, the deterioration of the human rights and security situation, the increasing threats posed for the stability of the whole African continent and the Mediterranean region by the very real risk of having a terrorist and drug-trafficking regime established in the Sahel and North African regions, prompting France to intervene militarily, as well as the spillover of the crisis into Algeria, a country in the Council of Europe's immediate neighbourhood, where hundreds of Algerian and foreign nationals were taken hostage by radical Islamist terrorist groups leave no doubts – I believe – about the relevance and significance of this debate for our Assembly.

5. The deaths of dozens of hostages in Algeria last week, including nationals of Council of Europe member and observer States, also tragically reminds us of the continuing threats posed by the scourge of terrorism and of the need for an efficient international response, including the suppression of the sources of the financing of terrorist groups.

6. Here too, the Council of Europe has drawn up a comprehensive set of efficient legal instruments to be used in the fight against terrorism and its financing, which once again underscores the relevance of our Organisation in this matter.

2. Recent developments in Mali

7. The conflict which broke out in northern Mali in January 2012 has its roots in the longstanding aspirations for independence of the Tuareg people, a traditionally nomadic people living in the Saharan parts in the north of the country, as well as in southern Algeria and northern Niger. These aspirations gave rise to a first Tuareg rebellion in 1962, following the end of French colonial rule, and renewed rebellions in the early 1990s and then again in 2007.

8. During the 2011 civil war in Libya, many Tuareg who had settled in Libya or been recruited as mercenaries fought alongside Gaddafi. At the end of the Libyan war and Gaddafi's defeat, Tuareg fighters returned to northern Mali heavily armed and trained and began fighting the government, claiming independence for the "Azawad" (term used to designate a territory comprising the Malian regions of Timbuktu, Kidal, Gao and part of the Mopti region). The Tuareg-dominated National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) initially allied itself with the Islamist group Ansar Dine and started the 2012 rebellion in northern Mali.

9. The use of heavy weapons, originating from the war in Libya, apparently took Malian officials and foreign observers by surprise.

10. Towards the end of March 2012, dissatisfied with the way President Touré was handling the rebellion in northern Mali and with the poor equipment provided to the army, a group of junior soldiers, led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, seized control of the presidential palace and declared the government dissolved and the country's constitution suspended. Sanogo proclaimed himself the Chairman of the new National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and State (CNRDR). The latter would exercise interim power until the restoration of power to a new, democratically elected government.

11. The coup was unanimously condemned by the international community, including by the United Nations Security Council, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and sanctions against Mali were imposed. The coup led to further political instability, the disarray of the Malian army and the further impoverishment of the population.

12. An agreement was finally reached between the military junta and the ECOWAS negotiators on 6 April 2012, in which both Sanogo and Touré would resign, sanctions would be lifted, the mutineers would be granted amnesty, and power would be transferred to the Speaker of the National Assembly of Mali, Diouncounda Traoré. Following his inauguration, President Traoré pledged to wage "a total and relentless war" on the Tuareg rebels unless they renounced control of northern Malian cities.

13. However, in the meantime, taking advantage of a politically chaotic situation, exacerbated by increasing poverty and food shortage caused by sanctions, the rebel groups seized control over major cities in the north, including Timbuktu.

14. On 6 April 2012, rebels from the MNLA declared independence from Mali and the secession of a new State, "Azawad". The declaration of independence was rejected by the African Union and the European Union as being invalid.

15. Shortly afterwards, the MNLA was, however, side-lined by radical Islamist groups associated with Al-Qaeda, wishing to impose the strict application of the Sharia law.

16. Failing to reconcile its vision of a new independent State with that of the radical Islamists, the MNLA dropped its demands for secession and started fighting against its previous allies, Ansar Dine and other radical Islamist groups, including the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA), a group linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

17. The second half of 2012 saw radical Islamist Al-Qaeda-linked groups gradually seizing control of all major cities in northern Mali, perpetrating shocking human rights violations, including against the local population.

18. By December 2012, the now displaced MNLA began peace talks with the Malian Government and renounced Azawadi independence in favour of self-rule within Mali, declaring its readiness to help its former opponents in the fight against the Islamists. The MNLA is only strong in rural and desert areas near the borders with Mauritania, Algeria and Niger, having been driven out from most of its claimed territory by radical Islamist groups.

