

UN condemns French airstrike on wedding in Mali that slaughtered 22

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In a report made public last week, the United Nations has revealed that the French military launched an airstrike on a wedding ceremony in Mali at the beginning of the year, slaughtering at least 22 people.

The airstrike took place at 3:00 p.m. on January 3, near the town of Bounty in the center of the country. According to the report by the United Nations Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the religious ceremony for the marriage had taken place the evening before in Gana, approximately seven kilometers away.

The following morning, approximately 100 people came from their homes in Bounty and smaller surrounding settlements to celebrate the marriage. As is normal in the local custom, the men were gathered in a separate area from the women and children. The French airstrike hit the gathering of men, killing 22.

Little has been publicly reported about the victims, except that they were aged between 23 and 71. The report states that 19 of the victims were civilians, and three were members of an armed Islamist group named Katiba Serma. However, it makes clear that there is no evidence that any of them were involved in any ongoing military operations against French armed forces and were therefore also protected under international law.

The MINUSMA report is the product of a weeks long investigation on the ground by a team of 19 UN staff, including two police science investigators. From January 4 to February 20, they traveled to the towns of Bamako, Sévaré, Douentza and Bounty. They conducted interviews with more than 115 people individually and another 200 people in groups, including family members of the victims, witnesses, and representatives of local community associations and medical responders.

Their report exposes the lies of the French army and

the Macron government following the attack. Immediately after the airstrike, the Macron government insisted that it had hit a gathering of 30 members of an “armed terrorist group.” On January 20, Minister for the Armed Forces Florence Parly was questioned about the attack during a hearing before the Senate Commission for Foreign Affairs. Parly called reports of an attack on civilians as an example of “information warfare” and “rumours” being used to discredit the French occupation of the Sahel.

“We have seen this again recently when on all sorts of social media networks, France has been accused of being at the origin of a strike having supposedly killed civilians,” she said. “It is not necessarily a question of rumors spread by local actors, but also a game of powers, competitors who see only advantages in Europeans leaving this theater, to be able to better deploy there themselves...”

Asked why the French army had not made public its evidence supposedly proving that the victims were members of an armed terrorist group, Parly claimed that this was impossible because it would show “our enemies what we know about them.”

All of these statements have been exposed as hollow lies. The report constitutes clear evidence of a French war crime. The massacre makes clear the criminal and neocolonial character of the entire military operation led by France in the Sahel. How many other similar attacks, attributed by Paris to the killing of “armed terrorist groups” have taken place but gone unanswered?

The civilian casualties of this war are systematically covered up by the occupiers. Parly’s denunciations of “social media networks” testifies to the acute consciousness in the French military brass and Macron government of the enormous popular opposition in the

French and African working class to the operations of French imperialism in the Sahel, and their determination to conceal the nature and victims of the occupation.

Even in the wake of the UN report, Paris has doubled down on its lies. On March 30 the armed forces published a statement, “Reaction to the MINUSMA report on the January airstrikes in Mali.” It makes no attempt to answer the substantial evidence provided in the 36-page report. It simply asserts in a gangster-like manner that “the only concrete sources that the report is based on come from local testimony. ... It is impossible to [give credence to] sympathisers or individuals under their influence.”

In reality, the report provides ample and detailed evidence to substantiate its conclusions. Throughout its investigation, the MINUSMA team maintained correspondence with the French army.

A January 7 army communiqué claimed that “the totality of intelligence information in real time permitted [French forces] to characterise and formally identify the gathering as belonging to GAT [armed terrorist group].”

The MINUSMA report states: “No information on the elements or probatory intelligence that the [French] Barkhane forces disposed of has been communicated to MINUSMA.”

According to the army’s own version of events, it monitored the group for one hour and a half before launching the airstrike.

The UN report comments: “It appears difficult in the circumstances (one hour and a half of observation) that the party responsible for the attack could have determined that all the participants in the gathering [almost 100 people] were members of an armed terrorist group. ... The characterisation of an entire gathering of people as members of an armed group, excluding *de facto* the presence of civilians, in such a period, and in such proximity to inhabited areas, raises significant concerns.”

It notes that a forensic examination of the scene of the airstrike found no evidence of destroyed arms, munitions or motorcycles that are typically used as means of transport by militia.

The French media has largely passed over the revelations of the French war crime. *Le Monde* devoted two news articles to the event and moved on. One can

only imagine the wall-to-wall media reports, editorials and news columns that would follow were a similar report produced about the operations of a major rival of French and European imperialism, including China or Russia.

In its concluding segments, the MINUSMA report calls for the French and Malian governments to conduct an investigation into themselves, including an “independent and transparent investigation to examine the circumstances of the attack and its impact on the civilian population in Bounty.”

The response already made by the French government to the latest revelations makes clear the illusory character of any such appeals. In fact, the latest massacre is the inevitable outcome of the neocolonial character of the war itself, which is aimed at the subjugation of the resource-rich region and where the entire population is therefore viewed as enemies.

France launched its intervention in Mali in 2013, after its overthrow of the Gaddafi regime during the 2011 NATO war in Libya that destabilized the entire Sahel. It has maintained a permanent occupation of between 4,000 and 5,100 troops, alongside Reaper drones and manned bombers.

While it is waged under the banner of combating separatist and Islamist terrorist groups, its real aim is the assurance of French neocolonial control over the resource-rich and strategically important region, which includes uranium supplies used for French energy production and neighbors what is believed to be the third largest gold supply in the world.



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