3. Foreign military intervention

19. Following requests from both the Mali transitional authorities and ECOWAS for foreign military intervention, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2071, unanimously adopted on 12 October 2012, under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, approved an African-led force to assist the army of Mali in combating the Islamist militants. While authorising the planning of forces and providing for United Nations resources to this planning, UN Security Council Resolution 2071 did not authorise the deployment of forces on the ground.

20. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2085, adopted two months later, on 20 December 2012, did authorise the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA) for an initial period of one year, in co-ordination with other partners, including a European Union-led training mission. However, it was clear that the deployment of both the AFISMA and the EU-led mission would not take place within days.

21. Subsequently, on 10 January 2013, radical Islamist forces captured the strategic town of Konna, located 600 km from the capital. An estimated 1 200 Islamist fighters later approached Mopti, a nearby Mali military garrison town.

22. With the rapid advance of the radical Islamist Al-Qaida-linked armed groups towards the capital, it started to become clear that the very existence of Mali was at risk and that the stability of the African continent as a whole and of the Mediterranean region was threatened by the establishment of a terrorist and drug-trafficking regime in the Sahel. This prompted the French authorities to decide to intervene militarily in Mali.

23. On 11 January 2013, the French military launched "*Opération Serval*" in Mali, consisting of air strikes and the deployment of some 2 000 French troops on the ground. According to the French authorities, the number of troops deployed in Mali will soon reach 2 500.

24. The United Nations Security Council and many member States of the United Nations approved the French intervention, which was welcomed with enthusiasm and relief by the Malian authorities. France, however, expects African nations to take the lead.

25. The United Kingdom is also providing two C17 Royal Air Force cargo planes in support of French efforts; Belgium, Canada and Denmark are also sending transport planes. The Government of Spain approved the dispatch of one transport aircraft to Mali for the purposes of logistical and training support and the Government of Germany authorised the contribution of two Transall C-160 transport aircraft to ferry African troops into the capital, Bamako. Likewise, the Government of Italy pledged air transport-based logistical support. The European Union said it had increased preparations for sending military training troops into Mali.

26. Moreover, troops from Chad, Nigeria, Togo and Benin have arrived in Mali. The total number of African troops expected to arrive in Mali includes 2 000 troops from Chad; 1 200 troops from Nigeria; 650 from Benin. Senegal, Burkina Faso, Niger and Togo are expected to send 500 each, and Ghana and Guinea are also expected to send troops.

27. About 100 American trainers have also been deployed to Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Togo and Ghana to discuss the training, equipment and deployment needs of those countries with a view to getting them ready to go into Mali. The United States is also providing communications support.

28. Increased involvement of, and solidarity by, other European and African States, the European Union and the United States in support of French and Malian forces on the ground are necessary to put an end to the establishment of a terrorist and drug-trafficking regime in the Sahel – with all the consequences this might have for the Mediterranean region, Europe as a whole and the international community at large – and restore Mali's constitutional order and territorial integrity.

4. Hostage crisis and the tragic loss of human life in Algeria

29. On 16 January 2013, a heavily armed group of Islamist terrorists attacked a bus transporting Algerian and foreign workers from the Tigantourine gas plant to the nearby In Amenas airfield, killing two people and wounding six. The terrorists then attacked the gas installation, where they took more than 100 foreign workers and an estimated 700 Algerians hostage.

30. A well-known Algerian terrorist, who leads a group which recently split from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), claimed to have organised the attack in retaliation for the French intervention in Mali and the Algerian decision to allow the French to use their airspace in the course of its intervention.

31. That said, analysts claim that the careful preparation needed for the hostage-taking on such a scale was hardly consistent with the short time between the French intervention in Mali and the attack and that it was most probably prepared well in advance.

32. Soon after the terrorists had taken control of the gas facilities, the Algerian Army and Special Forces surrounded them.

33. On 17 January 2013, as the terrorists were trying to move some of the hostages from the gas plant in a convoy, the Algerian army attacked them. As a result, it was said that some of the hostages and most of the terrorists were killed, while some were reported to have survived.

34. According to the Algerian media, on 19 January, the remaining terrorists started executing hostages (seven executions were reported), which prompted the assault by the Algerian forces.

35. On 21 January, the Algerian Prime Minister announced that 38 hostages had died, including 37 foreign nationals of eight different nationalities and one Algerian. Among those whose death has been confirmed are one French, one American, three British and seven Japanese. Five Norwegian Statoil employees are still missing – among them the stepfather of Norway's Minister of International Development, Heikki Holmas.

36. At the time of writing, some 20 hostages were still unaccounted for. Some 685 Algerian and 107 foreign workers are said to have been freed.

37. In spite of calls from foreign governments whose nationals were among the hostages, it appears that the Algerian forces acted without any prior consultation or information of the foreign governments concerned. This may have been due to the urgency of the situation. However, many analysts consider that the Algerian handling of the attack coincides with the Algerian views on independence, the prestige of its army and its approach to combating Islamist terrorism.

38. In order to understand better last week's events, it is important to recall the war the Algerian Army and Special Forces waged against Islamist groups in the 1990s, triggered by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) having nearly won the general election. This so-called "dirty war" drove the Islamists from the north to the south and then across the border to northern Mali, where they used the longstanding Tuareg problem to fuel their own agenda and where they lived off hostage-taking and drug trafficking. It is reported that Algerians represent an overwhelming majority of the leadership of jihadist groups active in northern Mali.

39. The tragic loss of life of so many people in Algeria last week reminds the international community of the continuing threat posed by the scourge of terrorism and the need for an efficient international response, including the suppression of the sources of financing of terrorist groups.

40. In this respect, I wish to recall that the Council of Europe has drawn up a comprehensive set of legal instruments to be used in the fight against terrorism and its financing, including in particular: the revised European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (ETS No. 90, as revised by ETS No. 190), the Council of Europe Convention for the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196), the Council of Europe Convention on the Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS No. 198), as well as the Guidelines on Human Rights and the Fight against Terrorism.

41. Council of Europe member and observer States should make full use of these instruments in co-ordinating their actions against terrorism and seeking to provide an effective and strong response to the current threats.

5. Grave human rights violations and humanitarian concerns

42. On 18 January 2013, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a report denouncing the serious human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, rape and torture, which marked the conflict in northern Mali throughout 2012. The report, compiled by a mission deployed to Mali and its neighbouring countries in November 2012, details how human rights violations have been taking place since January 2012, when fighting between government forces and Tuareg rebels broke out in the north of the country, and the subsequent seizing of control of the area by radical Islamists.

43. The report highlights that the current human rights situation is linked to longstanding and unresolved issues, and that human rights violations have been committed both in the north, and in the area under government control. It also warns that increasing ethnic tensions could have alarming consequences on this North African nation.

44. Members of the MNLA allegedly used students as human shields to force military forces to surrender and later executed 94 of the 153 captured soldiers. Several Tuareg soldiers were also victims of reprisals by members of the Malian army in the North, who reportedly killed nine soldiers in Timbuktu in February 2012.

45. The report stresses that women in particular have undergone degrading treatment by radical Islamist groups based on an extreme interpretation of Sharia law. They have suffered from harassment, abuse and sexual violence due to accusations of being improperly veiled or dressed, or for riding a motorbike. According to the report and the OHCHR spokesperson, Rupert Colville, the rape of women and girls, at times in front of family members and often apparently carried out on an ethnic basis, have been repeatedly used in the north to intimidate people and break up any form of resistance, in a culture where rape is considered as taboo and where the victims often are subjected to social exclusion. Girls as young as 12 or 13 have reportedly been forcibly married to radical Islamists and sexually abused.

46. Other reported human rights violations described in the report include amputations, arbitrary detentions, torture, forced disappearances and the recruitment of child soldiers.

47. Furthermore, the OHCHR mission highlighted the increasing presence of self-defence militia and expressed alarm at the growing ethnic tensions in Mali, which could also lead to possible acts of revenge against the Tuareg and Arab communities, who are perceived as being linked to the armed groups.

48. A report released as early as May 2012 by Amnesty International stated that the conflict had created Mali's worst human rights situation since 1960. The report documented instances of gang rape, extrajudicial executions and the use of child soldiers by both Tuareg and Islamist groups.

49. To quote only a couple of examples of the shocking human rights violations perpetrated by radical Islamist groups in northern Mali: on 29 July 2012, a couple was stoned to death in Aguelhok for having children out of wedlock; on 9 August, Islamist militants chopped off the hand of an alleged thief in the town of Ansongo, despite a crowd pleading with the militants for mercy.

50. In addition, during the conflict, radical Islamists damaged or destroyed a number of historical sites, particularly in Timbuktu, a UNESCO World Heritage site, on the grounds that they were idolatrous. In late June 2012, radical Islamists attacked several more sites in Timbuktu with pickaxes and shovels.

51. I can only but strongly condemn the continuing and shocking human rights violations perpetrated by the radical Islamist rebels in northern Mali. Noting that human rights violations have also been committed in government-controlled areas, including summary execution, we should also urge the Malian army and its supporters to refrain from any violent reprisals when they start regaining control in the north.

52. I also welcome the recent decision by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court formally to open an investigation into alleged crimes in Mali – including murder, rape and torture – with a focus on the northern part of the country. The Prosecutor has determined that some acts of brutality and destruction may constitute war crimes. Following a thorough and impartial investigation, perpetrators must be brought to justice and held accountable for the crimes they have committed. Indeed, justice may offer some relief to victims and their families.

53. Military clashes in the region have resulted in population displacement both within Mali and into neighbouring countries. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that, in the past two weeks, 450 Malian refugees fled to Niger, 309 to Burkina Faso and 471 to Mauritania, joining existing camps. As of January 2013, the estimated number of Malian refugees in the region is 143 791, with some 54 100 in Mauritania, 50 000 in Niger, 38 800 in Burkina Faso and 1 500 in Algeria. There are also small groups in Guinea and Togo. The internally displaced population inside Mali, including people displaced last year and those newly displaced in January 2013, is estimated by Mali’s Commission on Population Movements at 228 918.

54. Refugees reported general insecurity, a deteriorated human rights situation, the absence of subsistence opportunities and basic services, and the imposition of Sharia Law. The UNHCR is continuing to assist them by providing clean water, sanitation and hygiene structures, health care and education. It has received only 63% of the 123 million dollars required to assist Malian refugees and anticipates needs at a further 195,6 million dollars for 2013.[3] The Assembly calls on its member and observer States to provide concrete support to the relief efforts by the UNHCR in Mali and neighbouring countries.

6. Concluding remarks

55. The deterioration of the human rights and security situation in Mali in recent months and the very real risk of having a terrorist and drug-trafficking regime established in the Sahel – which prompted the French intervention on the ground – clearly represent a serious threat to the stability of the Mediterranean region, Europe as a whole and the international community at large. The tragic deaths of dozens of hostages last week in Algeria, including nationals of Council of Europe member and observer States, has further demonstrated the risk of contagion. Hence the need for greater involvement of, and solidarity by the international community in halting the radical Islamists in northern Mali.

56. The fact that the terrorist cells which have infiltrated Mali in recent months reportedly originate from all over the world is an additional element of concern. Here too, it is clear that the fight against terrorism requires an efficient and well-co-ordinated international response and the Council of Europe legal instruments in this field can be of significant relevance.

57. In the draft resolution I have summarised other issues of concern, such as the grave human rights violations perpetrated throughout 2012 in Mali and the humanitarian concerns the conflict has generated.

3. UNHCR, Briefing note for the Council of Europe PACE Winter session, 15 January 2013.

58. In concluding, I would like to stress that the conflict in Mali escalated following a military coup and the collapse of democratic institutions. It is essential that the transitional authorities in Mali finalise a transitional roadmap, through inclusive political dialogue, in order to restore constitutional order and the country's national unity, including through the holding of peaceful, credible and inclusive presidential and legislative elections, as soon as technically feasible. I believe that only a reconciliation process can ultimately provide the response not only to the current human rights, humanitarian and security challenges in Mali, but also to the longstanding and unresolved problems in the region.